



LIBRARY OF PRINCETON

NOV 28 2000

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY







NEW COMMENTARY  
ON  
ACTS OF APOSTLES

---

BY  
J. W. MCGARVEY, A. M.

*Professor of Sacred History in the College of the Bible. Author of  
"Commentary on Matthew and Mark," "Lands of the  
Bible," and "Evidences of Christianity."*

LEXINGTON, KY.

---

VOLUME I.

---

CINCINNATI :  
THE STANDARD PUBLISHING COMPANY,  
Publishers of Christian Literature.

Copyrighted, 1892, by

J. W. McGARVEY.

## PREFACE.

---

The composition of my first commentary on Acts was begun when I was about thirty years of age, and the work was published about four years later. The greater part of the writing was done amid the distractions of the first two years of our civil war, and the volume was issued in the autumn of 1863, when men's thoughts were turned away from religion to the events of the mighty struggle. The publication of a commentary under such circumstances was considered so hazardous, that it was not undertaken until the demand for it was tested by a call for subscribers in advance. The response to this call was unexpectedly encouraging, and the volume was issued in the inexpensive form which it has since retained.

The sale of the old work, though never very large, has been continuous from the time of its publication till the present hour ; and the author has received from time to time most gratifying assurances of the good it has done, both in furnishing needed instruction to many young preachers, and in teaching many other earnest souls "the way of the Lord more perfectly." Encouraged by these assurances, yet becoming more and more conscious every year of the defects of the work, I have felt a very keen desire to bring it to a higher state of excellence

before my life-work is done. I would be ungrateful indeed were I not very thankful now for the kind providence which has prolonged my life, and given me the strength to accomplish in some degree this desire of my heart.

During the twenty-nine years that have intervened, I flatter myself that I have become far better fitted to write a commentary on this precious book ; for I have not only experienced the mental growth which is common to men of studious habits, but during twenty-seven of those years I have annually given instruction on every verse of the book to the senior class in the College of the Bible. Within the same time questions of vital importance, pertaining both to the trustworthiness of this narrative, and through it to the foundations of the faith itself, have been imported from the rationalistic schools of Germany, and have sprung up in our own country and Great Britain, which were unknown to me thirty years ago. These questions must of necessity be discussed in a commentary on Acts that shall be suited to the wants of present day students. In seeking to meet these new issues, the friends of the Bible have been not less industrious than its foes have been in presenting them, and the result is an extensive literature not in existence when my first commentary was printed. Not only so, but the life-long labors of Tischendorf and Tregelles on the Greek text have been completed, as well as those of Westcott and Hort which were then but fairly begun,

## PREFACE.

and we now have for the first time since the early centuries of our era a corrected text in which to read these invaluable writings. The Revised Version has also come to my relief, saving me the necessity of correcting my own revision of the Authorized Version which was the basis of my former work.

In making use of all these new and better facilities, I have produced a work which is much more than a new and improved edition of my first commentary, and which I am constrained to style my New Commentary on Acts. It is new in almost everything except the form. As regards this, I have found the old form, which enables one to read the book, not as you read a dictionary, but continuously as you do other books, so advantageous in many respects, that I have retained it with slight modifications. My advanced age, and the many calls of duty which seem to claim the remnant of my active life, remind me that this is most probably the last effort that I shall make to improve a work which many of my friends have represented as the most useful of all my writings; and I now commit this labor of my hands and brain to the fate that awaits it in the form in which it will outlive me in this world. The Lord, in whose service I have written it, will deal with it according to its merits.

THE AUTHOR.

LEXINGTON, KY., 1892.



## INTRODUCTION.

---

I. Acts of Apostles is a much neglected book. It was so in the days of Chrysostom, who lived in the fifth century, and who says: "There are many who do not even know that this book is in existence, or who can state the name of the author."<sup>1</sup> It is so to the present time; and thousands go to other books of the Bible to find that which is the distinctive teaching of this. The reason is to be found in the fact that before the time of Chrysostom the church had departed from its distinctive teaching, and that to this day they have not returned to it. It was a painful consciousness of this fact which led the present writer, more than thirty years ago, to undertake a popular commentary on the book; and, although it is not now so much neglected as formerly, it still needs to be brought more prominently before the attention of this age. The fresh attention which has been given to it within our own generation, is mainly a result of attacks made upon its credibility by rationalists; and this may prove the providential means of calling men back to that clear understanding of its teachings, and that faithful observance of them, which characterized the primitive church.

II. THE TITLE, "The Acts of the Apostles," is misleading: it leads the uninitiated reader to suppose that it treats of all or nearly all the acts of all the apostles; whereas it actually treats of only a few acts of any of them, and of almost none of the acts of the majority.

---

<sup>1</sup> Homily on Acts I.

By omitting the two definite articles we obtain the title, Acts of Apostles, which answers well to the contents, representing some of the acts of some of the apostles, without pointing to the number of either. This is the very title which the book bears in one of the two oldest existing MSS. (B), while in the other (the Sinaitic) it is styled simply, Acts. The title was doubtless given after the book left the hands of its author; for the writers of that age were not accustomed to giving titles to their books; but it would be difficult to invent a better title than the one which we have adopted.

III. ITS AUTHOR. This book comes to us without an external expression of its authorship; but in its opening sentence it is addressed to one Theophilus, and it claims to be from the pen of one who had written a previous treatise concerning the career of Jesus, addressed to the same person. This previous treatise is our third Gospel, and it is credited to Luke. This claim of a common authorship is confirmed by the uniformity of style which pervades the two books.<sup>1</sup> All the evidence, therefore, which tends to prove that Luke wrote our third Gospel has equal force in proof that he wrote the book of Acts. While unbelieving writers in general deny that he wrote either, all admit that the same author wrote both.

In the course of the writing we learn, from the use of the pronoun "we" in connection with large sections of the narrative,<sup>2</sup> that the author claims to have been a

---

<sup>1</sup> "Not fewer than fifty words are common to the two books that are not found elsewhere in the New Testament" (Plumptre, *Int.* I.).

<sup>2</sup> Beginning with chap. xvi. 11, when Paul was first at Troas, it occurs at short intervals in the narrative to the end.



traveling companion of the apostle Paul during a large part of his ministry, and to have been with him during his first imprisonment in Rome.<sup>1</sup> These indications point exclusively to him whom Paul styles "Luke the beloved physician;" for he was with Paul in the Roman imprisonment, as appears from salutations sent by him in the epistles to the Colossians, and to Philemon, both written in that imprisonment; and the author is distinguished in Acts from all the other habitual companions of Paul. He is thus distinguished in the account of the company which started with Paul on his last journey to Jerusalem (xx. 4-6); for there Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus, are mentioned as going before Paul to Troas, and there waiting for "us," meaning the writer and Paul. As then the writer was none of these, and yet he journeyed with Paul on this visit to Jerusalem, and thence to Rome, we can identify him with no other than Luke. True, some others besides Luke were with Paul when the two epistles just mentioned were written, but none of these journeyed with Paul as did the author.<sup>2</sup>

The internal evidence of the authorship of any written document has a presumption in its favor, like that in favor of a deed or a will when found in proper form; and it stands good before the bar of law and of reason until it is set aside by stronger evidence from external sources. In order to set aside this evidence that Luke is the author of Acts, we should find some writer competent to testify, who contradicts it. Not only so, but, as the book was certainly written by somebody, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxviii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> The persons named are Aristarchus, Jesus called Justus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, Demas (Col. iv. 10-14; Philemon, 23, 24).

question of authorship lies between Luke and some other writer; and the adverse testimony, to be conclusive, should name that other writer. But it is not pretended that such evidence is in existence. Not only is the book not credited by name to any other known author, but it is not pretended that there is any external evidence that Luke is not its author. On the contrary, the two earliest writers of antiquity whose works have been preserved, and who mention this book by name, declare that Luke is its author. One of these is Irenæus, who was born in the vicinity of Smyrna in the first half of the second century, became an elder in the church of Lyons, France, in the year 170, and died about the close of that century. In his boyhood he knew Polycarp, who was acquainted with several of the apostles, and therefore he could not well be mistaken in regard to this matter.<sup>1</sup> The other is the author of the Muratorian Canon, written about the same time, who makes the same statement.<sup>2</sup> Such evidence in regard to the authorship of any book of a secular kind would not be doubted by any scholar; for in reality there is less evidence than this for the authorship of almost every secular book of antiquity.

Such being the internal evidence, and the earliest external evidence of the origin of the book, we find, as we should expect to find, traces of its existence all through the period intervening between the time of its composition and the days of the authors just mentioned.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Against Heresies*, iii. 14, 1.

<sup>2</sup> The words are, "The acts of all the apostles are written in one book, Luke relates the events of which he was an eye witness to Theophilus." The statement is inaccurate, but it is explicit as to the authorship.

Going backward from the latter date, Acts is found in the two translations of the New Testament made about the year 150, one of them into the Latin language, and the other into the Syriac. The former, the old Latin version, circulated in the Roman province of Africa, and the latter, the Peshito Syriac, in Syria, north of Palestine. That the book was thus translated shows that it had previously existed in Greek long enough to be credited to an inspired source, and this at a time when old men in the churches remembered far back into the days of the apostles. We find, also, that Polycarp, above mentioned as a contemporary of the apostles, makes quotations from Acts.<sup>1</sup> This chain of evidence is too strong to be broken. It has withstood the strain of unbelieving attacks in all the past, and it will doubtless continue to do so in all the future.

IV. THE AUTHOR'S SOURCES OF INFORMATION. While the use of the first person in the passages in which it occurs proves that the author was present in the scenes therein described, it does not imply that he was present in these alone. He may have spoken of Paul's company in the third person when he was himself present. When he was present his source of information was of course his own personal observation, and this covers not only the so-called "we" passages, but, in all probability, some others. For nearly all the rest, including the account of Stephen's speech and martyrdom, he had Paul as an informant; and concerning those events with which Paul had no connection, he had opportunity to converse with those who had—with Philip,

---

<sup>1</sup> In the first chapter of his epistle to the Philippians, he quotes from Peter's sermon on Pentecost the words, "whom God raised from the dead, having loosed the bands of hades."

for instance, concerning the latter's labors in Samaria and Philistia ; and with Peter and James the Lord's brother, for all in which they participated. The fact that some Hebraisms characterize his earlier chapters has led some scholars to suppose that he employed written documents to some extent, and this is not at all improbable. We must not forget, also, that he almost certainly enjoyed the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit through the imposition of apostolic hands ; and this, while it may not have superseded the necessity for careful inquiry, must have guided him in his selections, and guarded him against accepting misinformation.

V. ITS CREDIBILITY. The question of the credibility of the book is resolved by the nature of the subject matter into two—its credibility, first, as to the facts recorded ; and second, as to the speeches reported. The former rests upon three substantial grounds. In the first place, the book comes to us from a writer possessed of the first degree of credibility according to the canons of historical criticism ; that is, he was a contemporary of the events which he records, and, to the extent that he was not an eye-witness of them, he obtained them from those who were. Such a writer, unimpeached, possesses the highest degree of credibility known to secular history. In the second place, the events which he records correspond in many important particulars with the statements of other competent writers of the age in which he lived, and whose creeds and nationalities were hostile to his own. This adds greatly to the force of the evidence based on the ground first mentioned. In the third place, the book contains many points of incidental agreement with the acknowledged epistles of the apostle Paul, which can not be accounted

for except on the supposition that he and Paul both give a truthful account of these events. For a somewhat elaborate exhibition of the specifications under the last two heads, the reader is referred to Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*, the great masterpiece on the subject, and to the author's *Evidences of Christianity*, Part Third, which presents some points of the evidence omitted by Paley. The principle ground on which the credibility of Acts has been called in question is undoubtedly the fact that it contains so many accounts of miracles; but this objection is urged only by rationalists, who reject all such accounts, wherever found, without deeming them worthy of investigation. All special objections, based on particular passages in the book, will be noticed in the course of the commentary.

As to the speeches in Acts, it has been urged that, in the absence of any method of short-hand writing, it was impossible to preserve them as they were delivered; and it has been charged that certain characteristics of Luke's style of writing which they contain prove that he composed them and put them into the mouths of the supposed speakers. But these two objections are met by the consideration in regard to the first, that all of these speeches are obviously only epitomes of the originals, very greatly abbreviated, such as could be remembered and reported by the speakers, or even by their hearers; and that, as respects the marks of Luke's peculiar style, they can be accounted for partly by the part which he took in the abbreviation of them, and partly by the fact that some of them, having been delivered in Aramaic, were translated by Luke, and thus received the impress of his style. Furthermore, it has been clearly demonstrated by scholars who have taken the pains to search

into the phraseology of these speeches, and to compare them with the epistles of the speakers, that in the speeches of every speaker who has left epistles there are found some of the characteristics of his own style.<sup>1</sup> In reality, then, the speeches have precisely the characteristics which we should expect them to have if they originated and came to us as the narrative requires us to suppose.

VI. ITS DIVISIONS. Like all other early historians, Luke goes through his narrative from beginning to end without a mark or note to indicate the divisions of his subject; but while there is nothing addressed to the eye for the purpose of marking the divisions, they are made, and they are unmistakable. No one can read the book through without observing two great divisions, the first of which might be styled a general history of the church up to the death of Herod (xii. 23-25); and the second, extending thence to the end of the book, might be styled an account of the labors of the apostle Paul. Consequently, many writers treat the book as being divided only into these two parts. But each of these contains divisions which are sufficiently distinguished from one another, and of sufficient length to be also styled parts. The career of Paul, for instance, is divided into the account of his preaching tours among the Gentiles, from his being set apart to this work (xiii. 1-3), till his last visit to Jerusalem at the close of his third tour (xxi. 16); and the account of his five years of imprisonment, which occupies the remainder of the book. The general history, too, is divided into two very distinct parts, the first of which, ending with viii. 4, treats exclusively of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Numerous specifications are given in Alford's Introduction to Acts, Sec. II., and Canon Cook's Introduction to Acts in the Speaker's Commentary, Sec. 8.



Jerusalem church, and the remainder, from viii. 5 to xii. 25, of the spread of the gospel in Judea, Samaria, and surrounding countries. I prefer, therefore, a distribution into four parts, according to these four large divisions made by the author.

Each of these parts is subdivided into sections, treating each of a special topic under the general head. These should be distinguished by the chapters in our printed New Testaments, and they would be if the division into chapters had been made on scientific principles; but as the chapters are arbitrary, frequently severing natural sections, and thus leading to confusion, I have distributed the text into its natural sections, and have employed the chapter divisions only for convenience of reference. I have also, for the purpose of exhibiting more clearly still to the eye of the reader the author's divisions of his subject matter, separated the text into paragraphs, and appended to each its proper heading. These divisions, with their headings and sub-headings, are really parts of the commentary, as they help to exhibit to the reader the author's plan; and a careful study of them in connection with the remarks made on the details of the narrative, will enable the student to form a much higher opinion than he is otherwise apt to do of the author's literary skill.

VII. ITS DESIGN. Between believing scholars and rationalists there is a radical difference in regard to the chief purpose for which the book of Acts was written. F. C. Baur, in common with all his followers of the Tübingen school, assumes that Peter was the leader of those Judaizers who were in continuous antagonism with Paul, the other apostles being also in full sympathy with Peter; that this antagonism was unremitting throughout

the lives of the apostles; and that Acts was written about the close of the first century, or a little later, for the deliberate purpose of making it appear that no such antagonism had ever existed. Baur says: "We are thus obliged to think that the immediate object for which Acts was written was to draw a parallel between the two apostles, in which Peter should appear in Pauline, and Paul in a Petrine character. Even in respect to the deeds and the fortunes of the two men, we find a remarkable agreement. There is no kind of miracle ascribed to Peter in the first part of the work which does not find its counterpart in the second. It is even more striking to observe how in the doctrine of their discourses, and in their mode of action as apostles, they not only agree with each other, but appear to have actually changed parts."<sup>1</sup> This view of the author's design makes the book entirely untruthful, and a sufficient refutation of it is found in what we have said above as to its authorship and its credibility. We may add here, that the parallel between Paul and Peter, which really exists, fails to support the theory, because it is fully accounted for on the supposition that the whole story is truthful. If Peter and Paul had the power to heal diseases, they must have healed such diseases as they found among the people, and therefore they must have healed some of the same kinds of diseases. If they preached the same gospel, they must have given utterance to many of the same ideas, especially if they preached, as they must have done, to many persons in the same state of mind and needing the same instruction. If they were persecuted, they must have suffered alike the afflictions which men commonly visit on those whom

---

<sup>1</sup> *Church History*, i. 133.



they persecute ; and if they were guided by the same Spirit, they must have agreed with each other. Both the theory, then, and the reasoning by which it is supported, are fanciful and false.

While believers must of necessity reject the radical theory just stated, they differ very much among themselves as to the chief design of the writer. Opinions on this point are almost as numerous as commentators. We shall not attempt to name them : it is sufficient to say that they nearly all involve the mistake of failing to distinguish between what the author has done, and the design for which he did it. What he has done is to write a very brief account of the origin and progress of the church in Jerusalem, until its dispersion under the persecution which arose about Stephen ; of the men and methods by which churches were then established in surrounding districts, including the baptism of Gentiles ; of Paul's preaching tours among the districts of Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, including the origin and partial settlement of a controversy in regard to the relation of Gentile converts to the law of Moses ; and finally, of Paul's imprisonment, which began in Jerusalem, and was terminated in Rome. This is what he has done ; and his purpose in doing it is to be ascertained by an inspection of the subject matter which he has introduced into the different parts of his narrative. Doubtless, like other historians, he had more than one purpose in view, one of which may be regarded as chief, and the others as subordinate ; and we are to distinguish these by the relative amount of attention which he has given to each. That must be the chief purpose to which the most space is devoted, and to which the statements on other matters sustain a subordinate relation. Now

much the greater part of the book consists in detailed accounts of conversions to Christ, and of unsuccessful attempts at the same. If we extract from the book all accounts of this kind, together with the facts and incidents preparatory to and consequent upon each, we shall have exhausted almost entirely the contents of the book. The first chapter shows us how the apostles were prepared for the work of converting men; the second gives the account of converting the three thousand; the third recounts the conversion of many others, followed by the arrest and trial of Peter and John in consequence of these conversions; the persecutions in the next four chapters all grew out of opposition to these conversions; the eighth, ninth and tenth chapters are devoted to the conversions of the Samaritans, the eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, and Cornelius; the eleventh, mainly to the establishment of the church in Antioch by the baptism of Jews and Gentiles there; the twelfth is an episode, showing the benevolence of the new converts, and another persecution in Jerusalem; the thirteenth and fourteenth give the sermons and conversions on Paul's tour with Barnabas; the fifteenth describes the controversy on circumcision which grew out of the conversions on Paul's first tour; the sixteenth gives mainly the incidents leading to and immediately connected with the conversions of Lydia and the Philippian jailer; the seventeenth, the conversions in Thessalonica and Bœrea, followed by a nearly fruitless effort to the same end in Athens; the eighteenth, the conversions in Corinth, occupying a year and a half; the nineteenth, the many conversions followed by persecution in Ephesus; the twentieth, Paul's last journey to Jerusalem, followed by his arrest and his futile attempts to convert the mob in

Jerusalem, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa ; and his journey to Rome, where he attempts in vain to convert the leaders of the unbelieving Jews in that city. Undoubtedly, then, the writer's chief design was to set forth to his readers a multitude of cases of conversion under the labors of apostles and apostolic men, so that we may know how this work, the main work for which Jesus died and the apostles were commissioned, was accomplished. The cases recorded represent all the different grades of human society, from idolatrous peasants up to priests, proconsuls and kings. They represent all the degrees of intellectual and religious culture ; all the common occupations of life ; and all the countries and languages of the then known world ; thus showing the adaptation of the one system of life and salvation to all the inhabitants of the earth.

The history of a case of conversion embraces two distinct classes of facts ; first, the agencies and instrumentalities employed in effecting it ; and second, the changes wrought in the subject of it. In the pursuit of his main design, therefore, the author was led to designate specifically all these agencies, instrumentalities, and changes. He does so that his readers may know what agents are employed, and how they work ; what instrumentalities are used, and how they are applied ; and what changes take place in a Scriptural conversion. Men are taught more successfully and moved more easily by example than by precept ; and in accordance with this well known characteristic of our nature, many religious teachers depend much more, in their efforts at the conversion of sinners, on well told " experiences," than on the direct preaching of the word. This method was anticipated by the Lord in giving us the book of Acts.

The cases herein recorded have this superiority over all that now occur, in that they were directed by infallible teaching, and that they were selected by infallible wisdom from among the thousands which had occurred, because of their peculiar fitness for a place in the inspired record. If, then, modern conversions accord with these, they must be right; if they do not, they must be to that extent wrong. The man who proposes to guide others in the way of salvation is in duty bound to guide them by these models; and the man who supposes himself to be a genuine convert to Christ may test his experience by comparing it with these.

If it be asked, why may we not as well take as our model the conversions which occurred under the old dispensations, or under the personal ministry of Jesus, the answer is, that we do not live under the law of Moses, or under the personal ministry of Jesus, but under the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Forasmuch as Jesus, just previous to his ascension, committed all the affairs of his kingdom on earth into the hands of twelve men, to be guided by the Holy Spirit, who descended shortly after he ascended, all that we can know of the present terms of pardon must be learned through the teaching and the example of these men. If the conditions of pardon, therefore, under any preceding dispensation, differ in any particular from those laid down and exemplified in Acts, in all the points of difference we are bound by the latter and released from the former. To study the book of Acts aright is to study it with supreme reference to this subject; and for this reason this topic is never lost sight of in the following pages.

If this book has been neglected in the past, it has been neglected most of all, as we have intimated above,

in reference to this its most distinctive teaching. Through ignorance of this, thousands of evangelists are accustomed to referring sinners for instruction on the subject of conversion more frequently to the book of Psalms, than to Acts of Apostles. It is therefore a demand of this age, an intensely missionary age, that we understand better this one book of all in the Bible which is devoted to this transcendently important subject.

The principal agent in bringing about these conversions, and in directing all the labors of the apostles, was the Holy Spirit; and it is undoubtedly a secondary, if not a coördinate purpose of the author, to show how this divine power was exerted in compliance with the oft repeated promise of our Lord. The book has its starting point in the apostolic commission (i. 2); but the apostles were instructed not to begin their appointed work until the Holy Spirit should come upon them (i. 4); and so the main body of the book opens with an account of the descent of the Spirit, and from beginning to end it sets forth the labors of the apostles and evangelists as being constantly directed by the Spirit who dwelt within them. Our Lord had said to his disciples, before his departure, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (Jno. xvi. 7). "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye can not bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (*ib.* 22, 23). The account of the departure of the first of these heavenly guides is found in the introduction to Acts (i. 9-11), and the body of the book sets forth the promised work of the second. If, then, we may properly style the combined accounts of the four evangelists the Gospel of

Christ, we may with equal propriety, as Plumptre suggests,<sup>1</sup> style Acts the Gospel of the Holy Spirit.

In carrying out his main purpose in regard to conversions and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it was necessary for Luke to make selections from the multitudinous events which occurred in the thirty years covered by his narrative, and the plan on which these selections were made brings to view another of his subordinate designs. He evidently designed to set forth the labors of Paul more fully than those of all other men ; probably because, while they would serve his main purpose as well, he at the same time had a better personal acquaintance with them. But to set these forth alone would have been to present them without their historical connection in the past, and consequently he was constrained to begin with those events which preceded Paul's ministry and prepared the way for it. As Peter was the leader in all these preceding events, it was but natural that he should figure most prominently in that part of the narrative ; and inasmuch as there were many Judaizers at the time of the composition of the book, who were busily propagating the report that Paul's teaching was in some respects antagonistic to that of Peter, it was a wise expedient to refute this false and injurious report by selecting such actions and words of the two as would prove their perfect agreement. This further accounts for that phase of the narrative mentioned above which has been seized upon by rationalists as a ground for denying the credibility of the book.

When we inquire into the special character of the selections made in connection with Peter's work, we discover another subordinate design, that of giving in brief

---

<sup>1</sup> Handy Commentary, *Introduction*, IV.



the fortunes of the mother church in Jerusalem, and then the secondary agencies by which the gospel was carried to the peoples living adjacent to Palestine. At the same time, both in this part and in that with Paul as the central figure, the writer accomplishes another very important purpose, that of setting forth the apostolic method of organizing the individual congregations of the believers. Other subordinate purposes might be pointed out if we were disposed to exhaust this topic; but these are sufficient to show that the author's plan was systematic, well studied, and far-reaching. No book in the Bible gives finer proofs of a thorough forecasting of its method and matter with reference to the purposes in the mind of the writer.

VIII. ITS DATE. F. C. Baur, and all the rationalists of the Tübingen school, fix the composition of the Book of Acts at a date too late for Luke to have been its author. For this they have no reason except the demands of their theory respecting the design of the author, which we have briefly stated above (VII).; but as the theory is unquestionably false, the conclusion based on it is unworthy of serious consideration. Some writers who are more conservative, but who are to some extent under rationalistic influence, date it not earlier than A. D. 70.<sup>1</sup> The controlling reason for assigning it this late date is the assumed fact that Luke's gospel was written after the fall of Jerusalem; and the ground of this assumption is the further assumption that the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, quoted from Jesus in xxi. 20-25, was written after the event. But as such assumptions can have no weight at all with men

---

<sup>1</sup> Meyer, *Introduction*, Sec. III.; Lechler, *Introduction*, Sec. II.; Weiss, *Life of Christ*, i. 88.

who believe in the reality of miraculous prediction, we are justified in laying aside without further notice the conclusion which is based upon it.

Conservative writers in general, guided by the indications found in the book itself, unite in assigning it the date of the last circumstance mentioned in it.<sup>1</sup> This circumstance is the continuance of Paul's imprisonment in Rome for "two whole years." That the narrative here closes without telling the reader whether Paul was liberated or put to death, is held to be conclusive proof that neither had taken place when the last word of the book was written. This proof is greatly strengthened when we consider it in connection with the course of the narrative in the last four chapters. In chapter xxv., the writer gives the account of Paul's appeal to Cæsar, which broke off his trial before Festus, and which led to all the subsequent proceedings. It was in consequence of this appeal that Festus, being puzzled as to what report he should send to the Emperor with the prisoner, brought his case to the attention of Agrippa, and also brought Paul himself before this young king (xxv. 12, 26, 27). He was sent upon the voyage described in the twenty-seventh chapter in compliance with the law governing the right of appeal; he was cheered when life was despaired of in the storm by the divine message, "Fear not, Paul; thou must stand before Cæsar" (xxvii. 24); his appeal to Cæsar was the topic of the first conversation which he held with the Jews in the city of Rome (xxviii. 17-19); and he was kept in prison two whole years awaiting his trial. Now, if his trial before Cæsar had taken place when this book was completed, whether

---

<sup>1</sup> Gloag, *Int.*, Sec. V.; Canon Cook, *Speaker's Commentary, Int. to Acts*, Sec. X.; Aiford, *Int.*, Sec. IV.; Hackett, *Int.*, Sec. V.



it resulted in acquittal or conviction, it is unaccountable that the book was closed without a word on the subject. This would have been, not a mere omission like many others which we know to have occurred in the course of the narrative—the omission of matters the mention of which was not required by the historical context—but the omission of the culminating fact to which a long series of events previously mentioned led forward, and concerning which the writer had deliberately awakened the curiosity of his reader. It would be like a drama in which the deepest interest in the sequel of the plot is excited, but which closes just at the point when the sequel would have been the next and the last thing to be witnessed. Or, more pointedly still, it would be like the story of a noted trial, which would give the arrest of the prisoner, his transportation from a distant country to the place of trial, the incidents of a long imprisonment leading up to the very day of the trial, and then closing without a word about the trial itself. Such a narrative was never written, unless it were some fictitious story thus closing for the very purpose of tantalizing its readers. Such a close to a serious and truthful history is unheard of. Our only rational inference, then, is that Luke wrote the last sentence of this book just at the close of the two whole years which he mentions, and before Paul's case had yet been adjudged by the emperor.

An attempt has been made to break the force of this reasoning by supposing that Luke may have intended to write another book, and that, as he left the account of the ascension of Jesus incomplete at the close of his Gospel, and then completed it by giving other particulars in the beginning of Acts, so he intended to do with

the account of Paul's trial.<sup>1</sup> But there is not the least foundation for the supposition that Luke had any such intention. It is invented to explain a fact which admits of explanation without it. Moreover, the supposed case is not a parallel; for in Luke's Gospel he did mention the ascension, of which he gave a fuller account in his next book; but here he says not a word about the result of Paul's trial, although he could have done so in a single line. He disposes of the death of the apostle James in seven words in the Greek (xii. 2), and he could certainly have added that many to tell us that Paul was acquitted, or that he was convicted; and then, if he had another book in contemplation, he could have reserved for it a fuller account.

It is proper to say, before we leave this subject, that Irenæus, who wrote in the latter half of the second century, says that Luke wrote his Gospel after the death of the apostles Peter and Paul;<sup>2</sup> but the internal evidence adduced above outweighs this traditional evidence, and it acquires a still greater weight when we consider that on this supposition the author not only omitted to tell the result of Paul's appeal to Cæsar, but also failed to mention two events immediately connected with his story, which were the most alarming and distressing of all the calamities that befell the apostolic church, the execution in Rome of these two prominent apostles.

IX. ITS CHRONOLOGY. With the exception of some sections in Part Second, in which the author starts from the dispersion of the Jerusalem church to follow the preacher or preachers who carried the gospel to a

---

<sup>1</sup> Meyer, *Int.*, Sec. III., following several rationalistic German critics.

<sup>2</sup> *Against Heresies*, iii. 1.

## INTRODUCTION.

certain district, and then returns to the same point to follow another, all the matter in Acts is arranged in chronological order, and yet the author gives no connected notes of time from which we can make out either the whole time occupied by the events, or the time covered by any one part of the book except the last. In this last part he is explicit as to time, stating that Paul was arrested in Jerusalem at a feast of Pentecost; that he was held in prison from that time two years till the accession of Festus; that in the following autumn he was sent by Festus to Rome, reaching that city in the spring following; and that he remained a prisoner in Rome two whole years.<sup>1</sup> Thus we have nearly five years occupied with this portion of the history, and as it is a well established fact that Festus was sent to Judea in the year 60,<sup>2</sup> we see that Paul's arrest two years previous was at Pentecost 58; that his departure to Rome was in the fall of 60; that he reached Rome in the spring of 61; and that the narrative closes in the spring of 63. As the epistles entitled Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians, were written during this imprisonment,<sup>3</sup> they bear date 61-62.

If we start from Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, Pentecost 58, and count backward, we can go a certain distance by the light of Luke's statements alone, and still farther by the aid of Paul's. On the journey by which he reached Rome he spent at Philippi the preceding days of

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts xx. 16, *cf.* xxiv. 27; xxvii. 1; 9; xxviii. 11-16; 30.

<sup>2</sup> This I think is clearly established by the evidence in Conybeare and Howson, Appendix II., note (C), against the views of Meyer, *Int. to Acts*, Sec. IV.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. iii. 1; iv. 1; Phil. i. 12, 13; iv. 22; Col. iv. 10, 18; Phil. 1, 9, 10, 23.

unleavened bread (xx. 6), and he came thither directly from Greece, where he had remained three months (xx. 1-6). These must have been the three winter months, as they were followed by the trip to Philippi in the early spring. Here, then, we have reached the winter of 57-58; and as Romans was written on the eve of leaving Greece on the same journey (Rom. xv. 25, 26, *cf.* Acts xxiv. 17), its date is the beginning of 58. Galatians shows internal evidence of having been written about the same time.<sup>1</sup>

As Paul went directly from Macedonia into Greece, he must have spent the autumn in the former country; and as he tells the Corinthians that he intended to abide in Ephesus till Pentecost, and spend at Corinth the next winter, he must also have spent the summer in Macedonia (I. Cor. xvi. 5-8). This was the summer of 57, and as he wrote Second Corinthians in Macedonia (II. Cor. i. 12; vii. 5), this must be the date of that epistle. But he wrote First Corinthians in Ephesus not long before Pentecost the same year (I. Cor. xvi. 8), and consequently this is the date of that epistle, and it is also the year in which his labors in Ephesus ended. He had been there two years and three months (xix. 8-10), and therefore he commenced his work there in the beginning of 54. From this point backward we have no connecting figures, but we can feel our way by conjecture a short distance with a good degree of probability. As Paul, on his last homeward journey to Antioch left an appointment at Ephesus, and left there Priscilla and

---

<sup>1</sup> This is seen in the sameness of subject matter making up the principal argument of the two epistles, that is, justification by faith, together with Paul's allusion (Gal. i. 6) to the shortness of time since he had been in Galatia, a little over three years.

Aquila with the purpose of thus securing their aid on his return (xviii. 19-21), it is almost certain that on his return he passed very rapidly over the districts lying between Antioch and Ephesus, giving to the journey much less than a year. If so, he commenced his third tour in 53, having closed his second tour about the middle, or in the first half of that year. But in closing the second tour he came direct from Corinth, a journey of a week or two; and in Corinth he had stayed eighteen months (xviii. 11). This takes us back to about the beginning of the year 52, or late in 51, for the beginning of his labors in Corinth. About this time he wrote the two epistles to the Thessalonians.<sup>1</sup> If, now, we allow a little less than two years for the events of the second tour as far as to Corinth, we fix the beginning of that tour early in 50; and as that tour was begun almost immediately after the conference in Jerusalem on circumcision, we fix the beginning of the year 50 as the probable date of that event.

At this point some of Paul's figures come to our assistance. He states in Galatians (i. 18) that three years after his conversion he went from Damascus to Jerusalem, and that after fourteen years (ii. 1) he went there again with Barnabas to the conference. Now if these two periods are to be understood as consecutive,

---

<sup>1</sup> This is ascertained by comparing what is said of the arrival of Timothy and Silas in Corinth, Acts xviii. 5, with I. Thess. iii. 3-6, which shows that Timothy had been sent back to Thessalonica from Athens, and had returned to Paul at Corinth when the first epistle was written; and the sameness of the condition of the Thessalonian church, together with the continued presence of Silas with Paul, who was not with him after he left Corinth, shows that Second Thessalonians was written soon afterward. See II. Thess. 1-4.

making it seventeen years from his conversion to the conference, the conference could not have been in 50 without throwing Paul's conversion into 33, the year previous to the founding of the church.<sup>1</sup> But if we

---

<sup>1</sup> The majority of chronologists date the death of our Lord and the founding of the church in the year 33; but I am constrained, after much reflection, to believe that it occurred in 34. Jesus was baptized, according to Luke (iii. 24), when he was about thirty years of age, and consequently he entered almost immediately upon his thirty-first year. If he died in his thirty-third year, his ministry can have lasted only a little over two years. Our only means of ascertaining how long it lasted is by observing the number of passovers that occurred during his ministry according to the statements of John, the only writer who pays attention to this matter. The one mentioned in the second chapter of John is the first of these, and it probably occurred nearly or quite six months after the baptism of Jesus. If the feast mentioned, but not named, in v. 1 was a passover, the whole time of the ministry from the first passover was three years; for he certainly passed the time of one other mentioned in vi. 4, which would make two years, and he lived till the next, mentioned in xii. 1, which makes three years. The only debatable question, if we rely upon John's testimony, is as to whether the feast of v. 1 was a passover, or some other feast. If we argue that it can not be a passover because John calls it a mere feast without naming it, we may as well argue from the same fact that it can not have been the feast of pentecost, or that of tabernacles, or that of dedication; for he names all three of these feasts in other places. But it must have been one of the four, for the Jews had no others. If it was either the pentecost, the tabernacles, or the dedication *following* the supposed passover, this would make no difference as to the whole length of the ministry; for we would have the passover in question passed by in silence, and the space between the passover of chap. ii. and that of chap. vi. would still be two whole years. The supposition adopted by those who make the whole ministry last but two years after the first passover is, that the feast of v. 1 was the feast of dedication following next after the passover of chap. ii. But this requires a forced interpretation of the remark of Jesus to his disciples in John iv. 35: "Say ye not, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest?"



count the three years and the fourteen as both beginning from his conversion, which best agrees with the argument of the first chapter of Galatians, then fourteen years back from 50 fixes his conversion in the year 36, the second year after the founding of the church, and this is quite harmonious with the course of events in the first eight chapters of Acts.

With Paul's conversion in 36 as a new starting point, his first visit to Jerusalem thereafter, three years later, and his departure to Tarsus, are fixed in 39, and the labors of Philip in Samaria, together with his baptism of the eunuch, in the interval between 36 and 39.<sup>1</sup>

Next in advance of these figures we have a date fixed by Josephus. From him we learn that Agrippa died in 44,<sup>2</sup> and this was while Barnabas and Paul were

---

The natural implication in this question is that at the time it was propounded the next harvest was four months in the future; and as the harvest in Palestine begins late in April, the remark was made in the last of December, or the first of January. If so, the feast of dedication for that year was most probably already past, for it occurred on the fifteenth of the tenth month, which was never later than the fifth of our January, nor earlier than the fifth of December. Even if that was one of the years in which this feast fell late in our calendar, it is scarcely possible that it was the feast of John v. 1; for if it was, Jesus made this journey into Galilee only to return immediately to Jerusalem, and this in the dead of winter. For these reasons I think that the feast of v. 1 was a passover, and that therefore the ministry of Jesus lasted more than three years, and terminated in the year 34.

<sup>1</sup> By describing these labors between his account of the dispersion of the church and the return of Paul to Jerusalem, Luke evidently means that they occurred in this interval.

<sup>2</sup> He informs us (*Ant.* xix.; iv. 4, *cf.* v. 1; viii. 2) that soon after Claudius came to the throne he gave to Agrippa all the dominions of his grandfather Herod, and that Agrippa reigned over this enlarged kingdom three years. But Claudius came to

engaged in their visit of charity to the churches in Judea (xi. 29; xii. 25). But previous to starting on this visit, these two brethren had spent a whole year in Antioch (xi. 26), and this fixes both the arrival of Paul in that city in the year 43, and the duration of his stay in Syria and Cilicia from 39 to 43, a period of about four years. During this period occurred the labors of Peter recorded in the ninth and tenth chapters of Acts, and the founding of the Antioch church. We can trace the chronology of these with a good degree of probability. We are told that after Paul was sent away from Jerusalem the church throughout Judea, Samaria and Galilee had peace, and that Peter went "throughout all parts," meaning all parts of these three districts, until he finally came down to Lydda, whence he was called to Joppa; and that there he tarried "many days" (ix. 32-43). Now it would appear quite unreasonable to suppose that all these labors and journeys of Peter occupied less than one year, and it is more probable that they occupied two. If we adopt the former estimate, his call from Joppa to Cæsarea to baptize the Gentiles was in the year 40; and if the latter, it was in 41. The latter has been adopted as the correct date by the majority of commentators. It can not be far from correct; and it shows that the apostles continued to confine their preaching to the circumcised for seven years, from 34 to 41.

The date of founding the church of Antioch can be approximated by a similar calculation. As soon as the brethren in Jerusalem heard of the baptism of Greeks there, they sent Barnabas thither (xi. 22). This can not have been many weeks after the event, and Barnabas re-

---

the throne A. D. 41, and therefore Agrippa's death, three years later, must have been in 44.



mained there apparently but a short time before he went to Tarsus, and brought Paul to Antioch. But this last event, as we have seen above, was in 43; and consequently the founding of the church could not have been earlier than some time in 42. Thus we see that the baptism of Greeks in Antioch was begun some months after the baptism of the house of Cornelius, just as the course of the narrative in Acts would naturally lead us to suppose.

The results obtained by this zigzag line of research, the only kind of line which our detached figures permit us to follow, may be arranged for convenience in the following form, an interrogation point being placed after those dates which depend largely on conjecture:

1. The first Pentecost, May 34.
2. The dispersion of the Jerusalem church, and the conversion of Saul, 36.
3. The return of Paul to Jerusalem after his conversion, 39.
4. Philip's labors in Samaria, and the baptism of the eunuch, between 36 and 39.
5. The baptism of the house of Cornelius, 41?
6. Founding the Antioch church, 42?
7. First labors of Barnabas and Saul together in Antioch, 43.
8. Barnabas and Saul sent to Judea with alms, death of James, imprisonment of Peter, and death of Herod, 44.
9. The conference on circumcision, 50?
10. Paul's first tour among the Gentiles, between 44 and 50, five years lacking a stay in Antioch before he started, and a stay in Antioch just before the conference. The tour probably occupied nearly four years.

11. Paul's second tour, 50 to 53, including eighteen months, near about half the time, in Corinth. There he wrote I. and II. Thessalonians.

12. Paul's third tour, 53-58, including two years and three months in Ephesus, his longest stay in any one place. On this tour he wrote I. and II. Corinthians in 57, and Galatians and Romans in the beginning of 58.

13. From 58 to 63, his imprisonment, beginning in Jerusalem in 58, continuing in Cæsarea from 58 to 60, on the voyage to Rome from the fall of 60 to the spring of 61, and in Rome from 61 to 63. In the last two years, the writing of Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians, and also Hebrews, if he wrote the last at all (Heb. xiii. 18, 19).

Meyer, in his *Commentary on Acts* (Introduction), gives a table presenting the chronologies of thirty-three authors, ancient and modern, including only one of the many English authors who have written on the subject. No two of these fully agree with each other, yet so nearly do they all approximate agreement that very few of them differ more than two years at any one point from the figures given above. This is therefore a sufficiently near approach to the exact truth in the case to answer all practical purposes, especially as Luke shows by his almost total disregard of chronology that he did not base upon it the value of his facts.

X. LITERATURE. It would be easy to copy a list of all the books, ancient and modern, which have been written for the elucidation of Acts; but I think it sufficient here to name those which I have found most useful in my own studies.

When I wrote my old commentary, I had constantly in hand only Bloomfield's, Olshausen's and Hackett's

commentaries on the original text, and the popular commentaries of J. A. Alexander, Albert Barnes, and a few of the older English works which are now obsolete. I also made constant use of Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of Paul*, which was then a new work, and, being the first of its kind, was like a fresh revelation to all who had never studied Acts in the light of Paul's Epistles.

In preparing the present commentary, I have had the additional assistance of the following works:

1. **COMMENTARIES:** Alford's, Meyer's, Gloag's, Lechler's (in Lange's Bible Work), Jacobson's (in Speaker's Commentary), Plumptre's (a volume of the Handy Commentary), Stokes' (a volume of Expositor's Bible), and Lumby's (a volume of the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges). Of these, I have found Meyer's the most elaborate and instructive in grammatical exegesis; while Alford's and Plumptre's have proved the most helpful in other particulars.

2. **LIVES OF PAUL.** Farrar's *Life and Works of Paul* has vivified the picture drawn with so much precision by Conybeare and Howson, while the infidel works of C. F. Baur and Ernest Renan, have been of service in pointing out the approaches of the enemy, so that we may guard the student more securely against him.

3. **OTHER WORKS.** I have found a similar utility to that last mentioned, in the infidel work of Baur on the *History of the Christian Church in the first three Centuries*, in Zeller's work on Acts, and in the anonymous English work entitled *Supernatural Religion*.

In addition to the information derived from such books as I have mentioned, I also made the tour of

Palestine in the year 1879, and visited points of Biblical interest in Asia Minor and Greece. I traveled more extensively in Palestine, and saw more of its out-of-the-way places, than any other American with whose writings I am acquainted; and I did so for the distinct purpose of better qualifying myself to speak and to write on such topics as are illuminated by an exact knowledge of the country.

# COMMENTARY ON ACTS.

---

## PART FIRST.

### *THE ORIGIN, PROGRESS, AND DISPERSION OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM.*

(I. 1—VIII. 4.)

---

#### SEC. I.—INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS.

(I. 1-26.)

##### 1. THE STARTING POINT OF THE NARRATIVE.

Vv. 1, 2. Luke fixes the starting point of this narrative on the day in which his account of Jesus terminated: (1) The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began<sup>1</sup> both to do and to teach, (2) until the day in which, having given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen, he was taken up.<sup>2</sup> This is the proper starting point chronologically, because the present treatise is a continuation of the history begun in the former; and

---

<sup>1</sup> "Began both to do and teach" is an idiomatic expression in which "began" is superfluous in English. We would say, *both did and taught*. For other examples of this idiom, see Mark vi. 2; xiii. 5; Luke iii. 8; xi. 29; xiii. 25; xiv. 9, 29; John xiii. 5. It is a mistake to suppose that there is an allusion in this expression to the personal acts and teaching of Christ as a mere beginning of that which he continued to do and teach after his ascension.

<sup>2</sup> In this rendering of verse 2 the exact order of the clauses in the Greek is followed, and the connection between the day of the

the commandment given "on the day in which he was taken up," which can be no other than the Apostolic Commission, is the proper starting point logically, because from it the apostles derived their authority for the acts about to be recorded. During the personal ministry of Jesus, he authorized no one to preach him as the Christ; on the contrary, he forbade his apostles to do so.<sup>1</sup> He was doubtless moved to this by consideration of their inadequate conceptions of the Messiahship, their misunderstanding of the nature of his kingdom, and their imperfect apprehension of much that he had taught them. They were as yet incapable of setting forth his claims correctly. On the night of the betrayal he informed them that in a short time the Holy Spirit would be given to them to guide them into all the truth, and that then this restriction would be removed. Finally, "on the day in which he was taken up," he said, as Luke had written before, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem;"<sup>2</sup> and as Mark had written, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned."<sup>3</sup> We shall find that this commission is the key to the whole narrative before us; that the acts

---

ascension and the commandment given on that day is expressed as in the original. At the same time the words "after that" used in A. V. and R. V., but not represented by corresponding words in the original, are avoided, and the participle, *ἐντεταλόμενος*, has its proper rendering.

<sup>1</sup>Matt. xvi. 20; xvii. 9.   <sup>2</sup>Luke xxiv. 46, 47.   <sup>3</sup>Mark xvi. 15, 16.

of the apostles here recorded are the counterpart of its terms, and the best exposition of its meaning.

VER. 3. As the apostles are soon to appear in the narrative testifying to the resurrection of Jesus, our author next gives a compendious statement of their qualifications for this testimony: (3) to whom he also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God: In the concluding chapter of the former narrative a number of these proofs had been given, and they are not here repeated. We learn here, however, a fact not there related, that the time from the resurrection to the ascension was forty days. This statement has been treated by unfriendly critics as an after-thought on Luke's part, it being held that in his former narrative he represents Jesus as ascending to heaven on the same day on which he arose from the dead.<sup>1</sup> The truth is, that in the former account he describes an interview which occurred on the day of the resurrection, and one on the day of the ascension, without noting the fact that there was an interval between them;<sup>2</sup> while here he distinctly states that there was an interval of forty days. The latter statement serves the purpose of an explanation; but it is not a contradiction.

Vv. 4, 5. To account for the delay of the apostles in Jerusalem after receiving their commission, and also to fix more definitely the time at which they were to begin their work, the historian next quotes a part of the conversation which took place on the day of the ascension: (4) and being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but

---

<sup>1</sup> Renan, *Apostles*, 20; Meyer *in loco*. <sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 43, 44-51.



to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me: (5) for John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence. This commandment has been mistaken by commentators for the command referred to above (2); but, as we have seen, that commandment is the commission, while this is but a limitation of the commission as to its time and place of beginning. The "promise of the Father," which they had heard from him, is the promise of the Holy Spirit which he had made them on the night of the betrayal.<sup>1</sup> On the meaning of the expression, "baptized in the Holy Spirit," see forward under ii. 4. The allusion to John's baptism was probably suggested by the well remembered remark of John: "I indeed baptize you with water; but there cometh he that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire" (Luke iii. 16).

## 2. THE FINAL PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 6-8.

VER. 6. When Jesus died, all hope that he would set up the expected kingdom expired for a time; but since his resurrection he had spoken much to the disciples concerning the kingdom (verse 3), and he had said, as reported by Matthew, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (xxviii. 18); and from such remarks the apostles had begun to believe that the kingdom which he had failed to establish before his death he would yet establish after his resurrection. Luke reveals this revival of hope by his next statement: (6) They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time

---

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 26; xv. 26, 27; xvi. 12, 13.

restore the kingdom to Israel? The form of the question, "restore the kingdom to Israel," shows that they still retained their former misconception, that Christ's kingdom was to be a restoration of the old kingdom of David, and not a new and different institution. The question also shows unmistakably that his kingdom had not yet been inaugurated; for if it had been, it is inconceivable that these men, who were its chief executive officers on earth, knew nothing of the fact; and it is equally inconceivable that, if it had been, Jesus would not have promptly corrected so egregious a blunder on the part of the disciples. Nothing, indeed, but a misconception almost as gross as that of the twelve concerning the nature of the kingdom could have originated the thought entertained by some in modern times, that Christ's kingdom had been set up previous to this time. All the arguments in support of this idea, and all the interpretations of special passages in its favor, plausible as they may be, are set aside by the one decisive consideration, that this kingdom could not be inaugurated until the King was crowned in heaven. This occurred after the ascension,<sup>1</sup> and his first administrative act on earth was that of sending the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on the next Pentecost.<sup>2</sup>

Vv. 7, 8. We now take up the answer to the question which we have just considered: (7) And he said to them, It is not for you to know times and seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. (8) But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. The answer suggests that

---

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii. 8-11; Heb. ii. 9. <sup>2</sup> Acts ii. 32, 33.

the times and seasons of God's purposes are kept more in reserve than the purposes themselves; and this is in harmony with the known characteristic of prophecy, that it deals more in facts and the succession of events than in dates or definite periods. It was not important for them to know the time at which the kingdom would be established; but it was all-important that they should receive the power necessary to the part which they were to take in its inception and progress; so the answer is concerned chiefly with the latter. The power promised, and their work as witnesses, are so connected together as to indicate that the power to be effective witnesses is meant. This, as we learn from the testimony which they afterward gave, was not merely to tell what they had seen and heard, which they could have done by their unaided powers; but it included ability to recall all that he had said to them in his years of ministry; and to testify as to his exaltation in heaven, his will concerning all spiritual affairs on earth, and his future dealings with both men and angels. This power was to be conferred as he had previously promised,<sup>1</sup> and as he now once more assures them, by the Holy Spirit which they were to receive "not many days hence." The order of localities in which he tells them to bear witness was not the result of partiality for the Jews and Samaritans over the Gentiles; nor yet was it merely to fulfill the prediction that thus it must be; for it had been predicted because there were good reasons that it should be so. One reason, suggested by the commentators in general, for beginning in Jerusalem, was that he might be vindicated in the same city in which he was condemned; but the controlling reason was doubtless this:

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 48.

the most devout portion of the Jewish people, that portion which had been most favorably impressed by the preparatory preaching of John and Jesus, were always collected in Jerusalem at the great annual festivals, and hence a beginning could be made there with greater success than elsewhere. Next to these, the inhabitants of the rural districts of Judea were best prepared by the previous preaching; then the Samaritans, who had seen some of the miracles of Jesus; and last of all, the Gentiles. Thus the rule of success was made their guide from place to place, and it became the custom, even in heathen lands, to preach "first to the Jew, and then to the Gentile." The result justified the rule, for the most signal triumph which the gospel ever achieved was in Jerusalem, and the most successful approach to the Gentiles in every country was through the Jewish synagogue.

### 3. THE ASCENSION OF JESUS, 9-11.

VER. 9. Having now completed his brief account of the last interview between Jesus and his disciples, Luke says: (9) And when he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. We learn from Luke's former account of the ascension, to which this is a supplement, that Jesus was in the act of blessing them with uplifted hands, when he was parted from them and borne aloft into heaven.<sup>1</sup> The cloud formed a background which rendered the outline of his person very distinct while in view, and suddenly shut him off from view as he entered its bosom. Thus all the circumstances of this most fitting departure are calculated to

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 50, 51.

preclude the suspicion of deception, or of optical illusion.

It has been urged by some skeptical writers that the silence of Matthew and John in reference to the ascension, who were eye-witnesses of it if it really occurred, while it is mentioned only by Luke and Mark, who were not present, is ground for suspicion that the latter derived their information from impure sources. That the testimony of Mark and Luke, however, is credible, is made apparent to all who believe in the resurrection of Jesus by simply inquiring, What became of the body after it was raised? Even if none of the historians had described the ascension, we should still conclude that at some time and in some manner it did take place. It should be observed, too, that while John does not mention it, he quotes a conversation between Jesus and Mary Magdalene which implies it. He said to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it was omitted by Matthew and John because they both close their narratives with scenes in Galilee, far removed from Jerusalem; and mentioned by Mark and Luke because they conclude the previous part of their narratives in Jerusalem and on the day the ascension took place. Thus the association of thought, which so often governs insertions and omissions, may have had its natural influence on them. Finally, as to Luke, there was a special reason why he should mention it, found in the fact that the speeches and discussions which he is about to record had constant reference to Christ ascended and glorified, and it was most fitting that his introduction should mention the fact of the ascension.

---

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 17.

Vv. 10, 11. Not only the ascension of Jesus to heaven, but also his future coming to judgment, was to be a prominent topic in the coming narrative, hence the introduction here of another fact which Luke had omitted in his former account: (10) And while they were looking steadfastly into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; (11) who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven. The sudden coming, the appearance, and the words of these "two men in white," combined to show that they were angels, as the author would have us to believe. They state not merely that Jesus shall come again, but that he shall come in like manner as the apostles had seen him go; that is, visibly and bodily.

#### 4. THE WAITING IN JERUSALEM, 12-14.

VER. 12. At the rebuke of the angels the disciples withdrew their gaze from the cloud, and left the spot: (12) Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is nigh unto Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey off. The ascension took place near Bethany,<sup>1</sup> which was nearly two miles from Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> and on the eastern slope of the mount. It is the nearer side of the mount, or rather the summit of it, which is a Sabbath day's journey, or seven-eighths of a mile from the city. We learn from Luke's former narrative that they returned to Jerusalem "with great joy;"<sup>3</sup> their sorrow at parting from the Lord being turned into joy at the thought of meeting him again.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 50. <sup>2</sup> John xi. 18. <sup>3</sup> Luke xxiv. 52.



VER. 13. (13) And when they were come in, they went up into the upper 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. This fresh enumeration of the eleven very appropriately finds place here, because it shows that all of those to whom the commission was given were at their post, ready to begin their appointed work, and waiting only for the promised power from on high.

VER. 14. The manner in which these men spent the time of their waiting, an interval of ten days,<sup>1</sup> was such as we should expect: (14) These all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. The place of this prayer and supplication was not chiefly the "upper chamber where they were abiding," but the temple; for we learn from Luke's former narrative that they "were continually in the temple blessing God."<sup>2</sup> This is the last time that the mother of Jesus appears in New Testament history. The fact that she had returned with the disciples to Jerusalem, and remained with them instead of resuming her residence in Nazareth, indicates that John was faithful to the dying request of Jesus, and was caring for her as his own mother, though his natural mother was still living.<sup>3</sup> Though the prominence here given to her name shows that she was regarded with great respect by the apostles, yet the manner in which Luke speaks of her shows that he had no thought

---

<sup>1</sup> From the "morrow a'ter the Sabbath" of the passover week until Pentecost was fifty days (Lev. xxiii. 15, 16), and forty of these had passed when the ascension took place.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 53. <sup>3</sup> Matt. xxvii. 56.



of the homage that was to be paid her in later ages by an idolatrous church. Those styled "the women," who were also in this company of worshipers, were those who had come with Jesus from Galilee;<sup>1</sup> and they are mentioned in this informal way because they would be remembered by one who, like Theophilus, had read the former treatise. They, too, had returned from their Galilee homes to await with the twelve the coming "promise of the Father." The fact that the brethren of Jesus were of the company is proof that a great change had come over them since their divine brother had closed his labors in Galilee: for then they did not believe in him,<sup>2</sup> but now they do, and they are closely identified with the apostles. What special evidence had brought about this change, or just when it had taken place, we have no means of ascertaining.

#### 5. THE PLACE OF JUDAS FILLED, 15-26.

Vv. 15-19. The next incident is introduced in these terms: (15) And in these days Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren, and said, (and there was a multitude of persons gathered together, about a hundred and twenty, (16) Brethren, it was needful that the Scriptures should be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who was guide to them who took Jesus. (17) For he was numbered among us, and received his portion in this ministry. (18) (Now 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. (19) And it became known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch that in their language that field was

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiii. 49. <sup>2</sup> John vii. 1-5.

called Akeldama, that is, The field of blood.) The parenthetical statement that the number together was about one hundred and twenty, is not to be understood as meaning that these were all the disciples Jesus then had, but only those then and there assembled; for Paul says that Jesus was seen after his resurrection by more than five hundred brethren at once.<sup>1</sup> The hundred and twenty were probably all who at that time resided in Jerusalem.

The latter part of the parenthesis which describes the fate of Judas is unquestionably the language of Luke, and it is so closely connected with the former part as to indicate the same authorship for both. The certainty that it is Luke's arises from the use of the expression, "their language;" whereas Peter would have said, "our language;" and from the translating of the Hebrew word Akeldama into Greek, which Peter would not have done in addressing, as he did, an audience of Hebrews. The parenthesis was inserted to make intelligible to Luke's readers Peter's allusions to Judas, which, though perfectly intelligible without the parenthesis to Peter's hearers, would not be to Luke's readers.

But while this parenthesis serves very well its obvious purpose, it presents three points of apparent conflict with Matthew's account of the fate of Judas. First, it says that he fell headlong and burst asunder, whereas Matthew says that he hung himself; second, it represents him as obtaining a field with the reward of iniquity, whereas Matthew represents the chief priests as buying the field with the same money; third, it derives the name Akeldama from the circumstance of Judas having fallen there and burst asunder, whereas Matthew

---

<sup>1</sup> 1. Cor. xv. 6.

derives it from the circumstance that the field was bought with the blood money.<sup>1</sup> As to the first, the two accounts are in perfect harmony: for if he hung himself, he was either taken down, or he fell; and Luke says he fell. If he fell and burst asunder, he must have fallen a considerable distance; or when he fell his abdomen must have been in a somewhat decayed condition; or both may have been true. His hanging himself, and remaining suspended till he fell, supplies both conditions, and fully accounts for his bursting asunder. Furthermore, if we attempt to account for his bursting asunder on any other hypothesis, we find it very difficult to imagine one that is adequate. The two accounts, then, are not only harmonious, but Luke's is supported by Matthew's. As to the second point, if Judas returned the money as described by Matthew, and if the priests bought with it the potter's field, then that field was really the property of Judas, and could have been claimed by his heirs; for it was bought with money that belonged to him; and it could be truthfully said by Luke that Judas obtained the field. Thirdly, if the field was bought with the blood money, or if Judas fell there and burst asunder, the field could have derived its name from either circumstance, and much more might it have derived it from both. The probability is that the piece of land had been rendered comparatively worthless by the excavations which the potter had made in search of potter's clay; and when, in addition to this, it was found spattered with the contents of the putrefied bowels of a traitor who had hung himself there, it was so horrible a place that the owner was glad to sell it for a trifle, and this enabled the priests to buy it for the thirty

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvii. 3-8.

pieces of silver, amounting probably to about sixteen dollars. No other piece of land large enough for a small burying ground could have been purchased near the wall of Jerusalem for so small a sum. It was intended for the burial of foreigners too poor to afford a rock-hewn sepulcher. The poor, whether Jews or Gentiles, were buried in the ground.

VER. 20. The historian now resumes the report of Peter's speech, which he had interrupted with a parenthesis. In the remarks already quoted, Peter had based the action which he was about to propose on a prediction uttered by David, and he had stated, as the ground of the application about to be made, the fact that Judas had been numbered with them, and had "received his portion in this ministry." He now quotes the prediction alluded to: (20) For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be made desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and, His office<sup>1</sup> let another take. These two passages, the former from Psalm lxix. 25, and the latter from Psalm cix. 8, have no specific reference to Judas in their original context. They occur in the midst of curses pronounced, not by David, but, as Peter

---

<sup>1</sup>The word ἐπισκοπήν, here rendered "office" in the R. V., and "bishoprick" in the A. V., is quoted from the Septuagint, and its exact etymological equivalent in English is *overseership*. What particular kind of overseership is meant in the Psalm from which it is quoted, the context there does not indicate; but that it had not in the days of the Psalmist the meaning now attached to the word bishoprick in English, is absolutely certain, for no such office then existed. In the absence of definite knowledge as to the overseership originally referred to, it is probable that the generic term office is here the best representative of the word, especially as it is so rendered in the Psalm from which the quotation is made. See more on the N. T. use of the word, under xx. 28.

explicitly states, by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David (16), concerning wicked men in general who persecute the servants of God. But if it be proper that the habitations of such men in general should be made desolate, and that any office they held should be given to others, it was preëminently so in the case of Judas; and it was proper to say that these words were written of him as one among many. This was unquestionably Peter's meaning, for he could see as plainly as we can the general aim of the denunciation.

Vv. 21, 22. It is of some moment to observe here that the question on which Peter is discoursing is not the original appointment of an apostle, but the selection of a man to succeed an apostle. The qualifications, therefore, which are declared necessary to an election are those which must be possessed by any one who aspires to be a successor to an apostle. He states them in the next sentence: (21) Of the men therefore who have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, (22) beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection. There being no other instance in the New Testament of the selection of a successor to an apostle, this is our only scriptural guide on the subject; and we must conclude that all those who have since claimed to be successors to the apostles, but were not with the Lord in his personal ministry, lack an essential qualification for the office. The obvious reason for confining the choice to such as had been with the apostles from the beginning is that only such would be thoroughly competent witnesses of the identity of Jesus when they saw him after his resurrection. Thus Peter,

like Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians (ix. 1), makes it an essential characteristic of an apostle that he be a witness of the resurrection of Jesus.

Vv. 23-26. (23) And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. (24) And they prayed, and said, Thou Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show of these two the one whom thou hast chosen, (25) to take the place in this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place. (26) And they gave lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

It should be observed that the disciples did not themselves select Matthias, but, having first put forward the two persons between whom the choice was to be made, they prayed the Lord to show which one *he* had chosen, and then they cast lots, understanding that the one on whom the lot fell was the Lord's choice. This shows that they believed in a providence of God so especial that it includes, in the things that it determines, even the casting of lots—of all things apparently the most accidental. If it be inquired why they confined the Lord's choice to two persons, the obvious answer is, that these were the only two who possessed all of the qualifications laid down by Peter.

The prayer offered on this occasion is a model of its kind. The petitioners had a single object for which they bowed before the Lord, and to the proper presentation of this they confine their words. They do not repeat a thought, nor do they elaborate one beyond the point of perspicuity. Their petition having reference to the spiritual as well as the intellectual qualifications of two persons, they most appropriately address the Lord as



καρδιογνώστα, *the heart knower*. They do not pray, Show us which thou *wilt* choose, or *dost* choose; as though there was need of reflection with the Lord; but, "show of these two the one whom thou hast chosen." They describe the office which they desire the Lord to fill, as "the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place." He had been in a place of which he had proved unworthy, and now they have no hesitation in saying that he has gone to his *own* place, the place to which hypocrites go after death. So brief a prayer on so important an occasion would in this voluble age be scarcely regarded as a prayer at all; and one expressing so plainly the fate of a dead man would be regarded as uncharitable; for who dares to hint, at this day, that any dead sinner has gone to his own place?

Forasmuch as this transaction occurred before the inspiration of the apostles, and forasmuch as Peter bases his authority for it, not on any command of Jesus, but on what some critics regard as irrelevant citations from the Psalms, it has been held by some that it was totally unauthorized, and that Matthias was not therefore a real apostle. But the statement of Luke, "he was numbered with the eleven apostles," was written long after the inspiration of the twelve, and it expresses their final judgment in the case. Moreover, from this time on the company of the apostles is styled no longer "the eleven," but "the twelve,"<sup>1</sup> indicating that from the time of the appointment Matthias was held to be one of the number. Let it be observed, too, that Peter's omission to cite the authority of Jesus for the appointment is by no means proof that they did not have his authority.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chap. ii. 14; vi. 2.



Among the things concerning the kingdom of which he had spoken during the forty days (3), this may have been one, for aught we know; and Peter may have omitted to mention it because it was already well known to all the disciples, while they had failed to observe the predictions which also made it proper. Finally, the promise that the twelve apostles should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes,<sup>1</sup> required that the vacant place be filled; and even this may have been spoken of on some previous occasion, and was therefore omitted now. Paul's apostolate was a special one to the Gentiles.

The author has now completed his introductory statements. He has shown that his narrative starts from the commission given on the day of the ascension; that the apostles were assured on that day of a speedy baptism in the Holy Spirit, which would give them full power to testify for Jesus; that they witnessed his ascension to heaven whence he was to send the promised Spirit; that the original eleven were all at their post after the ascension, awaiting the promise; and that they had filled the vacant place of the traitor with a suitable successor. All was now in readiness, and the next section of the story opens with the advent of the expected Spirit.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xix. 28.

## SEC. II.—THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM ESTABLISHED.

(II. 1-47).

## 1. THE APOSTLES ARE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1-4.

Vv. 1-4. The author now enters upon the main body of his work by describing the promised advent of the Holy Spirit: (1) And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. (2) And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. (3) And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. (4) And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The day of Pentecost was the fiftieth day after the sabbath of the passover week; and as the count commenced on the day after the sabbath, it also ended on the same day of the week, or our Sunday.<sup>1</sup> On account of

---

<sup>1</sup> The commentators in general, misled by Josephus, represent the fifty days as being counted from "the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month" (Ant. iii. 10. 5). If this were correct, the first of the fifty, and consequently the last, might fall on any day of the week. But the enacting clause in the law reads as follows: "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall there be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meal offering unto the Lord" (Lev. xxiii. 15, 16.) This language is not easily misunderstood; for if even in the first clause, the words "from the morrow after the sabbath" could be construed as meaning from

the seven weeks which intervened between it and the passover sabbath, it was called in the Old Testament "the feast of weeks;"<sup>1</sup> on account of the wheat harvest having occurred in that interval, it was called "the feast of harvest;"<sup>2</sup> and on account of the offering peculiar to it, it was called "the day of first fruits."<sup>3</sup> But after the Greek language become known in Palestine, in consequence of Alexander's conquest of Asia, it acquired the name Pentecost (fiftieth), because it was the fiftieth day. It was celebrated, according to the Mosaic ritual, by the special service of offering the first fruits of the wheat harvest in the form of two loaves of bread.<sup>4</sup> This was one of the three annual festivals at which all of the male Jews were required to be present. The condemnation and death of Jesus had occurred during one of these,

---

the morrow after the first day of unleavened bread, the latter part of the sentence precludes such a construction; for the count was to be "unto the morrow after the *seventh sabbath*," and the word sabbath here unquestionably means a weekly sabbath; and if the fiftieth day was the morrow after a weekly sabbath, then the first must also have been the morrow after a weekly sabbath. That it was is further proved by the terms of the law, fixing the day of offering the sheaf of the wave offering: "And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it" (Lev. xxiii. 11.) The first day of unleavened bread, although in it "no servile work" was to be done, is never called a sabbath. As to the testimony of Josephus on the subject we must remember that, although he claims to have been of Jewish ancestry, he was never consecrated as a priest, he wrote his antiquities many years after the fall of the temple and the cessation of its solemnities, and he depended for his knowledge of such topics on his readings of the Old Testament, in which he had no advantage over modern scholars. He has here, as in many other places, misinterpreted the text.

<sup>1</sup> Dent. xvi. 10. <sup>2</sup> Ex. xxiii. 16. <sup>3</sup> Num. xxviii. 26. <sup>4</sup> Lev. xxiii. 15-21; Num. xxviii. 26-31.

and the next was most appropriately chosen as the occasion for his vindication, and for the inauguration of his kingdom on earth. The day was also appropriate from its being the day of the week on which he arose from the dead.

The persons thus assembled together and filled with the Holy Spirit were not, as many have supposed, the one hundred and twenty disciples mentioned in a parenthesis in the previous chapter, but the twelve apostles. This is made certain by the grammatical connection between the first verse of this chapter and the last of the preceding. Taken together they read as follows: "And they gave lots for them, and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place."<sup>1</sup>

The house in which the apostles were sitting when the Spirit came upon them was not the upper chamber in which they were abiding, but some apartment of the temple; for, as we learn from Luke's former treatise, the apostles during these days of waiting were "contin-

---

<sup>1</sup> The supposition first advanced by Chrysostom, and adopted very generally by more recent commentators, that all the one hundred and twenty were included, and the view advanced in modern times (see Alford *in loco*), that all the disciples of Jesus who had come to the feast were included, are entirely without support in the context; and the only plausible reason given for either is the universal language employed in the quotation made below from Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams," etc. But it is obvious at a glance that these words were not all fulfilled on that occasion. Nobody then present was seeing visions, or dreaming dreams. There was here only the beginning of a fulfillment which afterward was extended until all was done which Joel predicted.

ually in the temple praising God ;” that is, continually there through the hours in which the temple was open. The upper chamber was their place of lodging.<sup>1</sup>

The firelike and forked tongues which were visible above the heads of the apostles were symbols of the audible tongues in which they immediately began to speak ; and they added much to the splendor of the scene, which soon riveted the attention of the gathering throng. The statement that the tongues “appeared to them” is not intended to exclude as witnesses of it those who were drawn together, but it points to the fact that the apostles were alone when the phenomenon first made its appearance.

When the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance, the promise of a baptism in the Holy Spirit and of power from on high was fulfilled. The power took effect on their minds, and its presence was manifested outwardly by their speaking in languages which they had never learned.<sup>2</sup> The inner and mental miracle was demon-

---

<sup>1</sup> In opposition to this conclusion, Alford says: “Certainly Luke would not have used this word (‘all the house’) of a chamber in the temple, or of the temple itself, without further explanation.” (See also Meyer *in loco*). But explanation sufficient had already been given by the statement that the apostles were “continually in the temple ;” and, although Alford says that this statement can not apply here, he gives no good reason for the assertion, and we insist that it can and does. An upper room in a private house could not possibly have afforded space for the assembly which witnessed this phenomenon ; while one of the many apartments in the temple court, with one side open to the whole area of the court, would have been perfectly suited to the occasion.

<sup>2</sup> In regard to the author’s meaning here, the following emphatic statement of Alford is to be heartily adopted: “There can be no question in any unprejudiced mind, that the fact which

strated by the outward and physical. The promise, "It shall not be ye that speak, but the Spirit of my Father that speaketh in you," was fulfilled in its most literal sense; for the very words which they uttered were supplied to them immediately by the Spirit. They were not anxious how or what they should say, neither did they premeditate. It was literally given them in that hour what they should speak. Such power had never before been bestowed on men. It was the baptism in the Holy Spirit; not of their bodies, like John's baptism in water, but of their spirits. It was not a literal baptism, for this act is not to be affirmed of the connection between spirit and spirit; but the word baptism is used metaphorically. As the body, when baptized in water, is sunk beneath its surface and completely overwhelmed, so their spirits were completely under the control of the Holy Spirit, their very words being his and not theirs. The metaphor is justified by the absolute power which the divine Spirit exerted upon their spirits. Such is not the case with the ordinary influences of the

---

this narrative sets before us is that the disciples began to *speak in various languages, viz: the languages of the nations below enumerated, and perhaps others*. All attempts to evade this are connected with some forcing of the text, or some far-fetched and indefensible explanation." To admit with Meyer (*Com. in loco*), that this is the author's meaning, and then to say, "The sudden communication of a facility of speaking foreign languages is neither logically possible nor psychologically and morally conceivable," is not only to deny the reliability of the author, and thus to throw discredit on all of his accounts of miracles, but it is to deny that the Spirit can act miraculously upon the minds of men. The reader who is curious to know the many preposterous attempts which have been made to explain away this miracle, will find a sufficient account of them in Meyer's Commentary on this passage.



Spirit, consequently these are not styled baptisms in the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE EFFECT ON THE MULTITUDE, 5-13.

Vv. 5-13. If we attempt to conceive some method by which the miraculous inspiration of a company of men could be immediately demonstrated to an audience, we shall doubtless be at a loss to think of any other than the one employed on this occasion—that of speaking intelligibly the wonderful works of God in a variety of tongues unknown to the speakers. This shows the appropriateness of the particular miracle here wrought, and even the necessity for it in order to the immediate conviction of the hearers. Such an exhibition could be available for its purpose only in the presence of persons acquainted with the languages spoken; but the present occasion supplied this condition, and to this the author next addresses himself: (5) Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. (6) And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. (7) And they were all amazed, and marveled, saying, Are not all these who speak Galileans? (8) And how hear we every man in our own language, wherein we were born? (9) Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, (10) in Pontus and Asia, in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, (11) both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we do hear them speaking in our own tongues the mighty works of God. (12) And

---

<sup>1</sup> See further remarks on this subject under chap. x. 44-46.

they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying to one another, What meaneth this? (13) But others mocking said, They are filled with new wine.

The native tongues of these Jews were those of the countries enumerated in which they were born; yet all, or nearly all of them, had been taught by their parents the home dialect of Judea; for such was the custom of the Jews of that age. This enabled them to understand the tongues spoken by the apostles, and to know the reality of the miracle. Such a miracle had never before been witnessed, and the author exhausts his vocabulary in the attempt to describe its effect on the hearers. He says, "They were confounded," "they were amazed," "they marveled," "they were perplexed," and they said to one another, "What meaneth this?" On this question their thoughts centered when they had time to think; and it shows that they recognized the miraculous nature of the phenomenon, but could not determine what it meant; that is, for what purpose the miracle was wrought. As yet they knew nothing of the men who were speaking, except that they were Galileans. Their question, however, was the very one which the miracle was designed to call forth, and the speech which followed furnished the answer.

The mockers who said, "They are filled with new wine," were irreverent men, who either did not understand more than one of the tongues spoken, and so mistook the rest for nonsense; or were so excessively irreverent as to mock at that which filled all others with amazement. Their mockery received due notice in the speech which followed.

## 3. PETER'S SERMON, 14-40.

## I.

## INTRODUCTION: THE MIRACLE EXPLAINED, 14-21.

Vv. 14-21. (14) But Peter standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spake forth unto them, saying, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell in Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and give ear unto my words. (15) For these are not drunken as ye suppose; seeing it is but the third hour of the day; (16) but this is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel;

(17) And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God,  
I will pour forth of<sup>1</sup> my Spirit upon all flesh:

And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
And your young men shall see visions,  
And your old men shall dream dreams:

(18) Yea, and on my servants and on my handmaidens in those days

Will I pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

(19) And I will show my wonders in the heaven above,  
And signs on the earth beneath;

---

<sup>1</sup>The use that has been made of the expression "pour forth" in connection with the controversy on baptism (Alexander on Acts *in loco*) is a specimen of partisan zeal which is worthy of notice only because it is made to figure in discussions on the subject by men of little discrimination. It is used figuratively for the sending of the Holy Spirit, for it can not be used literally of a person. The mission of the Spirit thus designated, and the baptism in the Spirit, are two distinct conceptions, and the term in which the former is expressed can have no possible bearing on the meaning of the term by which the latter is expressed. Moreover, the term baptism is also used figuratively in this connection. It expresses the power which the Spirit exerted over the minds of the apostles after he entered into them; while the term pour forth (ἐκχεῖν) expresses the act of Christ in sending the Spirit from heaven.

Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke :

- (20) The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
And the moon into blood,  
Before the day of the Lord come,  
The great and notable day :

- (21) And it shall be, that whosoever shall call upon the  
name of the Lord shall be saved.

Peter had heard what the mockers said, and although it came from only a few, he spoke of it as though it expressed the sentiment of the multitude. This had the advantage of avoiding a personal issue with those who had made the remark, while it was calculated to excite for it the disgust of those who had taken the matter seriously. His answer was not a complete refutation of the charge, for men might be intoxicated at any hour of the day ; but the early hour made it highly improbable that they were under the influence of wine, while the rest of his discourse was relied upon to demonstrate the falsity of the charge.

The first part of the citation from Joel, verses 17, 18, are used by Peter to answer the question of the multitude, "What meaneth this?" and the answer was conclusive. If he had ascribed the speaking in tongues to the ingenuity of himself and his fellows, or to any other than divine power, his hearers could not have accepted his explanation ; for they knew that only divine power could enable men thus to speak. When, therefore, he ascribed it to the Spirit of God, they could but see that he was right ; and when he cited the passage from the prophet which was obviously fulfilled before their eyes, they could but see that the miracle was pre-determined in the mind of God. They could see, too, that the prediction involved much more than they were

then witnessing; for it contemplated an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, not only on the men then before them, but on "all flesh," such as would cause men and women to prophesy, to see visions, and to dream dreams. All but the first was yet to be fulfilled, but all was fulfilled in the course of the events which the author is about to record. By "all flesh" is obviously meant, not every human being, but persons of all nationalities.

The remainder of the quotation from Joel, verses 19, 20, has no bearing on Peter's argument, but was probably made in order to complete the connection of that which his argument demanded. The great and notable day to which it refers has been variously understood; some referring it to the destruction of Jerusalem, some to the day of judgment, and some even to the day of Pentecost itself. The fact that in connection with it the promise is made, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved," seems to identify it with the day of judgment; for the terrors of that day alone will be escaped by calling on the name of the Lord. We are not to understand that the mere act of calling on the name of the Lord will save, but such prayer to the Lord as accompanies the faith and the obedience without which all prayer is vain.

Thus far in his discourse Peter has confined himself to the proof of the inspiration of himself and his companions. This was a necessary preparation for what is to follow, for his hearers could in this way alone be prepared to receive with implicit confidence what he had to say of Jesus. Had he closed his discourse at this point, they would have been convinced (that is, the thoughtful portion of them) that they were listening to an inspired man; but they would have learned no more about Jesus,

or about salvation through him, that they knew before. But now the introduction of the discourse is completed; the way is paved for the presentation of the principal theme, and he proceeds at once to announce the proposition for which all that he had said was but introductory.

## II.

JESUS PROCLAIMED AS CHRIST AND LORD, 22-32.

(a). *HIS RESURRECTION DECLARED, 22-24.*

Vv. 22-24. It is impossible for us, at this distance of space and time, to realize, except in a faint degree, the effect on minds so wrought up of the next announcement made by Peter: (22) Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God to you by mighty works and wonders and signs,<sup>1</sup> which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; (23) him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of lawless<sup>2</sup> men did crucify and slay: (24) whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs<sup>3</sup> of death: because it was not possible

---

<sup>1</sup> By the three terms, mighty works (*δυνάμεις*), wonders (*τέρατα*), and signs (*σημεία*), Peter does not mean three classes of actions, but he uses the three terms to describe the same phenomena. He means the miracles of Jesus, which were mighty works, or powers, because wrought by the immediate power of God; wonders, because they excited wonder in those who witnessed them; signs, because they signified God's approval of what Jesus taught in connection with them.

<sup>2</sup> The original, *ἀνόμοι*, means in this place, as is indicated in the margin of the R. V., not men who are violators of the law, but men who are not under the law, *i. e.*, Gentiles, *cf.* I. Cor. ix. 21.

<sup>3</sup> In the expression, "loosed the pangs of death," *τὰς ὠδύνας τοῦ θανάτου*, the pangs of dying are figuratively regarded as bonds which hold the victim of death in confinement until they are loosed. Both terms are used figuratively, and it is not Peter's



that he should be held by it. Filled with amazement as the hearers already were, by a visible and audible manifestation of the Spirit of God, they now see that the whole of this amazing phenomenon is subservient to the name of that Nazarene whom they had despised and crucified. This conviction is forced upon them in a sentence packed with a series of facts calculated to make them reel and stagger as under a rapid succession of heavy blows. In one breath they are reminded of the wonderful miracles and signs which Jesus had wrought among them ; they are charged with knowing this to be true ; they are informed that it was in accordance with God's preordained purpose that he was delivered into their power, and not through his own impotence ; and they are boldly told that God had raised him from the dead, it being impossible that such a being as he should be permanently held down among the dead. Never did mortal lips announce in so brief a space so many facts of import so terrific to the hearers. We might challenge the world to find a parallel to it in the speeches of her orators, or the songs of her poets. There is not such a thunderbolt in all the burdens of the prophets of Israel, or among the voices which echo through the Apocalypse. It is the first public announcement to the world of a risen and glorified Redeemer.

(b). *THE RESURRECTION OF THE CHRIST PREDICTED BY DAVID, 25-31.*

Vv. 25-28. Two of the facts stated in this announcement required proof ; the others required none. That Jesus had been approved of God to them by miracles,

---

purpose to intimate that Jesus suffered any pangs after dying. But for another view of the meaning, see Alford and Meyer.



and that they had by the hands of the lawless Romans put him to death, were facts well known to the auditors ; but that Jesus had been delivered up to them in accordance with a predetermined purpose of God, was news to them ; and that God had raised him from the dead they did not believe ; both these latter statements, therefore, needed proof, and Peter proceeds to give the proof in a way both formal and conclusive. He cites first a passage in which David had very clearly predicted a resurrection of some one from the dead, speaking in the first person, as if he meant himself: (25) For David<sup>1</sup> says 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,

Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption.

(28) Thou madest known to me the ways of life ;

Thou shalt make me full of gladness with thy countenance.

Only so much of this quotation as refers to the resurrection suits the special purpose of the apostle, the preceding portion (verses 25, 26) serving to connectedly introduce it. The words, "Thou wilt not leave my soul

---

<sup>1</sup>To deny that David wrote Psalm xvi., which is here quoted by Peter (Meyer *in loco*, and rationalists in general), is to deny that he was speaking by inspiration, and therefore it is to deny the historic truthfulness of the preceding account of the Holy Spirit's work in him and the other apostles.

in hades," assert a return of the soul from the disembodied state;<sup>1</sup> while the words, "Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption," assert that the body would be reanimated by the return of the soul, before corruption would set in. The added words, "Thou madest known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of gladness with thy countenance," refer first to the knowledge of this subject imparted previous to death, and secondly to the gladness of the one raised from the dead when beholding the countenance of God. That this passage predicts the resurrection of some person from the dead previous to the corruption of his body, is undeniable; and the only question between Peter and his hearers was, of whom does David speak? As he uses the first person, and therefore appears to speak of himself, it was necessary for Peter, in order to make out his argument, to show that he refers to some other person, and that person the Christ. This he proceeds to do.

Vv. 29-31. (29) Brethren, I may say to you freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us unto this day. (30) Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; (31) he foreseeing this,

---

<sup>1</sup> Hades is a Greek word transferred into English because our language has no native word to exactly represent it. It is compounded of *à* privative and *idein*, to see, and means literally *the unseen*; but in usage it is applied exclusively to the unseen abode of disembodied human spirits. If we had no other proof of this meaning, our text, combined with Peter's comment, verse 31 below, would make it clear. While the body of Jesus was in the tomb, his soul was in hades, and yet it was in Paradise, as we learn from his declaration to the dying robber (Luke xxiii. 43). This shows that to the righteous hades is a place of enjoyment.

spake of the resurrection of Christ, that neither was he left in hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. It was well known to the Jews, as it now is to all interpreters of the prophetic Psalms, that David habitually speaks in the first person when prophesying of the Christ; and in any given case, if it is made clear that he does not speak of himself, the conclusion is that he speaks of the Christ. This is the force of Peter's argument, and it proved to his Jewish hearers that which he set out to prove, that the Christ, according to a predetermined and expressed purpose of God, was to suffer death, and to arise again speedily from the dead. It also corrected their conception of an earthly reign of the Christ, and showed them that he was to sit on David's throne after his resurrection, and not before his death.

(c). *THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS ATTESTED BY THE TWELVE, 32.*

VER. 32. Thus far in his argument the speaker has proved that the Christ was to be delivered up to death, and that he was to arise from the dead to sit on his throne; but he has yet to prove that this was true of Jesus. This he now proves by the testimony of himself and the eleven standing with him: (32) This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses. It is probable that this is only the substance of what he said on this point, and that he went into the details of the testimony. As the witnesses were personally unknown to the multitude, their testimony as mere men could have had but little weight with their hearers; but they spoke as men filled with the Spirit of God, and this to men of Jewish education was a sufficient guarantee that what they said was certainly true. Consequently, the fact

now established by this testimony, taken in connection with that just learned from the Psalm, that the Christ was to suffer and rise from the dead as Jesus had suffered and risen, proved beyond a doubt that Jesus was the Christ. So it must have appeared to every thoughtful hearer.

(d). *JESUS EXALTED TO THE THRONE OF GOD, 33-35.*

VER. 33. In order to sustain the proposition that the Christ was to be thus raised that he might sit on David's throne (verses 30, 31), it was necessary for Peter to trace his progress beyond the resurrection, and show that he had actually been exalted to a throne. This he does in these words: (33) *Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this which ye see and hear.* His proof is not the fact recited in the introductory chapter of Acts, that he and his companions had seen Jesus ascend into heaven; for this would have been unavailing, seeing that their eyes followed him no farther than the cloud which received him out of their sight; but it is that which his hearers were witnessing with their own eyes and ears, the fact that he and his companions were speaking as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance, while the tongues of flame sat upon their heads. In saying that Jesus had been exalted by the right hand of God, Peter spoke that which neither he nor any other mortal could know except by direct revelation; but as the direct revelation was manifested before the people, it was clear that the testimony given was that of the Holy Spirit himself, who had just descended from heaven where the exaltation had taken place. Here was testimony which no sane man among the Jews could think of calling in question.

Vv. 34, 35. One more point established, not in further proof that Jesus had been exalted, but to show that this which was now proved concerning him was predicted of the Christ, and this inimitable argument will be completed: (34) For David<sup>1</sup> 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. The Pharisees themselves admitted that in this passage David referred to the Christ; and they had been much perplexed in consequence of this admission in a memorable conversation with Jesus;<sup>2</sup> but Peter, taking nothing for granted, guards the application, as he had done that of the previous quotation from David, by remarking that David himself had not ascended to heaven, and therefore he could not in these words be speaking of himself. This admitted, the only alternative was, as in the other instance, that he referred to the Christ; for certainly David would call no other his Lord.

---

<sup>1</sup> In here quoting Psalm cx. as having been written by David, Peter by the Holy Spirit follows the example of Jesus, who did the same, and who also declares that David said this "in the Spirit" (Matt. xxii. 43, 44). This explicit testimony to the Davidic authorship of that Psalm can not be set aside by claiming that it was, in the lips either of Jesus or Peter, a mere accommodation to an incorrect opinion then current among the Jews; for the argument in both instances turns upon the fact that David was the writer, and it is fallacious if this is not a fact. Neither can it be regarded as a mistake on the part of either Jesus or Peter; for this would be to accuse them of fallacious reasoning based on premises assumed in ignorance. It would be a denial of supernatural knowledge on the part of Jesus, and of inspiration on the part of Peter.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxii. 43, 44.

*(c). THE LOGICAL CONCLUSION, 36.*

VER. 36. Having now established by incontestable evidence the two statements made in his opening announcement which needed proof; first, that Jesus had been delivered to his enemies by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; and second, that God had raised him from the dead; and having gone beyond his first announcement by proving that God had also exalted him, and caused him to sit at his own right hand in heaven, Peter now announces his final conclusion in these confident and startling terms: (36) Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. He had made him Lord by causing him to sit on God's own throne, to rule over angels and men; and he had made him Christ by causing him to sit on the throne of David according to the promise. It was God's throne, because it was the throne of universal dominion; and it was David's throne, because it was the lineal descent from David which made Jesus the rightful king. From this conclusion the Jewish hearers of Peter learned that, contrary to their previous conception, the promised Christ was to sit, not on an earthly throne, however glorious, but on the throne of the universe.

## III.

## THE PEOPLE EXHORTED TO SAVE THEMSELVES, 37-40.

VER. 37. As we have already observed, up to the moment at which Peter arose to address the audience, although the baptism of the Holy Spirit had occurred, and its effects on the subjects of it had been witnessed, no change had taken place in the minds of the people in reference to Jesus, nor did they experience any emotion



except amazement and confusion. The desired change in reference to Christ was not effected till Peter spoke; and all the power to effect it which resided in the baptism in the Spirit was brought to bear through the words which the Spirit caused Peter to speak. The first visible effect is described in these words: (37) *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?* In this exclamation they tacitly confessed their belief of what Peter had preached; and the statement that they were pierced to the heart shows that they felt keenly the remorse which the facts they now believed were intended to inspire. Since Peter began to speak a change has taken place in both their convictions and their feelings. They now believe that Jesus is the Christ, and they are pierced to the heart with the thought that they have murdered him. All this effect Luke traces, as we see it must be traced, to what they had heard: “Now when they *heard* this they were pricked in the heart.” This exemplifies Paul’s teaching, that “faith comes by hearing; and hearing by the word of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

VER. 38. The question, “What shall we do?” had reference to the escape of these guilty men from the consequences of their crime; and although the idea of salvation from their sins in general could scarcely yet have had a place in their minds, the real force of their question would be well expressed by the full inquiry, What shall we do to be saved? This is the first time under the reign of Christ that this momentous question was propounded, and the first time of course that it received an answer. Whatever may have been the proper answer

---

<sup>1</sup> Rom. x. 14-17.

under any previous dispensation, or on any previous day in the world's history, the answer given by Peter on this day of Pentecost, the day in which the reign of Christ on earth began, is the true and infallible answer for all such inquirers in all subsequent time. (38) And Peter said to them, Repent<sup>1</sup> ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for<sup>2</sup> the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It should be observed that in this answer to the question, what shall we do? they are told to do two things; first, to repent; and second, to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. If Peter had stopped here, the people would have learned their immediate duty, and we also would have learned that the immediate duty of men pricked in the heart by a sense of guilt is to repent and be baptized; we would also know that this is what we are to do to be delivered from our guilt. But Peter did not stop with the two commands; he saw fit to state specifically the blessings which would follow compliance with them. The people were told to repent and be baptized "for the remission of sins." This is only stating more specifically what would have been understood from connecting the question with its answer, as we have just stated. It makes it doubly certain that

---

<sup>1</sup> That these persons were commanded to repent after they had been "pricked in the heart" by the power of the Spirit through the truth preached, and were so penetrated with a sense of guilt as to cry out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" shows plainly that repentance is not mere sorrow for sin, but a change which follows after it. For a further definition of it, see the note under chap. iii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> For a justification of this departure from the R. V., and for a full statement of the connection between baptism and the remission of sins, see *Excursus A*.

remission of sins follows baptism, and is therefore to be expected by the baptized. This is equally true if the correct rendering be, as in R. V., "unto remission of sins," for if we are baptized "unto" remission, remission follows baptism, and baptism brings us to it. Remission of sins, forgiveness of sins, and pardon, are synonymous terms, and they express the chief want of the human soul in its most favorable earthly circumstances. The rebel against God's government, though he lay down his arms and become a loyal subject, can have no hope without pardon for the past; and after being pardoned, while he is humbly struggling in the service of God, he knows himself still guilty of shortcomings by which he must fail of the final reward unless he is pardoned again and again. The question as to the conditions of pardon, therefore, divides itself into two; one having reference to the hitherto unpardoned sinner, and the other to the saint who may have fallen into sin. It was the former class who propounded the question to Peter, and it is to them alone that his answer applies.

The second blessing promised on condition of repentance and baptism, is the "gift of the Holy Spirit." By this is not meant that miraculous gift which had just been bestowed upon the apostles; for we know from the subsequent history that this gift was not bestowed on all who repented and were baptized, but on only a few brethren of prominence in the several congregations. The expression means the Holy Spirit as a gift; and the reference is to that indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which we bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and without which we are not of Christ. Of this promise Peter speaks more fully in the next sentence of his sermon.

VER. 39. (39) For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even unto as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him. As this is a conditional promise, conditioned on repentance and baptism, the children mentioned can be no others than those who repent and are baptized. This promise can not therefore be understood of infant children. Moreover, the promise is to those whom the Lord shall "call unto him," and he calls only those who can hear and believe. We may remark that the universality of this promise, while very plain to us who read it in the light of subsequent revelations, was understood by Peter and the other apostles to include the Gentiles only as they might be circumcised. This is an instance among many in which inspired men, while speaking the words which the Spirit gave them, did not themselves adequately apprehend their import.

VER. 40. In concluding his report of Peter's sermon, the author indirectly informs us that he has given only an epitome of it: (40) And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. The term "testified" refers to the argumentative part of the discourse; and the term "exhorted" to the hortatory part. The latter naturally followed his statement of the conditions of pardon, and it is summed up in the words, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." They were to save themselves by complying with the conditions of salvation just laid down; for salvation from sin is accomplished in the remission of sins;<sup>1</sup> and the reference

---

<sup>1</sup> "Become saved from this (the now living) perverse generation away, in separating from them by the *μετάνοια* and baptism."—Meyer. In opposition to this, Alford says: "The apostles' com-

to these conditions was too obvious to be misunderstood. This exhortation should have prevented any one from ever conceiving the idea so often expressed by modern revivalists, that a sinner can do nothing toward saving himself. While it is true that the sinner can do nothing in the way of procuring or meriting his own salvation, or of forgiving his own sins, he *must* do that which is prescribed as the method of accepting the salvation procured for him and offered to him. To this extent he saves himself. To be saved from that generation was to be saved from the fate awaiting that generation in the eternal world, as we may be saved from a sinking ship by escaping its fate.

If the reader will carefully review this discourse, with reference to its plan as a sermon, and the conduct of its line of argument, he will find that it complies with the rules of homiletics as strictly as though Peter had been trained in this modern science; and that its logic is faultless from beginning to end. This could not have been a result of Peter's education or training; for he had no previous instruction which could have qualified him for extemporaneous work of this character; but it must be ascribed to the guiding power of the Holy Spirit, giving him, according to the promise,<sup>1</sup> "a mouth

---

mand is improperly rendered in A. V., '*save yourselves.*' It is strictly passive—be saved—'let us save you,' 'let God by us save you.' " But the staggering effort which this ingenious interpreter makes to extract from the precept the meaning which he assigns to it, betrays the weakness of the attempt. The original word is in the imperative mood, *σώθητε*, and as it expresses the command, *Be saved*, it requires the act of saving to be done by the persons addressed, and it is, therefore, properly expressed by the terms, "save yourselves."

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxi. 15.

and wisdom which all his adversaries were not able to withstand or to gainsay."

#### 4. EFFECT OF THE SERMON, AND PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH, 41-47.

VER. 41. The auditors who had been so pierced to the heart as to cry out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" were happily surprised to find the terms of pardon so easy; and they acted with becoming promptness: (41) They then that received his word were baptized; and there were added to them in that day about three thousand souls. They received his word in the sense that they believed it to be true, and adopted it as their rule of action.

Times without number it has been urged, and as often refuted, that three thousand men could not have been baptized (immersed) during the remainder of that day, and with the supply of water accessible in Jerusalem. It is true that there is no running stream in the vicinity of the city, and there never has been, suitable for the purpose; but from a time long prior to the birth of Jesus the city has been supplied with artificial pools in which the ordinance could be administered even to such a multitude. At the present day, the only one of these which remains entirely suitable for the purpose, and which has been so used in modern times by missionaries, is the pool of Siloam, situated in the valley immediately south of the temple enclosure. It is fifty feet long, has an average width of about sixteen feet, and is walled up with masonry to a height of about eighteen feet. At its southwestern corner, where the wall does not rise so high, a flight of stone steps, four feet wide, leads down to the bottom of it. The water comes in at the northern



end, being conducted by an underground conduit from the Virgin's Pool, a perennial spring, and it escapes at the opposite end through two orifices, one at the bottom, and the other some three or four feet above the bottom. When the former is closed, as it usually is, the water stands at the depth most suitable for baptism.

The pool now called Upper Gihon, situated about half a mile due west from the Joppa gate, is at present the next most suitable place. It is three hundred and sixteen feet long, two hundred and eighteen wide, and has an average depth of about twenty feet. It is supplied by surface drainage, and is now seldom full. It was supplied with broad steps at every corner, descending to the bottom, now in a state of dilapidation; and when the water was at a suitable depth it afforded facilities for baptizing such a multitude as were baptized on Pentecost. But the most suitable of all the ancient pools is the one now called Lower Gihon by Europeans, but called the Pool of the Sultan, on account of its size, by the natives. It was formed by constructing an immense dam across the valley which lies under the western wall of Mount Zion, to retain the water flowing through the valley, and another wall, five hundred and ninety-two feet higher up the valley, to hold back the earth at that end. The sides and bottom of this pool consist of the shelving rock of the valley, and this, on the side next to the city, lies in ledges from two to three feet thick, with an exposed surface in many places from eight to ten feet wide. On these ledges, at any depth of the water, a large number of administrators could stand, many more than the twelve apostles, and baptize at one time without interfering with one another. The plastering on the lower dam of the pool was three and a half inches thick ;

but it is now broken off to such an extent that the water freely pours through, and the pool is empty in the dry season ; but when this dam was in a good state of preservation no one accustomed to baptizing would think of resorting to any other place about the city. Indeed, it is seldom that a better baptistery can be found anywhere. Since a knowledge of these facilities for baptizing in ancient Jerusalem has been spread abroad by the writings of explorers within our own generation, it has become inexcusable in any person of intelligence to raise the objection which we have been considering.

As to the question of time for the baptism of so many, any one who will make the mathematical calculation, without which it is idle to offer the objection, can see that there was the greatest abundance of time. Peter's sermon began at nine o'clock, and we may safely suppose that the proceedings at the temple closed as early as noon. This allows six hours for the baptizing to be completed that day, as the text asserts. It is very deliberate work for an administrator to baptize one person in a minute ; and if he stands at one spot, as is often the case when a large number are to be baptized, and has the candidates to come and go in a continuous line, the work can be done in half this time. But, at the rate of sixty to the hour, twelve men could baptize seven hundred and twenty in one hour, and three thousand in four hours and a quarter. This simple calculation shows how idle the objection is, and it proves that those who urge it have never given the subject proper consideration.

Not satisfied with the two objections to the immersion of the three thousand which we have now disposed of, many affusionists insist that "access to the reservoirs, most precious to the population of a large city, would

not have been allowed to such a multitude.”<sup>1</sup> This objection betrays ignorance of the design of these pools, and of the use which is made of them. Even at this day, when water is far more scarce than in ancient times, they are freely used as swim pools, and their water is never employed for drinking or culinary purposes. Baptizing in them did not reduce the quantity or impair the quality of the water for any of the purposes for which it was used. The multitude who heard Peter could resort to them for baptism with precisely the same freedom with which believers now resort to streams and pools in the vicinity of any of our American cities or villages. It is to be hoped that the day has come when this objection will be heard no more from men of average intelligence.<sup>2</sup>

Before leaving this verse, we should observe that two distinct steps were taken by the three thousand: they were baptized, and then, as a distinct process, they were added to the previous number of the believers. The adding doubtless consisted in some form of public recognition, by which they were acknowledged as members of the church. As the form is not specified, it is not authoritative; and believers are now free to adopt any form which appears appropriate and in harmony with the simplicity of the gospel.

VER. 42. These young disciples having now been baptized on the same day in which they first became be-

---

<sup>1</sup> The Bishop of Chester, (Speaker's Com. *in loco*).

<sup>2</sup> And yet, in the volume of The Expositors' Bible on Acts, the author, G. T. Stokes, D. D., makes this statement: "On the day of Pentecost it was clearly impossible to immerse three thousand persons in the city of Jerusalem" (p. 143). We may charitably suppose that the author has never made himself acquainted with the water supply of Jerusalem.

lievers, had many subordinate objects of faith to become acquainted with, and many duties yet unknown in which to be instructed. In giving an account of these matters Luke is far more brief, adhering strictly to the chief purpose of his narrative, that of giving the process and means of conversion, rather than those of edification and instruction. He closes this section of the history with a brief notice of the order established in the new church, first mentioning their acts of public worship: (42) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and the prayers. The apostles were as yet the only teachers, and in teaching the disciples they were executing the part of their commission which required them to teach those whom they baptized all things which Jesus had commanded.<sup>1</sup> The command which made it their duty to teach made it also the duty of the disciples to learn from them, and to abide by their teaching; and that they did both is affirmed in saying, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching."

The fellowship in which they continued was their joint participation in religious privileges. The original term, *κοινωνία*, is sometimes used for contributions made for the poor;<sup>2</sup> but while this is one of the ways in which fellowship is manifested, the word is not usually restricted to this sense. It usually occurs in such connections as the following: "Ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ;" "the favor of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you;" "and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ;"<sup>3</sup> "we have

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. <sup>2</sup> Rom. xv. 26; II. Cor. ix. 13. <sup>3</sup> I. Cor. i. 9; II. Cor. xiii. 14; I. Jno. i. 3, 7.

fellowship with one another.” We have fellowship with God, because we are made partakers of the divine nature as we escape the corruption which is in the world through lust. We have fellowship with his Son, because of the sympathies which his life and sufferings have established between him and us; and with the Holy Spirit, because we partake of the strength and enlightenment which he imparts, and because he dwells in us. We have fellowship with one another, because of mutual participation in one another’s affection and good offices. The term is also used with reference to the Lord’s supper: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? the loaf which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ?”<sup>1</sup> This fellowship is our joint participation in the benefits of Christ’s broken body and shed blood. In all these particulars the first disciples continued steadfastly in the fellowship.

The breaking of bread and the prayers, in which they also steadfastly continued, are the breaking of the emblematic loaf, or the observance of the Lord’s supper, and the public prayers in the congregation. The frequency with which the loaf was broken is not here intimated; but it was doubtless the same weekly observance of this ordinance which we afterward find in existence in distant congregations.<sup>2</sup> This, as well as the number and character of the prayers offered at the meetings, was so well known to Theophilus that it was needless to give the details.

VER. 43. Next to this brief notice of the public service of the church, we have a glance at the effect of the scenes just described on the surrounding community:

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Cor. x. 16.    <sup>2</sup> Acts xx. 17; I. Cor. xi. 20.

(43) And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. This fear was not that which partakes of aversion; for we learn below (47) that many were daily added to the church. It was that solemn awe which miracles naturally inspire, mingled with profound reverence for a community universally characterized by holy living.

Vv. 44, 45. We are next introduced to a remarkable exhibition of the fellowship previously mentioned: (44) And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and they sold their possessions and goods, (45) and parted them to all, according as any man had need. This conduct was in marked contrast with the neglect of the poor which was then common among the Jews, in violation of their own law, and which was universal among the Gentiles. Nothing like it had ever been seen on earth before. For a fuller account of it, see the remarks under chap. iv. 32, below.

Vv. 46, 47. The further history of the church for a short time is condensed into this brief statement: (46) And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, (47) praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved. This shows plainly that the temple was the daily meeting place of the church. Its courts were open at all times; all Jews had as free access to them as to the streets of the city; and even Gentiles had free access to the outer court, which was called on this account the Court of the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup> No other place inside

---

<sup>1</sup> See more as to their use of the temple, under chap. iii. 11; v. 12, 20, 25, 42.



the city walls could have afforded room for the assemblage of such multitudes.

The breaking of bread mentioned here is not the same as that mentioned above at verse 42 ; for here the reference is to bread for food, as is seen in the qualifying clause, "they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart." That they had "favor with all the people," was a natural consequence of the admirable lives which they led. The priests and scribes had received such a shock by the sudden rise of the church that they were not yet prepared for open opposition to it.

The statement that "the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved," means that there were daily additions to the church, and that those daily added were daily being saved. The last expression does not mean that they were merely in the way of salvation ; but that they were saved. They were saved in the sense in which Peter had exhorted those on Pentecost to "save themselves." The word *save* means to make safe ; and a man is made safe from all his past sins when they are forgiven. He can be saved from them in no other way. In this sense those daily added were saved. Paul uses the word in the same sense when he says : "According to his mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus iii. 5). The fact that it was the saved who were added to the church, justifies the conclusion that only those who are saved, or whose sins are forgiven, are entitled to church membership. It condemns the practice of receiving persons into the church "as a means of grace," that is, as a means of seeking pardon ; and it also condemns the reception of infants who are

incapable as yet of complying with the conditions on which pardon is offered.

---

### SEC. III.—PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH, AND ITS FIRST PERSECUTION.

III. 1—IV. 31.

#### 1. A LAME MAN HEALED BY PETER, III. 1-11.

Vv. 1-10. Thus far the labors of the apostles had met with uninterrupted and most astonishing success. Now we are introduced to a series of conflicts, in which success and apparent defeat alternate in the history of the Jerusalem church. The temple is still the place of meeting, and it becomes the place of conflict. (1) Now Peter and John were going up into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. (2) 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 of them that entered into the temple; (3) who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked to receive an alms. (4) And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. (5) And he gave heed to them, expecting to receive something from them. (6) But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that I give unto thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. (7) And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankle bones received strength. (8) And leaping up, he stood, and began to walk; and he entered with them into the temple, walking, leaping, and praising God. (9) And

all the people saw him leaping and praising God : (10) and they took knowledge of him, that it was he who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple : and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened to him. This miracle is one of the many signs and wonders mentioned before in chap. ii. 43, as being wrought from day to day by the apostles ; and it is selected for particular mention because of the consequences which followed it. The circumstances attending it were calculated to make it attract unusual attention. The Beautiful Gate was doubtless the favorite passway into the temple court ; and as the subject of this cure was laid there every day, he became well known to all who frequented the temple. The natural curiosity of the benevolent concerning the afflictions of those to whom they minister had also led to the general knowledge that he had been a cripple from his birth. Furthermore, the time of the cure was when a multitude of pious people were just entering the temple for evening prayer, at the hour of evening incense,<sup>1</sup> and they could but notice the leaping and shouting of the man who was healed. As they witnessed his ecstasy, and saw him clinging to Peter and John, no one needed to ask the meaning of his conduct, for all saw at once that he had been healed by the apostles, and all stood gazing in amazement, forgetting the prayers for which they had come together.

VER. 11. It was probably the intention of Peter and John to go with the people into the Jewish court, and

---

<sup>1</sup> The hours of burning incense in the temple were the third and the ninth ; and we learn from the example of the people at the time of Zacharias' vision (Luke i. 10) that it was the custom of devout persons in the city to assemble about the temple and pray while the incense was burning.

engage with them in prayer while the incense was burning in the temple, but the conduct of the cripple and that of the people combined brought about a different course. (11) And as he held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them into the porch that is called Solemon's, greatly wondering. The structure that is here called a "porch" was a colonnade constructed along the inner face of the enclosing wall of the outer court. It consisted, according to Josephus, of rows of stone columns twenty-seven feet high, with a roof of cedar resting on them and on the wall, so as to constitute a covered portico, with its inner side open toward the temple. On the eastern side of the court there were two rows of these columns, making that portico sixty feet deep and as long as the wall, which Josephus estimates at a furlong, though its exact measurement to-day is fifteen hundred and thirty feet. Across the southern end, which now measures nine hundred and twenty-two feet, there were four rows of columns, making three walks or passages between them, each thirty feet deep, and consequently the depth of this portico was ninety feet.<sup>1</sup> These immense covered porticos, or cloisters, as Josephus calls them, served as a protection from the sun in the summer, and from the rain in the winter. They contained space sufficient for the great multitude of the disciples when assembled in one mass; and also for many separate meetings of large numbers to listen to different preachers speaking at the same time. All the twelve apostles might be preaching in them at the same hour, each to a large audience, and yet be far enough apart to avoid confusion of sound. In which of these porticos the present meeting was held we can not tell, because we are

---

<sup>1</sup> Josephus (*Ant.* xv. 3. 5).

not informed as to which was distinguished by the name "Solomon's," this being of course an honorary title.

## 2. PETER'S SECOND SERMON.

### I.

#### INTRODUCTION: THE MIRACLE EXPLAINED, 12-16.

Vv. 12-15. The admiration of the multitude was directed toward Peter and John, and the former saw that they ascribed the cure rather to something extraordinary in them than to the power of their Master. He takes advantage of this circumstance, and devotes the introduction of his sermon to turning their thoughts into the right channel. (12) And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this man? or 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 of our fathers, hath glorified his servant Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied before the face of Pilate, when he had determined to release him. (14) But ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the author<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The word ἀρχηγός, here rendered *Prince* both in A. V. and R. V., can have this meaning only in the primary sense of *leader*. It also means author, or originator, and it is so rendered in R. V., in Heb. v. 9; xii. 2, "*author* of eternal salvation," "*author* and perfecter of our faith." In those places it could not be rendered prince. Its only two other occurrences in the N. T. are in this place and in a later speech of Peter, v. 31. In the last instance "*prince* and Saviour" is not so good a rendering as "*leader* and Saviour," because the mind is apt to associate with *prince* the conception of royalty, which is not suggested by the original word. There is the same objection to "prince" in the passage before us, and the further objection, that the expression, "prince of

of life ; (15) whom God raised from the dead ; whereof we are witnesses.

In this passage the apostle makes in substance the same announcement concerning Jesus with which he introduced the principal theme of his first discourse. The antithetical style adopted on this occasion gave his announcement a force even greater than before, if we consider it with reference to the effect on the consciences of his hearers. The fact that the God of their fathers had glorified Jesus is contrasted with the fact that they had delivered him up to die ; their refusal to let him be released, with Pilate's desire to let him go ; their rejection of one who was holy and just, with the demand that a murderer should be released to them ; and the fact that they killed him, with the fact that he was the author of life. These four points of contrast form the steps of a climax. He whom the God of your fathers glorified, ye have delivered up to die. Your criminality in this is heightened by the consideration that when the heathen ruler of your nation pronounced him innocent, and proposed to release him, ye cried out against it. Even this does not express the enormity of your guilt, for ye yourselves knew him to be a man holy and just, and ye preferred the release of one whom ye knew to be a murderer. Finally, in murdering him ye put to death the very author of life itself, your own life, and the life of all men ; and although ye put him to death, he has arisen from the dead. A grander climax, or a happier

---

life," conveys no distinct idea, and certainly not the correct idea. Peter is contrasting the act of killing Jesus with the fact that he is the *author* of life. For these reasons I have not hesitated to depart from the R. V. in this instance. See Thayer's Grimm ; Meyer *in loco*, and Speaker's Com. *in loco*.



combination of climax and antithesis, is not found often, if at all, in literature. We have reason to believe (see below under verse 17) that the effect on the multitude was overwhelming. The facts set forth in it were undeniable, except the resurrection, and of this Peter declares himself and John to be witnesses.

VER. 16. By the preceding announcement Peter only in part introduced the theme of his discourse. He advanced as far as the resurrection, but he stopped short of the whole truth concerning the glorification of Jesus. He now completes his introduction, and at the same time demonstrates the reality of the resurrection and glorification of Jesus, by adding: (16) And by faith in his name hath his name made this man strong, whom ye behold and know: yea, the faith which is through him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Here is one of those repetitions common with extemporaneous speakers, intended to give greater emphasis to the principal thought, and at the same time to guard against a probable misunderstanding. Lest the peculiar use made of the name of Jesus should lead some of the excited multitude to think that there was some charm in the mere name, a mistake into which certain Jews in Ephesus afterward fell,<sup>1</sup> Peter is particular to say that it was by *faith* in his name that the miracle had been wrought. We must notice, too, that the faith which had effected the cure was not that of the cripple; for it is evident from the account of the cure (verses 4-8) that previous to it he had no faith at all. When Peter said to him, "Look on us," the man looked up, expecting to receive alms. And even when Peter told him in the name of Jesus Christ to walk, he made

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts xix. 13-17.

no attempt to move until Peter took him by the hand and lifted him up. He showed no faith either in Jesus, or in the healing power of the apostles, until he found himself able to stand and walk. The faith, then, was that of Peter; and this accords with what we learn in the Gospels, that the working of a miracle by those possessed of spiritual gifts was always dependent on their faith. Peter was empowered to walk on the water; but when his faith wavered he began to sink, and Jesus said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"<sup>1</sup> When nine of the apostles on a memorable occasion, tried to cast out a demon, and failed, Jesus explained the failure by saying it was because of their little faith.<sup>2</sup> It was only the "prayer of faith" which could heal the sick.<sup>3</sup>

It may be well to observe here, that while faith was necessary on the part of one to whom miraculous powers had been imparted, in order to work any particular miracle, no faith ever enabled one to work a miracle to whom such powers had not been imparted. The notion, therefore, which has existed in some minds from time to time ever since the apostolic period, that if our faith were strong enough we also could work miracles, has as little foundation in Scripture as it has in experience.

## II.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS OFFERED THROUGH CHRIST, 17-21.

Vv. 17, 18. At this point in the discourse there is a marked change in Peter's tone and manner. He has made a fearful arraignment of his hearers, exposing their criminality in unsparing terms; but now he softens his tone and extenuates their fault, influenced no doubt by a

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiv. 31. <sup>2</sup> Matt. xvii. 20. <sup>3</sup> James v. 15.

perceptible expression of pain in their countenances. (17) And now, brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. (18) But the things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. That they acted in ignorance was an extenuation of their crime, but it did not render them innocent. The fact stated in connection with this, that in their mistreatment of Jesus God was fulfilling what he had declared through the prophets should be done, is not easily reconciled by human philosophy with the assertion of their guilt. Once before Peter had brought these two apparently conflicting facts, the sovereignty of God and the free agency of man, into juxtaposition, when he said, "Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay." That God had predetermined the death of Jesus, can not be denied without contradicting both the prophets and the apostles; and that those who slew him acted wickedly in doing what God had determined should be done, Peter affirms, and three thousand of the participants on Pentecost, together with many on this occasion, admitted it. If any man can frame a theory by which these two facts can be philosophically reconciled, we shall accept it if we can understand it; but unless both facts unaltered have a place in the theory, it must be rejected. In the mean time it is well to follow Peter's example, who lays the two facts side by side, appealing to the prophets for proof of the one, and to the consciences of his hearers for the proof of the other, and not seeming to realize that he has involved himself in the slightest difficulty. It is folly to climb where we are certain to fall.

Vv. 19-21. Having now demonstrated the resurrection and glorification of Jesus, together with the criminality of those who had condemned him, the apostle next offers forgiveness to his hearers on the terms prescribed in the commission. (19) Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; (20) and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus: (21) whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restoration of all things whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began. Here, as in his former statement of the conditions of pardon, the apostle makes no mention of faith; but, having labored from the beginning of his discourse to convince his hearers, his command to repent carries the assumption that they believed. A command based upon an argument, or upon testimony, always implies the sufficiency of the proof, and assumes that the hearer is convinced. Moreover, Peter knew that none would repent at his command who did not believe what he had said. In every view of the case, then, he proceeded naturally and safely in omitting the mention of faith.

In the command, "Repent and turn again," the word turn expresses something to be done subsequent to repentance, and something different from repentance; for there would be no propriety in adding the command, "Turn," if its meaning had already been expressed in the command, "Repent." In order to a proper understanding of the conditions of forgiveness here prescribed, we must determine the exact import of both these terms.

The most prevalent conception of repentance is godly sorrow for sin ; but according to Paul, godly sorrow for sin stands related to repentance as cause to effect. "Godly sorrow," he says, "worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret." He says further to the Corinthians: "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye were made sorry unto repentance."<sup>1</sup> These remarks show that it is godly sorrow that brings men to repentance ; and the last implies that there may be sorrow for sin without repentance. The same distinction is implied in commanding those on Pentecost who were already "pricked in the heart" to repent. It is illustrated in the case of Judas, who experienced the most intense sorrow for sin ; but instead of working repentance, it drove him to suicide.

The fact thus made clear, that repentance is a result of godly sorrow for sin, has led some critics to suppose and to teach, that repentance means reformation of life, seeing that this is a result of the sorrow in question.<sup>2</sup> But while reformation does result from sorrow for sin, the Scriptures furnish clear evidence that it is distinguished from repentance. Confounding the two terms would make the passage before us a piece of tautology ; for when Peter says, "Repent and turn," the idea of reformation is involved in the word turn ; and if repent meant to reform, then the command would be nothing more than reform, and reform. John the Baptist, in requiring the people to "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance," distinguished between repentance and the deeds of a reformed life, by referring to the latter as the fruits of the former. With him reformation is the fruit

---

<sup>1</sup> II. Cor. vii. 8-10. <sup>2</sup> First propounded by Dr. George Campbell in his Notes on the Four Gospels.

of repentance, and not its equivalent. When Jesus speaks of repenting seven times a day, he certainly means something different from reformation; for this would require more time. Again, when Peter required those on Pentecost to repent and be baptized, if by repent he had meant reform, he would have given them time to reform before baptizing them, instead of baptizing them immediately. Finally, the original term is sometimes used in connection with such prepositions as are not suited to the idea of reformation. For instance, in II. Cor. xii. 21, it is said, "Many have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed." Men do not reform *of* their evil deeds; and the original preposition<sup>1</sup> in this case will not admit of a rendering that will suit the term reform.

Seeing now that repentance results from sorrow for sin, and leads to reformation of life, we can have no further difficulty in ascertaining what it is; for the only result of sorrow for sin which leads to reformation is a change of the will in reference to sin. The primary meaning of the Greek word (*μετανοία*) is a change of the mind; and in this sense it is used when it said that Esau "found no place for *μετανοία*, though he sought it carefully with tears."<sup>2</sup> What he sought was a change in his father's mind with reference to the blessing already bestowed on Jacob. Here the desired change was not a change from sin; for Isaac had committed no sin in conferring the blessing on Jacob; consequently, the word in this instance ought to be translated, not repentance, but change of mind. If the change of will designated by the word is not a result of sorrow for sin, but of some considerations of mere expediency, it is not the repent-

---

<sup>1</sup> It is *ἐπι* with the dative.    <sup>2</sup> Heb. xii. 17.



ance required ; and if it stop short of reformation of life on the part of the penitent, it falls short of the blessings here promised by Peter. Repentance, then, fully defined, is a change of will caused by sorrow for sin, and leading to a reformation of life.

We can now perceive more clearly than before that in the command, "Repent and turn again," two distinct changes are required, which occur in the order of the words. In commenting on the latter as rendered in the King James version, Mr. Barnes says : "This expression (be converted) conveys an idea not at all to be found in the original. It conveys the idea of passivity—be converted, as if they were to yield to some foreign influence which they were now resisting. But the idea of being passive in this is not conveyed by the original word. The word properly means to turn—to return to a path from which one has gone astray ; and then to turn away from sins, or to forsake them."<sup>1</sup> This interpretation was not disputed by competent scholars while the old version was current, and now that the Revised Version has stamped it with its authority, it will scarcely be disputed by any.<sup>2</sup> The term denotes a change of conduct. But a change of conduct has a beginning ; and a person is properly said to turn when he does the first act of the better life. Now it so happens that one act was uniformly enjoined upon the penitent believer as the first act of obedience to Christ ; that is, to be baptized. This Peter's present hearers understood ; for it had been pro-

---

<sup>1</sup> Notes *in loco*.

<sup>2</sup> In this vision the terms *convert* and *converted* are not found, the original word being everywhere translated *turn*. This better rendering should promote a better understanding of an important subject.

claimed from Pentecost onward, and they had seen it observed every day. When therefore they heard the command, "Repent and turn again," they could but understand that they were to turn by being baptized, thus entering upon a new and better life. Baptism was the turning act.

We may reach the same conclusion by another course of reasoning. The command, "Turn again," occupies the same position between repentance and remission of sins that the command, "Be baptized," does in Peter's former discourse. He then said, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins;" he now says, "Repent and turn, that your sins may be blotted out." We need scarcely remark that blotting out of sins is a metaphorical expression for their forgiveness, the forgiveness being compared to blotting out from a waxen tablet that which was written thereon. Now when Peter's hearers heard him command them to repent and turn for the same blessing for which he had formerly commanded them to repent and be baptized, they could but understand that the generic word turn was used with specific reference to baptism; and this, not because the two words mean the same, but because men turned by being baptized. This is the doctrine of the passage.

While the command to repent and turn again was for the primary purpose that their sins might be blotted out, two other consequences are mentioned as further inducements to compliance; first, "that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord;" and second, "that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus." The "seasons of refreshing" are placed here where "the gift of the Holy Spirit" was placed in the first discourse, and

the reference is to the refreshing of the soul effected by the joys of the Holy Spirit. The sending of Christ to them refers no doubt to his final coming; and it was dependent on their obedience, as we can know from later utterances, though Peter's hearers could not know it at the time, in the general way that a certain amount of work in the saving of men was to be accomplished before his coming. This is indicated by the qualifying remark, "whom the heaven must receive until the time of the restoration of all things whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets since the world began." It is difficult to determine the exact meaning of the word restoration in this place; but it is limited by the expression, "all things whereof God spake by the Holy prophets," and consequently it consists in the fulfillment of the Old Testament predictions; and the remark gives assurance that Jesus will not return again till all these predictions shall have been fulfilled. It is quite common for those theorists who believe in the final salvation of all men to quote this passage improperly by omitting the last clause, quoting it, "the restoration of all things," and making it mean the restoration to primitive purity and happiness of all things and all men. This is to handle the word of God deceitfully.

## III.

THESE THINGS MATTERS OF PREDICTION AND OF  
PROMISE, 22-26.

Vv. 22, 23. Whatever might be proved concerning the resurrection or glorification of Jesus, a Jew would not be prepared to accept him as the promised Messiah unless the proof contained evidence that the facts were subjects of prophecy. To this end, and also for the pur-

pose of warning his hearers against rejecting what they had heard, Peter next introduces a well known prediction made by Moses : (22) Moses indeed said, A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me ; to him shall ye hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak to you. (23) And it shall be, that every soul which shall not hearken to that prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. That Peter was right in applying this prediction to Jesus, was perfectly obvious to all who believed what he had previously said ; for if what he had said of Jesus was true, the likeness on which the application depended was found in Jesus, and in no one else. Moses was distinguished from all the other prophets in that he was a deliverer and a lawgiver. The others were employed in enforcing the law which Moses gave, but not in adding to it, or setting any of it aside. Jesus, however, was like Moses, in that he also came as a deliverer, proposing a far more glorious deliverance than that effected by Moses, and he also issued laws for a new government of men. This proved that he alone was the prophet spoken of by Moses, and it showed the audience that in obeying Jesus they would be obeying Moses, while in rejecting him they would incur the curse which Moses pronounced.

VER. 24. Not content with bringing to bear the testimony of Moses, Peter adds to it the combined authority of all the prophets. (24) Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and them that follow after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days. This declaration is to be understood only of those prophets whose predictions are recorded in the Old Testament ; for to these alone could Peter appeal before his hearers. The

universal terms of the remark are used, as was common with Jewish speakers and writers, in only a general sense; for it can not be affirmed absolutely that all of the prophets had spoken explicitly "of these days;" but this was true of the prophets in general, and Peter dates the beginning of the series from Samuel, not because Samuel himself spoke of these days, but because the constant succession began with him. It is highly probable that in the actual delivery of the discourse, of which Luke has almost certainly given us only an epitome, as he did of the first discourse, Peter quoted many of these predictions, and made their application clear to his hearers. The argument of the discourse is now completed, and Jesus is once more proved to be the promised Messiah and the glorified Son of God.

Vv. 25, 26. Having completed his argument, Peter next makes an appeal to his hearers based on their veneration for the fathers of their nation, and for the covenant which they had inherited. (25) Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. (26) Unto you first God, having raised up his Servant, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. This was a tender appeal to their national feelings, made more effective by the information that the blessing offered them in Christ was the very blessing contemplated in the well known promise to Abraham, and that to them first, because of their relation to the prophets and to Abraham, God had sent his risen Son to bless them before visiting the rest of mankind.

We here have an authoritative interpretation of the promise to Abraham. It is fulfilled, according to Peter,

in turning living men away from their iniquities. Those only who turn away from their iniquities are the recipients of the promised blessing; and the fact that all the kindreds of the earth were to be blessed, does not affect this conclusion, except by extending its application to those among all kindreds who shall turn from their iniquities. To Peter's hearers this concluding remark not only conveyed this information, but it recalled the exhortation, "Turn again," by telling them that God had sent Jesus for the very purpose of turning them from iniquity.

For a cause which appears in the next paragraph of the narrative, this discourse of Peter was not brought to its conclusion. Doubtless, if he had been allowed to continue it, he would have closed with an exhortation to immediate obedience such as that which closed his first sermon.

### 3. PETER AND JOHN ARRESTED, IV. 1-4.

Vv. 1-3. Thus far the work of the apostles had gone on without interruption, and they probably began to imagine that the old enemies of their Lord were so completely paralyzed by the triumphs of the truth that they had lost all of their former zeal and courage. But just at this moment of hope and joy the calm was followed by a storm. (1) And as they spake unto the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, (2) being sore troubled because they taught the people, and proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. (3) And they laid hands on them, and put them in ward unto the morrow: for it was now eventide. This sudden disturbance of the interested audience by a body of armed men rushing



through their midst and seizing Peter and John, was a very bold and startling movement on the part of the unbelievers.

At first thought we would have expected the Pharisees, the old persecutors of Jesus, to be the leaders in any persecution of his apostles; but here we see the Sadducees, who were comparatively indifferent to his pretensions, taking the lead; and it is explained by the fact that the apostles taught through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. While Jesus had taught the same doctrine, and on one occasion had maintained it against the Sadducees in special debate,<sup>1</sup> he had but seldom assailed either the doctrine or the practices of this party. But now the whole brunt of the preaching was in opposition to the denial by the Sadducees of the resurrection from the dead; and as for Caiaphas, the chief priest, who was a Sadducee, the preaching affected him still more seriously by accounting him a murderer. It was well calculated to arouse that party to violence. At the same time, although the Pharisees could by no means have looked upon the triumph of the apostles with indifference, even though their enemies were being discomfited by it, the doctrine of the resurrection was their own, and the only objection they had to the preaching was that the resurrection was proclaimed in the name of Jesus. They were as yet watching the course of things in amazement, unprepared for any decisive action. They had hated Jesus because he had assailed their traditions and exposed their hypocrisy; they had not yet learned to hate the apostles, because as yet the latter had not openly assailed them. The priests who assisted in this arrest may have been Sadducees, or they may have

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxii. 23-33.

been instigated by the fact that this preaching of Peter, beginning that day at the hour of evening prayer, had diverted the minds of the people from the sacrifices and the customary prayers before the temple. The "captain of the temple," who led the party making the arrests, was the commander of the guard of Levites who always stood on duty at the gates and elsewhere, to keep order within the holy precincts.<sup>1</sup>

VER. 4. The people who had been listening to Peter must have been thrown into great excitement by the arrest, and the disciples present may have expected to see reënacted the murderous scenes which terminated the life of their Master; nevertheless, the words of Peter were not without a decided effect, for Luke says: (4) But many of them that heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. True to the custom of Oriental nations even to the present day, the number of men alone is here given, the women not being counted. The whole number of believers of both sexes must have been largely in excess of these figures. The increase since the day of Pentecost must have been very rapid, for doubtless many of those baptized then must have departed to their distant homes, and still the increase had been more than two thousand, without counting women.

#### 4. PETER'S DEFENSE BEFORE THE COUNCIL, 5-12.

Vv. 5, 6. The arrest having been made late in the afternoon (eventide, 3), further proceedings were postponed till the next day, and Peter and John had the

---

<sup>1</sup>They were first appointed under the name of porters by David (II. Chron. xxvi. 1-19). A plurality of them is alluded to in Luke xlii 4

quiet of a night under guard for reflection and mutual encouragement ere they were brought to trial. (5) And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; (6) and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest. The men here called "rulers and elders and scribes" constituted the main body of the high court of the Jews, called the Sanhedrin. Annas, whom Luke both here and in his former narrative calls high priest, was the lawful high priest, but he had been deposed by Valerius Gratus, the predecessor of Pilate, and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, had been by the same unlawful procedure put in his place, so that while the latter was holding the office, the other was lawfully entitled to it, and was recognized as high priest by the people.<sup>1</sup> The John and Alexander mentioned were well known men of high authority, as the manner in which they are mentioned clearly indicates, but nothing more is now known of them. The assembly was called for the purpose of determining what should be done with Peter and John.

VER. 7. When the court was assembled the prisoners were brought in, and the cripple who had been healed, not willing that his benefactors should suffer without his presence and sympathy, boldly walked in and took a position close to them. (7) And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, By what power, or in what name, have ye done this? This was not the first time that Peter and John had been in the presence of this august assembly. As they looked up into the faces of

---

<sup>1</sup>To represent this as a mistake on Luke's part, as do Meyer and others, is absurd.

their judges, and recognized many of them, they could but remember the morning when their Master stood there in bonds, while they stood in the court and looked on, full of fearful misgivings. The fall and the bitter tears of Peter on that occasion were now a warning and a strength to them both, while their position brought to mind some solemn words of Jesus which had never acquired a present value till now. "Beware of men: for they shall deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall say. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."<sup>1</sup> Cheered by these promises, they now stood before their accusers and judges with a boldness which to the latter was altogether unaccountable.

The prisoners had been arrested and brought into court without a formal charge being brought against them, and the court was now dependent on what might be extorted from them for a ground of accusation. The question propounded is remarkable for its vagueness: "By what power, or by what name have ye done this?" Done what? might have been the answer. Done this preaching? or this miracle? or what? The question specified nothing, and the obvious reason is that there was no particular thing done by Peter and John on which they dared to fix attention, or on which they could base a charge of wrong doing. The chief priest cunningly framed an indefinite question, in the hope that

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 17-19.

the defendants, in their confusion, would furnish a ground of accusation by speaking unguarded words.

Vv. 8-10. Cunningly devised as the question of the council was, none could have served Peter a better purpose. It left him free to select as the subject of his answer anything that he had done, and he chose, out of all that he had done, that which was the most unwelcome to his judges. He framed his answer, too, with a more direct reference to the other terms of their question, than they either desired or anticipated. (8) Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, (9) Ye rulers of the people, and elders, if we this day are examined concerning a good deed done to an impotent man, by what means this man is made whole; (10) be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in him does this man stand before you whole. This statement needed no proof, for the judges could not deny, with the man standing before them, that the miracle had been wrought; nor could they with any plausibility ascribe the deed to any other power or name than that claimed by him who performed it. To deny that the power was divine, would have been absurd in the estimation of all the people; and to have rejected the explanation given by those through whom the power was exerted, would have been not less so. The answer, then, vindicated itself; and confounded those who propounded the question.

Vv. 11, 12. Realizing the advantage which he had now gained, Peter pushes it still farther by adding: (11) He is the stone which was set at naught by you builders, which was made the head of the corner. (12) 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. Here, using the words of David,<sup>1</sup> he puts his judges and accusers in the ridiculous attitude of builders laying the foundation of a house, but rejecting the stone which was cut out for the corner, without which the foundation course could not be closed up, and no part of the wall could be built. Then, dropping the figure, he plainly declares that there is no salvation for man except in the name of the very Jesus whom they had crucified. This declaration is universal; and it shows that every human being who is saved at all will be saved in the name of Christ. If any who do not know him or believe in him are saved, still in some way their salvation will be in his name.

#### 5. A PRIVATE CONSULTATION, 13-17.

Vv. 13, 14. Instead of answering evasively, or timidly, as was expected of men in their social position when arraigned in such a presence, the apostles had unhesitatingly avowed the sentiments which they had been preaching, and on account of which they had been arrested, and it had the effect of silencing their accusers: (13) Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled, and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. (14) And seeing the man who was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. It was not till this moment, apparently, that the two apostles were recognized by the judges as former attendants of Jesus, though all perhaps had seen them with him repeatedly before his death, and John was a personal acquaintance of

---

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxviii. 22, 23.



Caiaphas.<sup>1</sup> At the close of Peter's remarks there seems to have been total silence for a time; for "they could say nothing against it." Not one of them was ready to contradict anything he had said, or to rebuke him for saying it. Their embarrassment was painful.

Vv. 15, 16. The silence was broken by a proposal that the prisoners be withdrawn. (15) But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, (16) What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been wrought through them, is manifest to all who dwell in Jerusalem; and we can not deny it. This admission shows that in their public proceedings they had been utterly hypocritical and heartless. How they could now look one another in the face, is a moral puzzle. Perhaps they did not; and certainly they could not have allowed themselves to look up toward God.

VER. 17. The motive which controlled them crops out in the conclusion to which their deliberations brought them: (17) But that it spread no further among the people, let us threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. The man who made this proposal thought that he had solved a difficult problem, and the others were too well pleased at finding a loophole of escape from their present embarrassment, to forecast very shrewdly the probable success of the measure. It was a safe course, if not a very bold one, and as there was no obstacle in the way except conscience, they did not hesitate to adopt it.

How Luke learned the particulars of this secret consultation, we are not informed; but it is not difficult to imagine. Gamaliel, Saul's teacher, was probably present,

---

<sup>1</sup> John xviii. 15, 18.

and it is not unlikely that Saul himself was also there. Moreover, "a great company of the priests" afterward became obedient to the faith, and after they repented they would not hesitate to confess all of the villainy of their party.

#### 6. MORE PREACHING FORBIDDEN, 18-22.

VER. 18. The resolution was no sooner adopted than acted upon. (18) And they called them, and charged them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus. This is the first time in the history of the church that preaching was forbidden; and now it was forbidden absolutely. If the apostles obey, not another word is to be spoken for Jesus in public or in private. We shudder to think of the consequences if that injunction had been obeyed.

Vv. 19, 20. The apostles, if at all solicitous for their personal safety, might have retired from the assembly in silence. (19) But Peter and John answered and said to them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: (20) for we can not but speak the things which we saw and heard. The first part of this answer was an appeal to the consciences of the judges, and the last part was a plain but modestly expressed avowal of the purpose to disregard their order. Silence might have been construed as giving assent; and the apostles were too candid to allow it to be thought for a moment that assent would be given.

Vv. 21, 22. It must have been a sore trial to the proud spirits of the Sanhedrin to brook such defiance from humble men like these; but a desire to conciliate the people, mingled with a secret fear, perhaps, of doing

violence to men possessed of such power, restrained their wrath. (21) And they, when they had further threatened them, let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people; for all men glorified God for that which was done. (22) For the man was more than forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was wrought. Whatever the people thought of the teaching of Peter, they could but admire and applaud the "good deed done to the impotent man;" and the fact that the latter was more than forty years of age, made him well known and an object of universal sympathy.

#### 7. REPORT OF THE TWO APOSTLES, AND PRAYER OF THE TWELVE, 23-31.

Vv. 23-30. The apostles now retired in triumph from the assembly; but they were uninflated by their triumph as they had been undaunted in their danger. They seem to have attained to that lofty equipoise of faith and hope which enables men to maintain complete self-possession amid all the vicissitudes of life. The course which they immediately pursued is worthy of profound consideration. (23) And being let go, they came to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. (24) And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, O Lord, thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: (25) who by the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David thy servant,<sup>1</sup> didst say,

---

<sup>1</sup> In this passage, contrary to the opinions of modern rationalists, the apostles represent David as the author of the second Psalm, from which they quote and they declare that God himself,

- Why did the Gentiles rage,  
And the peoples 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 Anointed :  
(27) for of a truth in this city against thy holy servant  
Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius  
Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel (28)  
were gathered together to do whatsoever thy hand and  
thy counsel foreordained to come to pass. (29) And  
now, Lord, look upon their threatenings ; and grant unto  
thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, (30)  
while thou stretchest forth thy hand to heal ; and that  
signs and wonders may be done through the name of thy  
holy servant Jesus.

In this prayer, as in all those recorded in the Bible, we find a propriety in each part, and a fitness in the whole, which are worthy of study and of imitation. On a former occasion the apostles had set before the Lord two persons between whom choice was to be made for the apostolic office, so they addressed God as the heart-knower ;<sup>1</sup> but now they desire his protecting power, and their invocation is, " O Lord, thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is." Their petition is equally appropriate. They

---

by his Holy Spirit, spake these words by the mouth of David. Words could not be framed into a more explicit statement of both facts, and the truthfulness of the statement is attested not only by the authority of the inspired apostles, but by the manifest fulfillment of the predictions of the passage in the proceeding which they recite in the next division of the prayer. It is vain to say that these men did not understand higher criticism, for here they speak not as mere men, but as inspired men.

<sup>1</sup> Acts i. 24.

lay the foundation for it in the word of prophecy which the Lord himself had spoken, and which had now been fulfilled by Herod, Pilate, the people of Israel, and the Gentiles; and the petition is, first, "Behold their threatenings;" and second, "Grant unto thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness."

In these days of passion and war, when it is common for prayers to be filled with entreaties for victory over our enemies, and sometimes with maledictions upon those who are waging war against our supposed rights, it is quite refreshing to observe the tone of this apostolic prayer. These men were not in danger of losing some merely political power or privilege; but the dearest and most indisputable right they had on earth was denied them, and they were threatened with death if they did not relinquish it: yet in their prayer they manifest no vindictive or resentful spirit; but they pray in reference to their enemies only this, "Lord, behold their threatenings," while they leave the Lord without suggestion or request, to do as might appear good in his sight. By such prayers as are often uttered at the present time men seek to make God a partisan in all their angry contentions, as though he were nothing more than themselves.<sup>20</sup> In reference to their own work, the apostles pray only for boldness to continue it without regard to the threatenings of their enemies; and they intimate

---

<sup>20</sup> These thoughts were first written amid the din and confusion of our great civil war, when even devout men on both sides were beside themselves with the passions of the time. The composition of the first edition of this Commentary was once interrupted by the booming of cannon in the siege of Lexington, Mo., not many miles from the author's home in 1862, and once by the march and countermarch of contending armies through Lexington, Ky., where he lived in 1863.

how they expect this boldness to be given them by asking that the signs and wonders which had attested the presence of God with them thus far, might continue to attest it still. They had no thought of fear so long as they had evidence of the divine presence and approval.

VER. 31. The prayer for boldness was answered at once, but in a way not expected. (31) And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness. The shaking of the house, attended by a conscious renewal of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, gave them the boldness for which they prayed, by assuring them that God was still with them.

---

#### SEC. IV.—FURTHER PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH, AND A SECOND PERSECUTION.

(IV. 32—V. 42.)

##### 1. UNITY AND LIBERALITY OF THE CHURCH, 32-37.

V. 32-35. After the preceding account of the first persecution, Luke turns our attention once more to the internal condition of the church. The religious life of the disciples was now more developed than at the time referred to in the close of the second chapter, and the description enters more into details. (32) And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things that he had was his own; but they had all things common. (33) And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great



grace was upon them all. (34) For neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, (35) and laid them at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need.

Considering the large number of persons in this congregation, and the variety of social relations from which they had been suddenly drawn together, it is truly remarkable, and well worthy of a place in the record, that they were "of one heart and soul." The unity for which the Saviour had prayed<sup>1</sup> was now enjoyed by the church, and witnessed by the world. The most surprising manifestation of it was seen in that complete subsidence of selfishness which led one and all to say that the things which he possessed were not his own, but the property of all. This was not the result of socialistic theorizing, or of rules laid down to govern all who sought admission into the new society; but it was the spontaneous expression of the love of God and man which had taken possession of every heart. Among the heathen nations of antiquity, systematic provision for the wants of the poor was unknown; and even among the Jews, whose laws made ample provisions for this unfortunate class, voluntary benevolence was greatly neglected. It was therefore a new thing under the sun to see many persons in a large community voluntarily selling houses and lands in order to supply the wants of the poor who were among them. It could not fail to have the effect which Luke traces to it in the words, "And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all." The

---

<sup>1</sup> John xvii. 11, 20, 21.

fresh power was not in the testimony itself, which was a fixed quantity, the same at all times; but in its effect upon the people. Its effect was more powerful than before, because it was now backed up by such a life among those who accepted the testimony as could not have been seen or anticipated at the beginning. The "great grace" that was upon them all was not the grace of God, which had been upon them uniformly from the beginning; but the grace, more properly rendered, the favor of the people. It has been often observed since then that when unity and liberality prevail in a congregation the preaching has greater power because of its greater favor with the people; whereas, in the absence of unity and liberality, the most forcible preaching often fails of visible results.

This church was not at this time a commune, or a socialistic club, as many interpreters have fancied; for there was no uniform distribution of the property of all among the members; neither was the property of all held and administered by the apostles as a business committee. On the contrary, "distribution was made unto each as any one had need;" which shows that only the needy received anything, and that those who were not needy were the givers. This is further illustrated by the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira below (v. 1-4), and by the circumstances connected with the appointment of the seven to serve tables (vi. 1-3). It must not be supposed, either, that these disciples made a mistake in the matter of their benevolence, which they found it necessary afterward to correct by acting more rationally. This supposition can be adopted only by those who deny that the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit in directing the affairs of the church, and who at the same

time fail to take into their minds an adequate conception of Christian benevolence. In reality this church was setting an example for all other churches in all time to come, by showing that true Christian benevolence requires that we shall not let our brethren in the church suffer for food, even if those of us who have houses and lands can prevent it only by the sale of our possessions. In other words, it teaches us to share the last crust with our brother. We shall see hereafter that the church in Antioch imitated quite closely this noble example (xi. 27-30).

VER. 36. Luke now brings forward an individual instance of the liberality previously mentioned, which he introduces no doubt on account of the subsequent prominence of the person. (36) And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being translated, Son of exhortation), a Levite, a man of Cyprus by race, (37) having a field, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. "Son of exhortation" is a Hebraism for one noted as an exhorter. The name was given to him on account of his superiority in hortatory addresses. This is a power much rarer among public speakers than logical or didactic force, and it has been very highly prized throughout all the history of the church. We shall see hereafter that it had much to do with shaping the subsequent career of this excellent man. ✓

Inasmuch as the law of Moses made no appropriation of lands for the tribe of Levi, but provided that it should be supported by the tithes from the other tribes, some surprise has been expressed that this Levite was the owner of real estate. But it should be remembered that the original allotment of certain lands to certain

tribes, and certain cities to the Levites, had been completely broken up by the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, and had never been fully restored, for it was only remnants of some of the tribes which returned from captivity, and even they did not again settle within the old tribal limits. This state of things left the Levites to shift for themselves to a great extent, and there was no law, nor had there ever been, to prevent them from acquiring individual landed possessions. It is highly probable, too, though it is not asserted in the text, that Joseph's land was in Cyprus, which was his native country. In the expression, "a man of Cyprus by race," the term race is used, as it is in some other passages,<sup>1</sup> for the place of his ancestry, and not for his ancestral blood.

## 2. A CASE OF DISCIPLINE, v. 1-11.

Vv. 1, 2. Unfortunately for our race, every excellence in human character has its counterfeits, and the praise lavished on men of real benevolence prompts others at times to play the hypocrite by pretending to be more benevolent than they are. So it proved in the present instance: for the benevolence of the church, which was its noblest characteristic in the eyes of the world, became the occasion of the first piece of corruption among its members. (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 part and laid it at the apostles' feet. The language implies what is distinctly avowed by the wife below, that this part was represented as the whole price of the possession. If we attempt to analyze the motive of the guilty pair, we shall find that

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark vii. 26; Acts xviii. 2, 24.

their act was a compromise between two unholy desires. The desire to have the praise of men, such as had been bestowed upon Barnabas and on some others, prompted the sale and the gift, while the love of money, which still held too strong a hold on them, prompted the retention of a part while they were pretending to give all. True benevolence seems to have had no part in moving them. But while they were undoubtedly governed by avarice in withholding a part, it was not, after all, an excess of avarice; for if this passion had been as strong in them as in many professors of the faith at the present day, they would not have sold the land at all. That they gave a large part, is proof that they were not sinners above all men in respect of love of money, and yet their fate is held up as a warning to all generations.

Vv. 3, 4. Never was a man, or an assembly of men, more astonished than were Ananias and the congregation in whose presence he had ostentatiously presented his gift, at that which followed: (4) But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? (4) While it remained, did it not remain 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. In this heart-searching demand Peter brings together the power of Satan and the free agency of the tempted, just as he had in a former discourse the free agency of man and the sovereignty of God. He demands of Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit," and in the same breath, "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart?" The existence and agency of the tempter are distinctly recognized, yet it is

not Satan, but Ananias, who is rebuked, and he is rebuked for doing the very sin that Satan had done, showing that he is as guilty as though Satan had done nothing. The justice of this is manifest from the fact that Satan had no power over his heart without his coöperation. That he had rendered this coöperation, threw the responsibility on him.

Peter's knowledge of the attempt at deception was the result, not of human information, but of the insight miraculously imparted by the Holy Spirit. This conclusion is necessitated by the whole course of the narrative, as well as by the words of Peter concerning the Holy Spirit.

VER. 5. While the exposure of the hypocrisy of Ananias was a great surprise to the people present, they were not prepared, as probably Peter himself was not, for that which immediately ensued. (5) And Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the spirit: and great fear came upon all that heard it. There is no evidence that Peter had any will of his own in this sudden death. It seems to have been a sudden stroke of the divine will, the responsibility for which attached not to Peter as an officer of the church, but to God as the moral governor of men. The propriety of it may be appreciated if we suppose Ananias to have succeeded in his undertaking. His success would have been but temporary, for the fraud, like all other frauds, would have been detected sooner or later, and when detection came it would have brought with it a serious discount in the minds of the people on the powers of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the apostles. To learn that the Spirit could be deceived, would have undermined the whole fabric of apostolic authority, and might have overthrown



the faith of many, if not of all. The attempt brought on a crisis of vital importance, and demanded such a vindication of the power of the Spirit as could be neither mistaken nor forgotten. The immediate effect was precisely the effect desired: "great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard these things."

VER. 6. The scene was too awe-inspiring for lamentation, or for needless funeral ceremonies. As when Nadab and Abihu fell dead at the door of the tabernacle, with strange fire in their censers, there was no weeping or delay.<sup>1</sup> (6) And the young men arose and wrapped him round, and they carried him out and buried him. This was an imitation of the burial of the two sons of Aaron just mentioned; and as the latter was ordered by Moses, the former was doubtless ordered by Peter. It is scarcely conceivable that young men in the audience would have felt at liberty to do anything, unless it would be to go and tell the dead man's wife what had happened, if they had received no orders from the apostle. So natural is this supposition, that the historian says nothing as to the reason why the young men acted as they did.

VER. 7. Sapphira was not present. (7) And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. How she was kept so long ignorant of the fate of her husband, we are not informed, though it is a most extraordinary circumstance. He had dropped dead in a public assembly, had been carried forth for burial, and three hours had passed, yet his wife came into the same assembly without a word reaching her ear on the subject. Naturally, the first impulse of every one would have been to run at once and

---

<sup>1</sup> Lev. x. 1-7.

tell her the story, so that she could at least be present at her husband's burial. It is necessary to suppose here, as in case of the surprising act of the young men, some overruling authority; and it is not difficult to see that Peter himself, in order that the complicity of Sapphira in the crime might be fairly tested and exposed, commanded the disciples present to withhold the information from her.

Vv. 8-10. She came in prepared to act out in full the part agreed on between her and her husband. (8) And Peter said unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much. And she said, Yea, for so much. (9) But Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them who have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out. (10) And she fell down immediately at his feet, and gave up the spirit: and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her by her husband. In her case Peter knew what was about to take place, and declared it; but there is no evidence that his own will was exerted in causing her death. We regard her death, like that of her husband, as a miracle wrought independently of the power lodged in the apostle; and it seems to have been so regarded by the authorities in Jerusalem; for when the apostles were afterward brought before them, no charge of murder was preferred, as might have been the case if the act had been understood differently.

In the question, "Why have ye agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" Peter states the result of their agreement, and not the aim of it. The act was tempting the Spirit, in the sense of trying its power to

detect the thoughts of men. If the guilty pair had been asked, beforehand, whether they thought they could deceive the Holy Spirit, no doubt they would have answered, no: for they must have known that such an attempt would be in vain. They dared to make the attempt because they had their minds on the apostles as men, and not as inspired men. The test thus unintentionally applied resulted in a triumphant vindication of the Spirit's power as an indwelling guide, and the circumstances were such that no man could dare to repeat the experiment.

VER. 11. The failure of the plot proved as propitious to the cause of Christ as its success would have been disastrous. (11) And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things. This fear was excited not merely by the sudden and awful fate of the guilty pair; but also by the evidence which the incident furnished of the heart-searching power which dwelt in the apostles. The disciples now had a better conception of the nature of apostolic inspiration, and the unbelieving masses were awed into respect and reverence.

We must not drop this incident without observing its bearing in another direction. This piece of corruption was connected with the Lord's treasury; and apart from the feature which was emphasized by Peter, it has a bearing on our modern church life. The lie told by Ananias consisted in representing his gift as being more liberal in proportion to his ability than it really was. Every time a member of the church at the present day makes exaggerated statements of the amount he is giving, or understates the amount of his wealth, in order to make out a degree of liberality beyond what is

real, he is guilty of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira; and if all such were to drop dead in their tracks, there would be a thinning of the ranks in some places. All who are tempted to act thus should be faithfully notified that the same God who punished Ananias and Sapphira on the spot will not fail to punish, in his own time and place, all who imitate them.

### 3. PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH INCREASED, 12-16.

In this paragraph the author states more fully the effects of the exposure and punishment of Ananias and Sapphira. They were seen in the greater number of cures wrought by the apostles, the greater reverence felt for them by the people, and the greater number of additions to the church. (12) And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. (13) But of the rest durst no man join himself to them: howbeit the people magnified them, (14) and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women; (15) insomuch that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that, as Peter came by, at least his shadow might overshadow some of them. (16) And there also came together the multitude from the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one. The latter part of this passage shows that the greater number of miracles now wrought was in consequence, not of any increased power of the apostles, but of increased zeal for healing among the people; and they brought a greater number of sick to be healed because their faith in the healing power was

greater than before. Many of these who were healed and of those who brought them were doubtless baptized, and thus churches began to be formed in these "cities round about." Solomon's portico continued to be the meeting place of the disciples; but now both saints and sinners kept at a more respectful distance from the persons of the apostles than before; for each felt his own unworthiness, and dreaded the possibility of being smitten for some sin, as Ananias and his wife had been. All these considerations had their natural effect on sinners, in bringing them in greatly increased numbers to repentance and baptism. The special mention of women here for the first time is a probable indication that among the converts there was now a greater relative number of these than before.

Usually, in our modern experience, a great sin exposed in the church, such as that of Ananias and Sapphira, brings the church into disrepute for a time, diminishes the respect for it entertained in the community, and renders all efforts to add to its numbers futile. Why was the effect in Jerusalem the reverse of this? This is a serious question for those who bear rule in the church. It is quite evident that the difference depends on the very different way in which such scandalous conduct is now treated. If the Jerusalem church had tolerated Ananias and Sapphira, by retaining them in their fellowship after their exposure, doubtless the "ways of Zion would have mourned," and sinners would not have been turned to the Lord. But the sudden punishment visited upon them by the Lord, and the abhorrence of their deed manifested by burying them without ceremony in the clothing in which they died, and while their bodies were scarcely cold, made the

whole community feel that here was a people among whom sin could not be tolerated. It was a safe place for a man who needed holy companionship to help him in the effort to live a holy life—a place in which he might expect every false step to be promptly corrected, and through which he might confidently hope to make his pilgrimage to a better world. People who wish to make a compromise with sin, and who join a church merely because they are afraid to live without some appearance of religion, will always avoid such a church; but those who are in earnest about the desire to save their souls and to do good, seek just such a church as their spiritual home. When shall the rigid discipline which God established in the beginning be seen on earth once more? Let the shepherds of the flock give an answer, as they remember that they must give account to God concerning the souls committed to their care.

#### 4. THE APOSTLES ARE IMPRISONED AND RELEASED, 17-21.

Vv. 17, 18. The excitement which now prevailed throughout Jerusalem and the adjacent cities, finding expression in enthusiastic praise of the apostles, and in the turning of many to the Lord, was too much for the equanimity of the dignitaries who had forbidden any more preaching or teaching in the name of Jesus, and it moved them to action again. (17) But the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy, (18) and laid hands on the apostles, and put them in public ward. Here we have the same Sadducees who had arrested and threatened Peter and John. Made



furious with jealousy toward men whose influence they had vainly tried to destroy, and who were now almost worshipped by the people, they seized not only the two whom they had formerly arrested, but all of their companions, being determined to execute on a large scale the threats which they had uttered. The night in prison was a gloomy one to the apostles, and still gloomier to the thousands of their less courageous brethren and sisters outside.

Vv. 19-21. To the apostles the arrest and imprisonment could not have been a surprise, for they knew that the Sanhedrin was governed by determined men who would be likely to put their threats into execution ; but that which followed the night of imprisonment must have been a great surprise both to them and to all Jerusalem. (19) But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them out, and said, (20) Go ye, and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. (21) And when they had heard this, they entered into the temple about daybreak, and taught. The hearers whom they found in the temple "about daybreak" were doubtless few, and they were probably some of the brethren who could not sleep for anxiety, and who went there to pray. As these early worshipers entered the temple and found the apostles there, their first impulse was to run and spread the news ; so the apostles had not long to wait ere they were surrounded by a listening throng. I imagine that the sermons which were interrupted the previous day were renewed as if the interruption had been but momentary.

### 5. THE APOSTLES ARE BROUGHT INTO COURT, 21-27.

Vv. 21-24. To the high priest and his coadjutors, the night had doubtless been one of troubled thought; for they knew that in the morning they would have to confront once more the men who had defied them, and who, in their course of defiance, had won to their side a vast multitude of the best people in the city and surrounding country. What to do with them was a puzzling question. (21) But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. (22) But the officers that came found them not in the prison; and they returned, and told, saying, (23) The prison house we found shut in all safety, and the keepers standing at the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. (24) Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were much perplexed concerning them whereunto this would grow. The disappearance of the prisoners was to them a mystery, yet they could not fail to refer it to the working of the miraculous power with which they knew the apostles to be endowed. To us the mystery is that, with such facts confronting them, they thought only of "whereunto this would grow," instead of thinking, What will God do with us if we continue to fight against these manifestations of his power? The wonder is that they did not immediately disperse, and try to conceal the fact that they had come together at all. They were, in reality, staggered by the announcement, and they knew not for a time what to do or say.

Vv. 25-27. It was soon known abroad in the city that the Sanhedrin had assembled, and the purpose of the meeting was well understood. By this time also some of the people who stood with the priests had learned what was going on in the temple. (25) And there came one and told them, Behold, the men whom ye put in the prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people. (26) Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them, but without violence; for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. (27) And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. When the news came that the apostles were in the temple, the captain and his band, having once before been sent for them, needed no further orders; he went at once for his escaped prisoners. He doubtless saw in the faces of the people that his task was a dangerous one, and he may have seen a few stones in the hands of the more excitable part of the crowd; for to the people, who now understood how the apostles had been released, their re-arrest appeared to be a daring outrage. The captain does not handle the men as he would escaped prisoners under ordinary circumstances; but he escorts them most deferentially into the presence of the court. It was doubtless the outside multitude from whom he feared the stoning, and not the disciples; but it is not improbable that some of the new converts, who had imbibed only in part the spirit of the gospel, would have taken part in the fray had it once begun.

#### 6. THE ACCUSATION AND THE DEFENSE, 27-32.

Vv. 27, 28. We now have a lively and graphic description of the trial of the apostles. Caiaphas is not so indefinite about the grounds of accusation as in the

case of Peter and John : the injunction with which they had been dismissed gives him a starting point for the present proceedings. (27) And the high priest asked them, saying, (28) We straitly charged you not to teach in this name : and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. These words contain two specific charges against the apostles—disobedience to the Sanhedrin, and an attempt to bring upon them the blood of Jesus. The last was the tender point with the accusers, and the mention of it here brings to light a secret feeling which had been animating them from the beginning. If the resurrection of Jesus could have been established without implicating those who had condemned him in the crime of shedding innocent blood, it is highly probable that this series of attempts to suppress the preaching would not have been made. But this could not be; and these unfortunate men now found themselves involved by their previous crime in the necessity of accepting the brand of murderers at the hands of an indignant people, or suppressing and crushing out the belief in the resurrection. Instead of receding from the course of hypocrisy and crime upon which they had entered in condemning Jesus, they chose the bad alternative of plunging into it still deeper.

Vv. 29-32. The candor and fearlessness of Peter's reply to the demand of the chief priest are worthy of the man and the occasion. (29) But Peter and the apostles answered and said, (30) We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree.<sup>1</sup> (31)

---

<sup>1</sup> On the word "tree," used here for the word cross, see remarks under chap. xiii. 29.

Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. (32) And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him. To the first charge, that of disobeying the Sanhedrin, they plead guilty. Peter and John had departed from their first trial with the words, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to obey you rather than God, judge ye;" and now they say in reference to their disobedience, "We ought to obey God rather than men." The second charge is met by reiterating that for which they were accused—by boldly hurling into the teeth of their judges the awful fact that it was innocent blood which they had shed, and that this was proved by the resurrection of Jesus and his exaltation in heaven. And lest they should still doubt the fact of the resurrection and exaltation, Peter repeats what he had so often said before, that he and his fellow apostles were witnesses of the former, while he refers to the Holy Spirit as the witness of the latter. This testimony, coming from men who had just been delivered miraculously from a guarded prison, the guards not knowing they had passed out, and who had previously filled Jerusalem with wonderful works wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit, could not be gainsaid, or honestly doubted.

In the statement that Jesus had been exalted a Prince and Saviour to "give" repentance and remission of sins, it is implied that repentance as well as remission of sins is a gift. But to give repentance can not mean to bestow it without an exercise of our own will; for it is itself, as we have seen before, an act of our will.<sup>1</sup> It is an act of the will to which we are led by sorrow for sin. God

---

<sup>1</sup> See the remarks on repentance under chap. iii. 19.

gives it then, not directly, but indirectly, by giving the motives which lead to it. There were adequate motives to sorrow for sin before Jesus was presented as a Saviour ; but it must be admitted that his death, resurrection, and exaltation in our behalf, is the one great motive now, compared with which all others are insignificant. By furnishing this greatest of all motives for repentance, God had given repentance to Israel.

7. THEY ARE SAVED FROM DEATH BY GAMALIEL,  
33-42.

Vv. 33, 34. The manner in which Peter, as the mouthpiece of the apostles, repeated in the presence of the Sanhedrin the offense for which they had been arrested, exasperated the leading Sadducees beyond measure, and came near turning the court into a mob : (33) But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart, and were minded to slay them. (34) But there stood up one in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in honor of all the people, and commanded to put the men forth a little while. The Pharisees, as we have seen before, were less excited over the progress of the gospel than the Sadducees ; and now that the latter were about to precipitate a crisis which would have involved the whole Sanhedrin in a horrible crime, at least one Pharisee was cool enough and prudent enough to interpose wiser counsel. The removal of the prisoners, like that of Peter and John before, was to prevent them from hearing any admissions which might be made in the course of the intended discussion. The statement that Gamaliel "commanded" the men to be put forth, implies that this was the privilege of any member of the court.



Vv. 35-39. Gamaliel seems to have retained his position on the floor until the officers had withdrawn the prisoners and closed the doors, while the Sadducees, with no little impatiencé, were awaiting his remarks. (35) And he said to them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves as touching these men, what ye are about to do. (36) For before these days rose up Theudas, giving himself out to be somebody; 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. (37) After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the enrollment, and drew away some of the people after him: he also perished; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad. (38) And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown: (39) but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God.

It has been charged by unfriendly critics that the author of Acts has here put into the mouth of Gamaliel a speech which, in the nature of the case, he could not have uttered. It is held that while Theudas is here placed before Judas, he really lived at a later period, a mistake of which Gamaliel could not have been guilty; and furthermore, that Theudas flourished twelve years after the time at which Gamaliel is said to have made this speech. The charge is based on the fact that Josephus mentions a Theudas who did flourish at a later period, in the reign of Claudius Cæsar, and whose career was similar to that of the Theudas here mentioned.<sup>1</sup> The truth of the charge depends on the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ant. xx. v. 1.

identity of the Theudas of Josephus and the Theudas of Luke. Neither writer goes into such details as to furnish safe ground for the assumption of identity, while Josephus himself makes room for the supposition that there may have been more than one Theudas, by mentioning a large number of insurrections occurring at the right period to suit the remark of Gamaliel, without naming their leaders. He says of the period just preceding the deposition of Archelaus: "Now at that time there were ten thousand other disorders in Judea, which were like tumults, because a great number put themselves in a warlike posture, either out of hopes of gain to themselves, or out of enmity to the Jews." He also says in another place: "And now Judea was full of robberies; and as the several companies of the seditious lighted upon any one to lead them, he was created a king immediately, in order to do mischief to the public."<sup>1</sup> Now, that one of these leaders may have been named Theudas, is not at all improbable, and when we have the word of a veracious writer that he was, it is most unjust, in the absence of all conflicting evidence, to charge him with falsehood.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* xvii. x. 4, 8.

<sup>2</sup> The question discussed above has been in dispute ever since the second century, when the objection was first urged by Celsus (Origen *vs.* Celsus, B. I. c. 6). All unbelievers and all semi-rationalistic writers who think that our Gospels and Acts were not written by their reputed authors, taking ground against Luke; while those who give full credit to the Scriptures have held substantially the view stated and defended above. The reader will find in Alford's Commentary, and Meyer's, the two sides of the controversy well stated, and also the names of the most noted writers on both sides. In confirmation of what I have said above, I may add, that while the Theudas of Gamaliel was followed by about "four hundred" men, who were, after he was

Upon the fate of these two impostors Gamaliel bases his advice in reference to the apostles. The merits of his advice must be differently estimated according to the point of view from which we contemplate it. If it were proposed as a general rule of procedure in reference to religious movements, we should condemn it as time-serving. Instead of waiting to see if such a movement is to prove successful, every lover of truth will promptly investigate its claims, if it has any worthy of attention, and decide without reference to public opinion or probable success. But Gamaliel was arguing a different question from this, the question whether this movement should be suppressed by violence; and from this point of view his advice was certainly good. Assuming, as he did, that the movement was an improper one, the question was, Shall we attempt to crush it out with violence? or shall we suspend proceedings against it until it begins to grow weak of itself, as it certainly will if it be not of

---

slain, "dispersed;" the Theudas of Josephus "persuaded a *great part of the people* to take their effects with them and follow him to the Jordan;" and when the troops of Cuspius Fadus attacked them, they "*slew many of them, and took many of them alive*" (Ant. xx. v. 1). The differences are not easily explained, except by supposing that the Theudas of Gamaliel and the Theudas of Josephus are different persons. The probability that two such leaders, living at considerable intervals apart, may have borne the same name, is happily illustrated by similar occurrences in our own century. We quote from Prof. Stokes: "There was an Irish movement in 1848 which numbered among its prominent leaders a William Smith O'Brien, and there is now (1891) an Irish movement of the same character, and it also numbers a William O'Brien among its most prominent leaders. A Parnell leads a movement for the repeal of union in 1890. Ninety years earlier a Parnell resigned high office sooner than consent to the consummation of the same legislative union of Great Britain and Ireland" (*Expositor's Bible, Acts*, p. 237.)

God? Such was the drift of the first part of his remarks; but at the close he betrays a doubt whether the movement should be opposed at all; for he very clearly intimates that it may be of God, and that in fighting against it they might be found fighting against God. It is strange that a man who was capable, under such circumstances, of the calm thought and sound reasoning which characterize this speech, had not already committed himself to a cause so well supported by incontrovertible evidence.<sup>1</sup>

Vv. 40-42. The advice of Gamaliel had the effect of restraining the council from shedding blood; but the priests and elders were too much exasperated to follow fully his advice. (40) And to him they agreed; and when they had called the apostles to them, they beat them, and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. (41) They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted

---

<sup>1</sup> Christian Baur makes use of this consideration to throw doubt on the reality of the preceding miracles. He says: "If all these miracles were really performed as is here narrated, and in so authentic a manner that the Sanhedrin itself could not ignore them, nor bring anything against them; if the man lame from his birth was healed by the word of the apostle, and if the apostles themselves, without any human intervention, were freed from prison by an angel from heaven—how could Gamaliel, if he was a man such as is here described, unbiased and thoughtful, resting his judgment on experience, express himself so problematically as he does here, and leave it to the future to decide whether this cause were or were not divine?" (*Paul*, vol. i. 35). If this question had been propounded to Gamaliel himself, it would doubtless have thrown him into confusion; for he was in that particular state of mind in which men are often guilty of the greatest inconsistency. They are unwilling to admit conclusions which evidence is forcing upon them, and yet they are too honest to altogether deny the force of the evidence.

worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. (42) And every day, in the temple and at home, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ. The law of Moses limited the scourge to forty stripes, and left it discretionary with the judges for what offenses it should be inflicted.<sup>1</sup> It seems from Paul's experience to have been customary to stop at thirty-nine,<sup>2</sup> perhaps to prevent going beyond the limit of the law by a miscount. It is probable that the apostles received thirty-nine apiece on the naked back. The statement that when they were released they went away "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name," would be incredible, were it not written in such a book as this, and written of such men as these. Even as the case stands it is a more surprising fact than any of the miracles which they are said to have wrought; especially when we consider that this was their first experience of scourging. After Paul had endured a long continued fight of afflictions like this, it is not so wonderful to hear him say, "I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then I am strong."<sup>3</sup> But that the older apostles had a similar experience the first time they were scourged, is one of the grandest exhibitions of faith to be found in apostolic history. Perhaps the secret of their ability to rejoice is to be found in the consideration that Christ showed confidence in their steadfastness by allowing them to be tested in this way, and they were glad of the opportunity to prove that his confidence was not misplaced.

The preaching was now, as before, in the temple; for there was no thought of excluding the apostles and

---

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxv. 1-3. <sup>2</sup> II. Cor. xi. 24. <sup>3</sup> II. Cor. xii. 10.

their brethren from the open court to which all Jews had right of access ; and it was also daily. They held, in modern Protestant phraseology, a continuous protracted meeting. But they did not limit their labors, as so many modern preachers are content to do, to public preaching : they also taught and preached “ at home ” (42)—an expression which points to the homes of their hearers, rather than to their own home ; for in their own home, if they still lodged in the same house, they could receive but few persons, whereas in the homes of the people they could reach everybody who was in need of instruction or conviction. Thus we have the inspired apostles as an example for that most directly effective of all preaching, the face to face work, without much of which no preacher of the gospel can be thoroughly successful in evangelizing a community.

We have now reached the close of the first persecution, and it is plainly to be seen that it resulted in a complete triumph for the apostles. When the people saw them go away from the whipping-post, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer thus for the name of their Master, they were amazed ; for the like of this had never before been seen on earth. And when they saw that the preaching continued without intermission in defiance of all threats and all punishment, the hearts of all the nobler men and women, of all who could admire moral heroism, were irresistibly drawn toward the Christ whose love thus ennobled his followers.



## SEC. V.—FURTHER PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH, AND THIRD PERSECUTION.

(VI. 1—VIII. 4.)

### 1. SEVEN MEN APPOINTED TO SERVE TABLES, 1-7.

VER. 1. Having completed his account of the second persecution, our author continues the plan of this part of his work by turning our attention once more to the progress of the church, and then to a third persecution which followed. The perfect unity which had hitherto bound together the multitude of the disciples was now in jeopardy, though it would be too much to say, with some writers, that it was broken; and we are introduced to both the cause of peril and the steps by which it was averted. (1) Now in these days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. By daily ministration is meant the daily distribution from the fund contributed by benevolent members, which was made "to every one as he had need." That it was made daily, and that the widows were the principal recipients, confirms our former conclusion that there was no general equalization of property, but only a provision for the needy. The Grecian Jews, more properly Hellenists, were Jews of foreign birth and Greek education, so called because they adopted the manners of the Hellenes, or Greeks. The great multiplication of the disciples having rendered it impracticable for the twelve, with so much other work on hand, to look after the wants of all with equal care, very naturally the widows of these com-

parative strangers in the city were the first to be unintentionally overlooked.

Vv. 2-4. The unity of heart and soul which still prevailed in the church manifested itself by the promptness with which a satisfactory arrangement was made to quiet the murmur as soon as it was heard. Doubtless the need for such an arrangement was foreseen by the head of the church and by the Holy Spirit dwelling in the apostles; but this foresight was not given to the apostles, nor were they moved to make the arrangement until the need for it was manifest to them and to the whole church. Thus the Spirit guided them into additional truth as additional truth was needed. Hitherto the twelve were the only officers in the church; but now they are led to the appointment of others. (2) And the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God, and serve tables. (3) 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. (4) But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word. The alternative with the twelve was to forsake (not wholly, but in some measure) the preaching and teaching of the word, in order to serve the tables satisfactorily, or to turn the latter business over to others, and give themselves wholly to the former. The right course was too obvious to admit of hesitation or delay.

It seemed good to the apostles and to the Holy Spirit that the whole "multitude of the disciples" should take part in the selection of these officers, the apostles doing no more in the matter than to prescribe their qualifications. No ingenuity of argument can

evade the conclusion that this gives the authority of apostolic precedent for the popular election of church officers. In what way the choice was made by the multitude, whether by balloting, or by a *viva voce* vote, and whether with or without nominations, we are not informed; and consequently, in reference to these points, every congregation is left to its own judgment.

The three qualifications prescribed should not escape our notice. They indicate what kind of men are alone fitted to be office-bearers in the church of God. They were to be men, first, of "good report;" and this has reference, no doubt, to their reputation both within the church, and within the circle of fair-minded persons outside the church. Second, they were to be "full of the Spirit." As we have had no account thus far of any but the apostles having received miraculous powers from the Spirit, the historian can not be fairly understood as referring, by this expression, to such powers. He means men who were full of the Spirit as respects the fruits of a holy life. That some of these wrought miracles afterward, is no proof that they could do so now. Third, they were to be men "full of wisdom;" by which is meant that they should possess that practical good sense which enables men to manage complicated business affairs with satisfaction.

Vv. 5, 6. The wisdom of the proposal was obvious to all, and none hesitated about prompt compliance with it. (5) And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: (6) and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on

them. It is a remarkable manifestation of generosity in the church at large that all these are Greek names, indicating that the men were selected from the very party whence the murmuring had proceeded. It was as if the Hebrews had said, We have no selfish ends to accomplish, and no jealousy toward you whose widows have been neglected; we therefore give the whole business into your hands, and fearlessly trust our widows to your care. So generous a trust could not be betrayed except by the basest of men: it was a continuation of the perfect unity which had existed before, and which the murmuring had not been allowed to interrupt.

The title of the office here created is not given, and from this circumstance some scholars have failed to identify it with that of deacon, mentioned in the first chapter of Philippians and the third chapter of First Timothy. But while the name of the office is absent, terms are used which show plainly that the office is the same. If the question had been one about ruling, and the seven had been chosen and appointed to rule, there could certainly be no hesitation about styling them rulers. The case before us is a perfect parallel. The question was about the "daily *διακονίας*,"<sup>1</sup> and the seven were chosen

---

<sup>1</sup> The word *διάκονος* is rendered in our English version by the three words, minister, servant, and deacon. No reader unacquainted with the original could imagine that three English words now currently used in senses so different, could represent the same word in the original; and consequently this rendering leads to confusion. One of the three should be employed uniformly so as to give the English reader the same opportunity to see its usage that the Greek reader enjoys. The term deacon would not answer this purpose, because it is limited in its meaning as an English word to the office so designated, and it would be misleading in every passage in which the original occurs except two; for out of the many occurrences of *διάκονος* it is rendered

to διακονεῖν; why, then, hesitate to call them διάκονοι? Indeed, the verb διακονεῖν, here used to express the chief duty of the office, is the very one which in the third chapter of First Timothy is twice rendered in our version "serve as deacons."<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, then, it is the deacon's office which was here first created, and supplied with incumbents. The chief duty for which they were appointed was "to serve tables;" and as reference is had to the "daily ministration," and the complaints of neglected widows, the tables of the poor are specially those to be served. But while serving these tables, it was a natural consequence of having such business in charge

---

deacon only in Phil. i. 1 and I. Tim. iii. 8, 10. Deacon, indeed, is the Greek word anglicized, and we have to resort to a Greek lexicon for its meaning. The word minister would also be objectionable as a uniform rendering, for it is appropriated in modern usage to the public speakers of the church, whereas the original word has no such limitation. Should we adopt it, we would have such renderings as these: "His mother said to the *ministers*, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it" (Jno. ii. 5; see also 9); "If any man serve me (ἐμὸν διακονή), let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my minister (διάκονος) be" (Jno. xii. 26); "Phœbe our sister, who is a *minister* of the church at Cenchrea" (Rom. xvi. 1). But the word *servant* would properly express the idea everywhere. This is the precise meaning of the word, and the Latin word *minister*, by which it is most commonly rendered in our version, means the same. With servant as the uniform rendering, the English reader could determine by the context, as the Greek scholar now does, whether in a given passage the servant was one in the official or in the unofficial sense of the term. The two classes of officers, now called elders and deacons, would in this way be known as rulers and servants, their true relationship.

<sup>1</sup> It is gratifying to know that this argument, made in the first edition of my Commentary, is made also by Bishop Lightfoot in his Commentary on Philippians, published several years later (Lightfoot's Phil. p. 186)..

that they also served the Lord's table ; and it was an equally natural transition, that forasmuch as the poor fund was in their hands, all the other financial interests of the church were also committed to them. Because these officers were charged with the business affairs of the church, it by no means follows that they were shut off from usefulness in any other way for which they had capacity and opportunity. God exacts the employment of every talent which he has committed to us, and he has appointed no work to be done which is too holy for the humblest disciple. We therefore find one of the seven soon after standing in the front rank of the defenders of the faith in the very city where the apostles themselves were laboring ; while another was the first to plant a church among the Samaritans. Those who deny to deacons in the present day the same privilege, impose restrictions in conflict with this manifestation of God's will. Only two of the seven are mentioned afterward in Acts, but this does not prove that the others were either inactive or unfaithful. The service of all as deacons proved temporary ; not, as some suppose, because it was so intended ; but because the church which they served was soon scattered to the winds, and their ministration was no longer needed. When the church was afterward restored, it may be that some of them returned to the city and resumed the duties of their office.

The first name in the list, that of Stephen, is followed by the words, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," and these words are not repeated after the other names ; but we are not to understand from this that they were not true of the other persons ; for as the apostles had prescribed this characteristic as a qualification for



the office, we are to understand the words, though not repeated, as applying to all alike.

That Nicholas was a "proselyte of Antioch," which means that he was a convert from heathenism to Judaism, and had previously lived in Antioch, shows very plainly that the disciples entertained no doubt about the reception into the church, and even about the election to office, of Gentiles, provided they had been circumcised. This should be borne in mind when we come to consider the discussions which afterward arose about the relation of the Gentiles to the church, and to salvation in Christ.

VER. 7. The appointment of the seven to administer the business affairs of the church, left the apostles, as was intended, with nothing to do but to preach and teach and pray ; and thus the work of the whole church was more effective than before. (7) 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. This great multiplication of the disciples in Jerusalem, after such an increase as we have noticed before, puts it beyond our power to estimate, with any approach to accuracy, the number at this time. The tide of success had now reached its flood, and this was signalized not so much by the great number of converts, as by the fact that among these was a "great company of the priests." The peculiar relation which the priesthood sustains to any religion must always render the priests the chief conservators of old forms, and the most persistent opponents of revolutionary changes. When they begin to give way, the system which they have upheld is ready to fall. No fact previously recorded by Luke shows so strikingly the effect of the gospel on the popular mind in Jerusalem.

The remark made concerning these priests, that they "were obedient to the faith," shows that there is something in the faith to be obeyed. This obedience is rendered not by believing; for that is to exercise the faith, not to obey it: but faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, demands of us a course of life in accordance with that which we believe; and to follow this course is to obey the faith by yielding to its demands. This obedience begins with baptism; and consequently, to say that the priests "were obedient to the faith" is equivalent to saying that they were baptized. Paul, with the same thought in mind, declares that the grace and apostleship conferred on him were for the "obedience of faith among all the nations."<sup>1</sup>

There is another expression in this verse worthy of notice, because of its singular contrast with phraseology often heard in modern times in connection with such events. It is the saying, in connection with the great multiplication of the disciples, and the obedience of so many priests, that "the word of God increased." At the present day such incidents are often introduced by remarks of this kind: "There was a precious season of grace;" "The Lord was present in his saving power;" "There was a gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit," etc. So great a departure from Scripture phraseology, indicates a departure from Scriptural ideas. With the conception that the conversion of sinners is an abstract work of the Holy Spirit, men may express themselves thus; but Luke, who had no such conception, saw in the increase an increase of the word of God; by which he means an increase not in the amount of the word, but in its effects. The more favor-

---

<sup>1</sup> Rom. i. 5.

able condition of the church when the recent murmuring ceased, and the introduction of a more perfect organization, made the preaching more effective, and greater success was the consequence.

## 2. STEPHEN ARRESTED AND FALSELY ACCUSED, 8-15.

VER. 8. The great prosperity of the church resulted, as it had done twice before, in arousing the unbelievers to action in the way of persecution. In this instance Stephen was selected as the victim. (8) And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people. This is the first exhibition of miraculous power by any but an apostle. Whether Stephen received the power to work wonders and signs before or after his appointment as deacon, we have no means of determining ; neither does the writer tell us in what way it was imparted to him. He reserves information on the subject of imparting spiritual gifts to a point in the history further on (viii. 14-17).

Vv. 9, 10. The circumstances which led to this prominence on the part of Philip are stated next. (9) But there arose certain of them that were of the synagogue called the synagogue of the Freedmen,<sup>1</sup> and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. (10) And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. All the parties here mentioned were Hellenistic Jews, who, from a natural inclination to flock together in the Holy City, had a syna-

---

<sup>1</sup>The word *libertines* in our version is here misleading to the uneducated reader ; and as it is the Latin word for freedmen, there can be no good reason for not translating it, and therefore I depart from the R. V. here in rendering it freedmen.

gogue of their own.<sup>1</sup> Stephen, being also a Hellenist, had doubtless been a member of this synagogue before he became a Christian, and by his new connection he had not forfeited his membership. Most naturally, when he began the public advocacy of the new faith, he did so in the synagogue of which he was already a member, and undertook the conviction and conversion of his former associates. This brought on the conflict.

The Freedmen, who constituted a large element of the membership in this synagogue, were Jews who had been slaves, and had by one means or another obtained their freedom. The others were from the several cities and countries named, at least the Cilicians being the countrymen of him who was afterward the apostle Paul. The Jewish learning of the day belonged to the Pharisees, rather than the Sadducees; the faithful among the foreign Jews were chiefly Pharisees, and they were generally men of some wealth and much intelligence. Consequently we now find a new leader on the part of the church and a different party of the unbelievers brought into conflict. It was not now, as in the two former conflicts, a mere struggle between force and endurance; but it was an intellectual struggle—a war of arguments on the great question of the Messiahship. Never, perhaps, even in the life of Jesus, had there been so protracted, and so warmly contested a debate between competent disputants on the great question of the day. It was the first time the disciples had measured arms with their opponents in open discussion. The young converts had hitherto en-

---

<sup>1</sup> I can see no ground in the wording of the text for the conclusion adopted by some writers, that *three* synagogues are here designated (Alford *in loco*), by others *two*, by others *five* (Meyer *in loco*). It is a matter, however, of no special importance.

joyed no opportunity of comparing the evidences by which they had been convinced with those which learning and ingenuity might frame against them; but now they heard both sides, with the odds in numbers, learning and social position all on the side of their opponents. It was a critical moment in their experience, and it needs no vivid imagination to realize the solicitude with which they listened to Stephen and his foes. Any fears they may have entertained at first were soon dissipated, as it became evident that Stephen's antagonists "were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke."

Vv. 11-14. When men whose chief concern it is to vindicate themselves rather than the truth are defeated in debate, they very commonly resort to vituperation or violence. Both were tried against Stephen. The Pharisees, who had the management of the case, entered upon the same line of policy which they had pursued successfully in the prosecution of Jesus. (11) Then they suborned men, who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. (12) And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and seized him, and brought him into the council, and set up false witnesses, who said, (13) This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law: (14) for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.

This is the first time that the people are represented as being stirred up against the disciples. Hitherto the fear of the people had restrained the violence of the persecutors. This change is accounted for by the fact

that the Sadducees, who had conducted the previous persecutions, had comparatively little influence with the masses, and the further fact, that they had contented themselves with arraying against the apostles the mere authority of the Sanhedrin; but now the Pharisees, who had much more popular influence, are in the lead, and they poison the minds of the people by seizing upon certain utterances of Stephen which needed to be only slightly distorted in order to form the ground of very serious charges. They are cunning enough, too, to make these charges, not against the whole body of the disciples, or against the apostles, who now enjoyed the confidence of the masses; but against a single person who had just risen up from obscurity.

The general charge was that he had committed blasphemy—a crime punishable with death under the law; blasphemy against Moses, in saying that Jesus would change the customs which Moses had delivered; and blasphemy against God, in saying that he would destroy God's holy temple. It is quite probable that Stephen had, in the course of the debate, quoted the prediction of Jesus that the temple would be destroyed, but had not said that Jesus would destroy it; and as his enemies could see that the destruction of the temple would necessarily bring to an end the temple services, they put their own inference into his lips, in charging him with saying that Jesus would change the customs delivered by Moses. The specifications were so nearly true as to form a plausible ground for the accusation,<sup>1</sup> while the falsity

---

<sup>5</sup> The position taken by Baur in his chapter headed "Stephen the Predecessor of Paul," that Stephen looked upon the temple worship "as a thing already antiquated and in ruins," while "the apostles always remained immovably true to their old ad-



of the witnesses lay in the additions they made to Stephen's words, and in construing what he said as blasphemy.

Let us observe here, that the Pharisees avoided the blunder committed by the Sadducees, of bringing men into court for trial with no definite charges framed against them. Charges were formally presented, witnesses were deliberately heard in support of them, and Stephen was called upon for his defense.

VER. 15. When the case had been fully stated, and the testimony of all the witnesses was in, there was a momentary pause, and all eyes were fixed upon Stephen, who stood before his accusers. (15) And all that sat in the council fastening their eyes on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. There is no need to suppose anything supernatural in his appearance. He was standing just where his Master had stood when condemned to die; he was arraigned on a similar charge; he had the same judges; and he knew perfectly well that the court had come together not to try him, but to condemn him. He knew that the supreme hour of his life had come; and the emotions which stirred his soul as he thought of the past, of death, of heaven, of the cause which he had pleaded, and of the foul murder about to be perpetrated, necessarily lit up his countenance with a glow almost supernatural. If his features, as is highly probable, were naturally fine and expressive, the

---

herance to the temple," is without justification in the text, even if we regard the accusations brought against Stephen as strictly true; for there is no evidence that he differed from the apostles in believing the prediction of Jesus concerning the destruction of the temple, or that he held the temple worship as "already antiquated and in ruins." (*Life and Works of Paul*, vol. i. c. 2).

crowning ornament of a noble form, it is not surprising that in such a moment his face should be compared to that of an angel.

### 3. STEPHEN'S DISCOURSE, VII. 1-53.

#### I.

#### THE INTRODUCTION, 1-8.

Vv. 1-8. With his face glowing like that of an angel, at a word from the high priest Stephen proceeds to deliver one of the most remarkable discourses on record. (1) And the high priest said, Are these things so? (2) And he said, Brethren and fathers, hearken. The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> It is charged by rationalists generally, that Stephen makes several historical mistakes in this speech, of which the first is his representation here that God gave this command to Abraham "before he dwelt in Haran," whereas it is said in Genesis xii. 1-4 that he gave it to him in Haran. But his language implies that he knew what occurred in Haran, but wished to state an additional and antecedent fact. Knowing that God did appear to Abraham in Haran, and also knowing what some of his hearers overlooked, that he had also appeared before that time, he here speaks of the previous appearance, this being the one that started Abraham in the direction of Canaan. Those who say that he was mistaken should account for the fact stated in Gen. xi. 31, that Terah took his family, "and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan." What could have started this whole family of Shemites on a journey of more than a thousand miles into a country occupied by Hamites, unless it were some such command as that which finally took Abraham from Haran into that same country? Stephen says it was such a command; and even if he based the statement on a logical inference, with no other source of knowledge, no one can deny that the inference is a just one. If it be objected that the command, if given before, would not have been repeated in words so nearly identical, we may answer, that the command given to

(3) and said unto him, Get thee out of thy land, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I will show thee. (4) Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran : and from thence, when his father was dead,<sup>1</sup> God removed him into this land,

---

Jonah to go into Nineveh was expressed in almost the same terms when first given as when repeated after his experience in the bowels of the fish (Jonah i. 2; iii. 2). Furthermore, there is an important omission in Stephen's quotation of the words as compared with those in Gen. xii. He omits the words, "and from thy father's house," which agrees with the fact that on leaving Ur of Chaldea he did not leave his father's house, as he did when he left Haran.

<sup>1</sup> Here is the second mistake charged upon Stephen. It is claimed that Abraham was born when his father was seventy years old (Gen. xi. 26); that he left Haran when he was himself seventy-five years old, which would make his father  $70+75=145$ ; and as Terah lived to two hundred and five (Gen. xi. 32), he must have lived  $205-145=60$  years after Abraham left Haran, instead of dying, as Stephen says, before Abraham's departure. But this whole calculation depends on the correctness of the figures from which it starts. The statement of the text, Gen. xi. 26, is that "Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abraham, Nahor and Haran." Unless we assume that these three were triplets, we can not assert that Terah was just seventy when Abraham was born. But that they were not triplets, and that Nahor and Abraham were much younger than Haran, is evident from the fact that Nahor's wife was Haran's daughter, and that Haran's son Lot was not many years younger than Abraham, as appears from the later history of the two. It is obvious, then, that this statement about the births of the three is not intended to show the time of the birth of Abraham or Nahor, but only that of Haran. It is similar to the statement in Gen. v. 32, that "Noah lived five hundred years: and Noah begat Shem, Ham and Japheth;" whereas, by comparison of the ages of Noah and Shem at the time of the flood, we find that Noah was five hundred and two years old when Shem was born (Gen. iii. 13, cf. xi. 10). In other words, the author of Genesis, in his aim at extreme brevity, in both these instances gives the age of a father at the birth of one

wherein ye now dwell: (5) and he gave him no 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. (6) And God 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. (7) And the nation to which they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that they shall come forth and dwell in this place. (8) And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and

---

(and apparently, in both cases the oldest) of his sons, and while doing so mentions the births of the other two, without wishing to make the impression that they were all brought forth at one birth. Indeed, he avoids that impressien by other statements in the context which preclude it. Stephen then may be relied on when he says that God removed Abraham from Haran into Canaan after the death of Terah; and if so, then the age of Terah when Abraham was born was 205—75—130 years. Alford objects to this conclusion in the following terms: "Terah, in the course of nature, begets his son Abram at one hundred and thirty; yet this very Abram regards it as incredible that he himself should beget a son at ninety-nine (Gen. xvii. 1, 17); and on the birth of Isaac out of the course of nature, most important Scripture arguments and consequences are founded, *cf.* Rom. iv. 17-21; Heb. xi. 11, 12" (*Commentary in loco.*) The learned author forgets that "in the course of nature" this same Abram, long after he was ninety-nine, and apparently after the death of Sarah, when he was one hundred and thirty-seven, took a younger wife and begat six other sons, the sons of Keturah (Gen. xxiii. 1; xxiv. 1-4). The incredulity of Abram, then, so far as it respected himself (for it is evident that it had reference chiefly to Sarah), depended on something else than his mere age. It may have depended largely on the fact that he had now been living thirteen years with a young concubine, Hagar, since the birth of Ishmael, and she had not borne him another son (xvii. 24, 25).

Isaac, Jacob; and Jacob, the twelve patriarchs. Here is a calm, dignified, and very graphic sketch of the story in Genesis, from the first call of Abraham until the birth and circumcision of the twelve sons of Jacob. It was a recital which always interested a Jewish audience, just as an effective recital of the migration of our Pilgrim Fathers always interests an American audience. But what had it to do with the charges brought against Stephen? and why should it be found on the lips of a man about to be condemned to die? These questions it was impossible at the moment for his hearers to answer, though they must have occurred to every mind. It is equally impossible for us to answer them, unless we anticipate the sequel, which we should not do.

## II.

## THE CASE OF JOSEPH, 9-16.

Vv. 9-16. The speaker next recounts the circumstances growing out of the sale of Joseph, which led to the migration of Jacob into Egypt, and to his death, with that of his sons, in that foreign land. The account is equally graphic with the preceding, and as skillfully abridged. (9) And the patriarchs, moved with envy against Joseph, sold him into Egypt: (10) and God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. (11) Now there came a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction; and our fathers had no sustenance. (12) But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent forth our fathers for the first time. (13) And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's race became

manifest unto Pharaoh. (14) And Joseph sent and called to him his father, and all his kindred, three score and fifteen souls.<sup>1</sup> (15) And Jacob went down into Egypt; and he died, himself, and our fathers; (16) and they were carried over into Shechem, and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a price in silver of the sons of Hamor in Shechem.<sup>2</sup> In this division of the discourse,

---

<sup>1</sup> Here Stephen is said to make his third mistake, in putting the number of Jacob's family at seventy-five, whereas the text of Gen. xlv. 27 makes the number seventy, including two who had died in Canaan. Many conjectures have been advanced to account for this difference, while the only one that should have been thought of has been often overlooked. Stephen, being a Hellenist, read the Scriptures in the Greek translation, as did all of his adversaries in the foreign synagogue, and as did the great majority of the Jewish people, to whom the original Hebrew was already a dead language. His Greek Bible, the Septuagint version, gives precisely the number of names which he here quotes. It reads: "All the souls of the house of Jacob who went with Jacob into Egypt, were seventy-five souls;" and it makes the additional five, by giving, at verse 20, the names of two sons of Manasseh, two of Ephraim, and one grandson of the latter. Stephen then gave the figures as he and his hearers read them in their Bible, and perhaps neither he nor they had ever observed the discrepancy between the version and the original.

<sup>2</sup> In this sentence are two more of the mistakes charged on Stephen, and they are much more like real mistakes than any of the preceding. He appears to say that Jacob was carried over to Shechem and buried, whereas he was buried at Hebron in the cave of Macpelah; and he does plainly say that Abraham bought a tomb of the sons of Hamor in Shechem, whereas it was the tomb at Hebron which he bought, while it was Jacob who bought a piece of land at Shechem. It is difficult to imagine how Stephen could have made these two mistakes; for the burial of Jacob is made so prominent in Genesis, and was attended by so remarkable a funeral procession, including not only all the men of his own posterity, but the elders of Egypt, and a great company of Egyptian horsemen, that the account of it must have been very familiar to every Israelite, and very dear to his heart. So, too,



the ill treatment of Joseph by his brethren is brought into vivid contrast with his final rescue of the whole family from starvation; and the way the story is told

---

the purchase of the cave at Macpelah by Abraham, attended as it was by great sorrow for the loss of his beloved wife at an advanced age, and by the beautiful courtesies which adorned both his own conduct and that of his Hittite neighbors in making the transfer, was too prominent and interesting an event for a Jew of any intelligence in the Scripture, such as Stephen certainly was, to commit so great a blunder in regard to it. It is far more likely that some early copyist, knowing of Abraham's purchase, and not remembering that Jacob also made one at Shechem, here inadvertently substituted the name Abraham where the name Jacob was originally written. We are constrained therefore, by the natural probabilities of the case, to conclude with many eminent critics that the name Abraham is a clerical error, and not a mistake made by Stephen. The statement made concerning the burial of Jacob admits another explanation. As the two clauses stand in our version, "he died, himself, and our fathers; and they were carried over into Shechem," there can be no doubt that "himself" and "fathers" are common subjects of the one verb "died," and that the pronoun "they" before "were carried" refers to both alike. But it is not so in the original. The construction is different. The verb rendered died is in the singular number, ἐτελεύτησεν, and it agrees only with αὐτός, himself. The plural substantive "fathers" is not the subject of that verb, but of the plural ἐτελεύτησαν understood. The construction having been changed with the introduction of the plural subject, it follows that the plural verb μετετέθησαν, "were carried," belongs to fathers, and not to Jacob. The two clauses, properly punctuated, and with the ellipsis supplied, read thus: "and he died; and our fathers died, and were carried over into Shechem." With this rendering and punctuation, which are certainly admissible, the contradiction totally disappears; and if the passage had been thus rendered at first into English, a contradiction would not have been thought of. The question whether the "fathers," other than Joseph, were carried over to Shechem for burial, can not be determined by anything said in the Old Testament; for of their burial place nothing whatever is said. Stephen must have obtained his information on this point, as he did his knowledge of the edu-

was well calculated to interest Stephen's hearers; but the use which he intended to make of the facts recited was a mystery to them, and no one present could have been more conscious of this than Stephen himself, who purposely kept his ultimate aim out of sight.

### III.

#### THE CASE OF MOSES IN EGYPT, 17-37.

Vv. 17-29. From this glance at the history of Joseph the speaker advances to that of Moses; and with a master hand he sketches so much of it as to show that God raised him up in a remarkable way to a position of great learning and power, and that Moses undertook the deliverance of his people, but failed because they turned against him. (17) But as the time of the promise drew nigh, which God vouchsafed to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, (18) till there arose another king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. (19) The same dealt subtilly with our race, and evil entreated our fathers, that they should cast out their babes, to the end that they should not live. (20) At which season Moses was born, and was exceeding fair; and he was

---

cation of Moses, from some extra biblical source. As the mummy of Joseph was buried in the piece of land bought from the sons of Hamor (Josh. xxiv. 32), it is not improbable that the same was true of his brothers. Jerome, who lived in Palestine in the fourth century, says: "The twelve patriarchs were buried not in Arbes (Hebron), but in Shechem;" which shows that in his day the fact stated by Stephen was the current belief of the Jews. (See the citation in Speaker's Commentary). That a tomb was purchased together with the piece of land bought at Shechem, Stephen must also have learned from some source other than the Old Testament; but it is not at all improbable. Indeed, the possession of a sepulcher may have been one of the motives for the purchase of the land.

nourished three months in his father's house : (21) and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. (22) And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians ; and he was mighty in words and works. (23) But when he was well nigh forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. (24) And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian : (25) and he supposed that his brethren understood how that God by his hand was giving them deliverance ; but they understood not. (26) 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 to another ? (27) But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us ? (28) Wouldst thou kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday ? (29) And Moses fled at this saying, and became a sojourner in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons. Although it was afterward discovered that this effort of Moses was premature, the Israelites of later generations must have regretted that their fathers rejected in so ungenerous a manner the offer to deliver them made by Moses at such a sacrifice to himself ; for no doubt Stephen here rightly interprets his slaying of the Egyptian as a signal for his countrymen to rise and strike for liberty under his leadership. It was sad to think of their want of appreciation of such heroism.

Vv. 30-37. But Stephen has use for the next section in the career of Moses, in which, after being rejected by his countrymen, God made him their deliverer : and this he proceeds to sketch in the same graphic style. (30)

And when forty years were fulfilled, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. (31) And when Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold, there came a voice of the Lord, (32) I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. And Moses trembled, and durst not behold. (33) And the Lord said, Loose the shoes from thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. (34) I have surely seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them: and now come, I will send thee to Egypt. (35) This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? him hath God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. (36) This man led them forth, having wrought wonders and signs in Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. (37) This is that Moses, who said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me.<sup>1</sup> In this passage the speaker not only presents the contrast between the rejection of Moses by his brethren, and God's appointment of him to the very office which they refused him, but he also introduces the prediction uttered by Moses concerning the Messiah—a prediction in which Moses evidently anticipated the coming of a prophet greater than himself.

## IV.

THE CASE OF MOSES IN THE WILDERNESS, 38-41.

Vv. 38-41. Ungrateful as had been the conduct of the Hebrews toward Moses when he first attempted to

---

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xviii. 15-19.

deliver them, it bore no comparison to their mistreatment of him after he had led them out into the wilderness; and to this Stephen next invites the attention of his hearers: (38) This is he that was in the church<sup>1</sup> in the wilderness with the angel<sup>2</sup> who spoke to him in Mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received living oracles<sup>3</sup> to give unto us: (39) to whom our fathers would not be obedient, but thrust him from them, and turned back in their hearts into Egypt, (40) saying unto Aaron, Make us gods which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, who led us forth out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. (41) And they made a calf in those days, and brought a sacrifice unto

---

<sup>1</sup> The word here rendered church, ἐκκλησία, is the one usually so rendered in N. T., but never in O. T. As the body of the Israelites represented by it is always in O. T. styled the congregation, or the assembly, so it should have been here in the text as our revisers have given it in the margin. This is required by uniformity, and it would have prevented some persons from confounding the assembly in the wilderness with the New Testament church.

<sup>2</sup> By "the angel who spoke to him in Mount Sinai," Stephen means the same angel mentioned in verse 30, where he says, "An angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush." In the next verse (31) this angel is called The Lord, as in Exodus he is called both Jehovah and God (Ex. iii. 2, 4). This shows that visible and audible manifestations of God were made through the persons of angels.

<sup>3</sup> The term oracles was used by the Greeks for communications supposed to have been received from their gods. In contrast with these, which came from no living being, and which were nothing but empty words, the communications received by Moses are called by Stephen *living* oracles, because they came from the living God, and because they had within themselves power to direct aright the lives of men. Both Paul and Peter unite with Stephen in applying the title "living" to the word of God (Heb. iv. 12; I. Pet. i. 23). See further under 53.

the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their hands. The greater fragrance of this sin appears from the fact that it was committed immediately after those splendid manifestations of God's presence with Moses which the people had witnessed in Egypt, at the Red Sea, in the march to Mount Sinai, and in the giving of the law from the summit of that mountain. They rejected Moses after he had accomplished the main part of their deliverance, and yet God made him the instrument for completing the deliverance which he had begun.

## V.

## GOD'S FINAL REJECTION OF ISRAEL, 42, 43.

Vv. 42, 43. The next division of the speech is apparently more abbreviated in Luke's report than the preceding divisions, and perhaps Stephen himself went less into details here than before. In a single sentence he passes over all the apostasies of Israel, from the time of the calf worship at the foot of Mount Sinai, till the final announcement of the Babylonian captivity by the mouth of the prophet Amos, whom he quotes: (42) But God turned, and gave them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets,

Did ye offer unto me slain beasts and sacrifices  
 Forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?  
 (43) 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.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen here quotes the Septuagint version of Amos v. 25-27, which varies slightly from the Hebrew. A discussion of the variations belongs rather to a commentary on Amos than to one on Acts. Stephen's purpose in the quotation is to show his



With this brief glance at the course of Israel in rejecting their divinely appointed leaders and deliverers during a period of many centuries, the first general division of the speech, as we shall see, is concluded. Before making the application of it, he passes to a topic which was included in his accusation ; for we should be careful to observe that nothing which he has said thus far has any connection at all with the charges under which he was arraigned. His hearers could but wonder what use he intended to make of the facts which he had recited, and he was not yet ready to satisfy their curiosity.

---

hearers that one of their own prophets had long since convicted the generation in the wilderness of abandoning the service of Jehovah for that of various idols besides the calf which Aaron made ; in consequence of which God then gave them up to worship "the host of heaven," and, as a remoter consequence, was in the days of the prophet about to send them into captivity in a foreign land. The question, "Did ye offer me slain beasts and sacrifices in the wilderness forty years?" is answered by the statement, "Ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of the god Rephan ;" thus showing, that although, as plainly appears in the Pentateuch, some sacrifices were offered in the wilderness, they were vitiated so as to amount to no worship at all because of the idolatry which was intermingled with them. In the expression "beyond Babylon," Stephen departs from the text of both the Hebrew and the Septuagint, which read "beyond Damascus." He doubtless did this on purpose, because the change more fully expressed the real mind of God in the prediction. God saw fit, in speaking through the prophet, to speak only of sending the people beyond Damascus, which was a short distance, when he really intended, as subsequent events disclosed, to send them much farther. Stephen puts in the word which expresses the full purpose of God. His hearers were acquainted with the facts, and could easily perceive his purpose.

## VI.

## THE TABERNACLE AND THE TEMPLE, 44-50.

Vv. 44-50. Instead of either admitting or formally denying the charge of blasphemy against the temple, the speaker proceeds to show very briefly the true religious value of that building. This he does by first alluding to the movable and perishable nature of the tabernacle, which was superseded by the temple, and then showing from the prophets that a temple made with hands can not be the real dwelling place of God. (44) Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, even as he appointed who spoke unto Moses, that he should make it according to the figure that he had seen. (45) Which also our fathers, in their turn, brought in with Joshua when they entered on the possession of the nations, which God thrust out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;<sup>1</sup> (46) who found favor in the sight of God, and asked to find a habitation for the God of Jacob. (47) 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:

---

<sup>1</sup>The commentators are nearly equally divided on the question whether the clause, "unto the days of David," is to be connected with the thrusting out of the Canaanites, or the bringing in of the tabernacle; Alford, Meyer and Hackett holding the latter view, and Lechler, Gloag and Jacobson, the former. It is not important to decide the question, for both views are in harmony with the facts of the history, and also with Stephen's train of thought. Our translators appear to have held the latter view,

Or what is the place of my rest ?

(50) Did not my hands make all these things ? <sup>1</sup>

Involved in these remarks is the argument, that inasmuch as the tabernacle was once God's house, but was supplanted by the temple ; and inasmuch as the temple, grand and ancient as it was, was infinitely too small to contain the living God, and was declared by one of their own prophets not to be God's real dwelling place, it could be no blasphemy to say that it was yet to be set aside and destroyed.

## VII.

### THE APPLICATION, 51-53.

Vv. 51-53. Stephen is now prepared to spring upon his accusers the concealed application of the facts which he had arrayed in the first division of his discourse. The historical introduction had paved the way for the following analogies. As Joseph, the divinely selected saviour of his brethren, had been sold into slavery by these brethren ; as Moses, divinely selected to deliver Israel from bondage, was at first rejected by them to become a fugitive in Midian, but was sent back by the God of their fathers to actually deliver them ; as Moses, after leading them out of Egypt, was again and again rejected by them ; and as all the prophets had met with similar mistreatment ; so now, the final prophet of whom Moses and all the later prophets had spoken, sent to deliver them from a far worse bondage, had been rejected and slain by the sons of those persecuting fathers. The force of all these analogies is concentrated in the few

---

for the comma which they have placed after " fathers " is out of place if the former is the connection of thought.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xlv. 1, 2.

words which follow : (51) Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised<sup>1</sup> in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit :<sup>2</sup> as your fathers did, so do ye. (52) Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute ? and they killed them who showed before the coming of the Righteous One ; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers ; (53) ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not.<sup>3</sup> The pent-up fires which had burned in the breast of Stephen from the beginning of these cruel proceedings, and which had given an angelic glow to his features before he began to speak, but had been carefully smothered during the progress of his argument, found vent, to the amazement of his hearers, in these scorching and blazing words.

---

<sup>1</sup> On account of the feeling with which Jews came to look upon all uncircumcised persons, the term uncircumcised was used by them as a term of reproach and contempt ; Moses emphasizes his want of eloquence by speaking of his "uncircumcised lips" (Ex. vi. 12, 30) ; and speaks of Israel in apostasy as having "uncircumcised hearts" (Lev. xxvi. 41). David denounces Goliath as "this uncircumcised Philistine" (I. Sam. xvii. 26) ; while Jeremiah says of the people, "Their ear is uncircumcised, they can not hearken" (Jer. vi. 10) ; and Ezekiel speaks of Elam as "uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh" (chap. xlv. 7, 9). Adopting this Scriptural usage, Stephen denounces his judges in the terms hurled at heathen nations and apostate Israel by Moses and the prophets. No words could have been severer in their estimation, and none could have been more just.

<sup>2</sup> Their fathers had resisted the Holy Spirit, as Stephen shows in the next verse, by persecuting the prophets ; and they had done the same, as he shows in verse 53, by persecuting Jesus. Thus we see that men resist the Holy Spirit when they reject the words spoken by the Holy Spirit through inspired men.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek words here rendered "as it was ordained by angels," *εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων*, are very obscure in meaning, and therefore difficult of translation. Many and conflicting attempts have been made by the commentators, but Alford is surely correct when he

## 4. STEPHEN IS STONED, AND THE CHURCH IS DISPERSED, VII. 54—VIII. 4.

Vv. 54-60. The exasperation of the Sanhedrin was as sudden as was the explosion of feeling with which the discourse came to an end; and it was the more intense because the denunciation hurled in their teeth was not a mere burst of passion, but the deliberate announcement of a righteous judgment, sustained by his array of analogies from Scripture, the bearing of which now flashed suddenly upon their minds. They had not been able to resist in debate the wisdom and spirit with which Stephen spoke, and now their efforts to convict him of crime had recoiled with terrific force upon their own heads. Their only recourse was the one usual with unprincipled partisans when totally discomfited, and to this they rushed with fearful rapidity. (54) Now when they heard these things they were cut to the heart,<sup>1</sup> and they gnashed on him with their teeth. (55) But he,

---

says: "The key to the right understanding of them seems to be the similar expression in Gal. iii. 19." He might have added, Heb. ii. 2. In the former place it is said that "the law was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator;" and in the latter it is referred to as "the word spoken through angels." These passages show that according to apostolic interpretation God gave the law to Moses, not by speaking in his own proper person, but by speaking through angels whom he sent to Moses, and who doubtless appeared to him visibly. This, then, is the conception which Stephen embodies in the words before us; and although the rendering of the Revised Version which we follow does not bring out this thought very clearly, it is perhaps the best rendering which the original admits.

<sup>1</sup> Literally, *sawn asunder in their hearts*. They felt as if their hearts had been cut through with the rough teeth of a saw, so sharp and rasping were the words of Stephen. The literal gnashing of their teeth toward him was a natural consequence.

being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, (56) and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. (57) But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord; (58) and they cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their garments<sup>1</sup> at the feet of a young man named Saul. (59) And they stoned Stephen, calling upon the name of the Lord, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. (60) And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (viii. 1) And Saul was consenting to his death. This was a strange way for a court to break up; the whole body of seventy grave rabbis, whose official duty it was to watch for the faithful execution of the law, leaving their seats and rushing in a wild mob, amid hideous outcries, to the sudden execution of a prisoner uncondemned and untried.<sup>2</sup> But the maddest pranks ever played on earth are witnessed when wicked men set themselves in uncompromising opposition to God and his people.

---

<sup>1</sup> The witnesses had to begin the stoning (Deut. xvii. 7), and they threw off their outer garments to give their arms free movement.

<sup>2</sup> The objection urged by unfriendly critics, that the Sanhedrin had no right to execute a criminal without the consent of the Roman governor, and that therefore this account of Stephen's death is incredible (Baur, *Life of Paul*, i. 53, 54), is precluded by the narrative itself, which shows that this was an essentially unlawful procedure. It were as sensible to deny the credibility of any other account of mob violence, on the ground that it was not lawful. Mobs, because they are mobs, violate law, yet they often observe some of the forms of law, as did this mob in requiring the witnesses to begin the stoning.



The vision witnessed by Stephen need not be understood as a real opening of the sky, so that things beyond could be seen by the human eye, but only as a symbolical representation, such as those granted to John in the isle of Patmos. It was vouchsafed both for his own encouragement in the hour of death, and for the good of friends and foes alike in subsequent days. The words of Stephen, "Son of man standing on the right hand of God," were an echo in the ears of the chief priests of those uttered by Jesus when he stood before them on trial. There was at least one in the audience upon whom, we have reason to believe, the impression made by this whole procedure was deep and lasting. The young man Saul never forgot it, but long afterward, when bending under the weight of years, he made sad mention of the scene.<sup>1</sup> From him, as an eye-witness, Luke undoubtedly obtained the information concerning it on which he relied, and also his report of Stephen's discourse. This is a sufficient answer to all who have raised doubts about the practicability of his obtaining a correct report of the speech.<sup>2</sup>

Vv. 1-4. The enemies of the church had now tried in vain all ordinary methods of opposing the truth. Under the leadership of the Sadducees they tried first threatening, then imprisonment, and then stripes. They were about to follow these with the death of the twelve, when the milder counsels of the yet unexasperated Pharisees prevailed, and resort was had to discussion. But the cause, which had prospered under the imprisonment and scourging of its chief advocates, bounded forward with a fresh impetus when brought before the

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxii. 19, 20; I. Tim. i. 12-17.

<sup>2</sup> See Baur, *Paul*, i. 52, 55; Zeller, *Acts of Apostles*, i. 241.

people in open debate, and the Pharisees were moved to follow the Sadducees in using violence. It was their purpose to proceed in their bloody work with the forms of law ; but in a moment of frenzy they lost all restraint, and dispatched their chosen victim with the violence of a mob. Once embarked in this mad career, nothing less than the extermination of the church could satisfy them.

(1) And there arose on that day<sup>1</sup> a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem ; and they were all<sup>2</sup> scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,<sup>3</sup> except the apostles. (2) And devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. (3) But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging forth<sup>4</sup> both men and women, committed them to prison. (4) They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word.<sup>5</sup>

The grief of the good in a community at the loss of a good man is always great ; but it is most intense when

<sup>1</sup>The statement of the text is not that the whole of the persecution described below occurred on "that day," but it then "arose." Doubtless many days transpired before the whole church was dispersed.

<sup>2</sup>To assume with some (Baur, Zeller, *et. al.*), that only the Hellenistic portion of the church was scattered abroad, is to contradict without reason the universal terms of the text.

<sup>3</sup>That Samaria was one of the regions to which these Jews fled, shows that already there was a feeling among the Samaritans toward the disciples quite different from that toward the Jews in general.

<sup>4</sup>The term *haling*, here employed by our translators, is so thoroughly obsolete, that it should no longer disfigure the text, and I have accordingly discarded it, as was desired by the American section of the Revision Committee.

<sup>5</sup>The preaching here referred to was doubtless both public and private preaching, the latter being participated in by women as well as men.

the death is brought about by injustice and violence. It is not surprising, therefore, that the burial of Stephen was attended by "great lamentation" on the part of the "devout men" who discharged this mournful service. Possibly some of them were not members of the church. But while his death filled the hearts of the disciples with unutterable grief, it possessed a very great value to them from another point of view. They had embarked with all their interests, temporal and eternal, in the cause of one who, though he had proved himself mighty to deliver while present with them, had gone beyond the reach of vision, and no longer held personal converse with his former companions. Thus far, amid many tears, some stripes, and much affliction, they had found satisfaction in his service; but before Stephen's death it was not known by experience how their new faith would sustain them in a dying hour. Now one of their number had tried the dread reality. He had died praying for his murderers, and committing his spirit to the Son of man, whom he saw in a heavenly vision. No man at the present day can tell how great was the strength and consolation which came to all when the death of the first who died was so triumphant. It was a fitting and most providential preparation for the fiery ordeal through which the whole body of the believers was immediately compelled to pass. They could now go forward in their tear-dimmed course without fear or care for that within the grave or beyond it. With much bitterness of heart they left their native city and their individual homes to seek refuge among strangers; but to many of them the bitterness of temporal loss was no doubt slight compared with that of seeing the cause which they loved better than life apparently brought to

ruin. Still, though they had lost all for preaching the word, they went everywhere preaching it. And what must have been the feelings of the twelve when they found themselves alone in a great city, the congregation of many thousands which they had collected all scattered and gone, and they themselves silenced for want of hearers? Their own lives must have been in imminent peril; but, supposing that the time to which Jesus had limited their stay in Jerusalem had not yet expired, and being undoubtedly solicitous for the future of their many brethren and sisters who were languishing there in prison, they courageously stood their ground, regardless of consequences. That they were allowed to stay, and were unmolested, may be accounted for in part by the supposition that they would be powerless after the destruction of the church, and in part by the remembrance of their miracles, especially their miraculous escape from prison. Moreover, they could no longer preach in public for want of an audience, and thus they appeared to be frightened into silence, and were consequently considered harmless.

# COMMENTARY ON ACTS.

---

## PART SECOND.

### *SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL IN JUDEA AND ADJACENT COUNTRIES.*

(VIII. 5—XII. 25.)

---

#### SEC. I.—THE LABORS OF PHILIP.

(VIII. 5-40.)

##### 1. HE FOUNDS A CHURCH IN THE CITY OF SAMARIA, 5-13.

VER. 5. Among the many who now went about preaching the word, the writer first follows Philip, and describes some of his labors. (5) And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ. This Philip was not the apostle by that name, seeing that the apostles are said in verse 1 to have remained in Jerusalem; but he was one of the seven mentioned in vi. 5. His office of deacon had terminated by the dispersion of the church which he had served, and now he becomes an evangelist, the title by which he is called in xxi. 8. He evidently became an evangelist, not by being formally set apart to this work, but by beginning to evangelize under the force of circumstances. Among the older commentators there was much dispute as to whether the city into which he went was *a city of*

Samaria, or *the* city of Samaria; but the definite article is now admitted to be a part of the Greek text, and this settles the question.<sup>1</sup> It was the old capital of the twelve tribes, and it had recently been enlarged and embellished by Herod the Great.<sup>2</sup> Luke describes Philip's work in Samaria first, because this was the first successful work outside of Judea, and because, in the directions given by Jesus (i. 8), Samaria stands next to Judea.

Vv. 6-12. When Philip entered the city of Samaria the public mind was in a condition apparently unfavorable to the reception of the gospel. The practice of magical arts was quite common among the Jews and the Samaritans of that age, and the masses of the people of all nations were very superstitious in reference to them. At this particular time the people of Samaria were completely under the influence of a famous magician, and this obstacle had to be overcome before Philip could hope for success. The story of the conflict and the triumph is briefly told. (6) And the multitude gave heed with one accord to the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs which he did. (7) For from many of those who had unclean spirits, they came out, crying with a loud voice: and many that were palsied, and that were lame, were healed. (8) And there was much joy in that city. (9) But there was a certain man, Simon by name, who be-

---

<sup>1</sup> It was settled by the reading (*την πόλιν της Σαμαρειας*) in the Sinaitic MS., which, reinforcing the previously known evidence of the Alexandrian and the Vatican MSS., overbalanced all evidence for the omission of *την* before *πολιν*.

<sup>2</sup> Herod changed its name to Sebaste, the Greek for Augusta, in honor of Augustus Cesar; and it still retains this name in the Arabic form, *Sebustijeh*. For a description of its present ruins, see the author's *Lands of the Bible*, 294.



foretime in the city used sorcery, and amazed the people of Samaria,<sup>1</sup> giving out that himself was some great one: (10) to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is that power of God which is called Great. (11) And they gave heed to him, because that of long time he had amazed them with his sorceries. (12) 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.

This is another case of conversion, with a very brief account of the means and influences by which it was brought about. Philip's preaching, like that of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and that of Jesus before them, was accompanied by miracles. The first effect on the people was great joy, accompanied by the most interested attention to the things which were spoken by Philip (6-8). Next, they shook off the spell which Simon had wrought upon them, and believed Philip's preaching (9-12). When they believed they were baptized, both men and women (12), and here the brief story ends. It is as simple and direct as the commission under which Philip preached: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

This case of conversion was well chosen by Luke, because the subjects of it, up to the moment in which Philip began to speak to them, were under the spell of a magician, and the miracles wrought by Philip were

---

<sup>1</sup> Here the name Samaria designates not the city, but the country of the Samaritans. The expression in Greek is τὸ ἔθνος τῆς Σαμαρείας. Josephus describes its limits (*Wars*, iii. 3, 4); and they corresponded very closely to those of the tribes of Ephraim and western Manasseh.

brought into direct comparison with the wonders wrought by Simon. The fact that the people without hesitation gave up their faith in Simon as the great power of God, and implicitly believed in what Philip did and taught, can be accounted for only on the ground that there was such a difference between the tricks of sorcery and the miracles, that the people, even though completely deluded by the former, could plainly see, when once the two were placed side by side, that the latter were divine, and the former human. The tricks of sorcery were, and they are still, as inexplicable to the beholder as miracles; but the former are mere tricks, serving no purpose except to excite idle curiosity, and therefore they are unworthy of God as their author; while the miracles consisted in acts of healing which were altogether beneficent and worthy of the exercise of divine power. Furthermore, the latter served the purpose of accrediting a message of mercy to a lost race, and thus they subserved a purpose far superior in beneficence to their immediate good effects on the afflicted. On account of this distinction, the miracles, instead of being superior exhibitions of magic art, as skeptics have alleged, are found in mortal conflict with magic wherever the two came together. See further evidence of this in xiii. 6-12, and xix. 11-20.

VER. 13. The most signal triumph achieved on this occasion, was that over Simon himself. Luke gives it the prominence of a separate statement in these words: (13) And Simon also himself believed; and being baptized, he continued with Philip; and beholding signs and great miracles wrought, he was amazed. His amazement is proof that he saw, as the people did, the distinction between miracles and his own tricks of jugglery. He could understand the nature of the latter, even such

as he knew not how to work, because of his own experience with such things ; but the former were to him, as to all men, incomprehensible. It was undoubtedly this which caused him to believe ; and to avoid the confusion into which many have fallen in regard to his faith, it should be observed that the words, " Simon also himself believed," are written not from Philip's point of view, but from Luke's. Philip might have been deceived by a pretended faith ; but Luke, writing long after the transaction, and with all the knowledge of Simon's later career that we have, says that he believed, and this should preclude all doubt as to the reality of his faith. The statements made below (18-24) are to be interpreted in the light of this fact. His baptism committed him not only to this faith, but to the abandonment of sorcery, as of all other sins.

## 2. MISSION OF PETER AND JOHN TO SAMARIA, 14-17.

Vv. 14-17. Luke next introduces an incident which, on account of its singularity in New Testament history, and the speculations to which it has given rise, demands very careful consideration : (14) Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John : (15) who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit : (16) for as yet he was fallen upon none of them ; only they had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. (17) Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

In order to a correct understanding of this procedure, we must notice four facts which are conspicuous : first, that the Samaritans, having believed the gospel and been

baptized, were, according to the commission (Mark xvi. 16), and according to Peter's answer on Pentecost (Acts ii. 38), pardoned and in possession of the "gift of the Holy Spirit." After they had been in possession of this gift long enough for the news to reach Jerusalem, the body of the apostles united in sending to them Peter and John.<sup>1</sup> Third, previous to the arrival of Peter and John the Holy Spirit had fallen with its miraculous powers on none of the Samaritans. Fourth, upon the imposition of hands by the two apostles, preceded by prayer, the Holy Spirit with its miraculous powers fell upon them.

From these facts we may draw several conclusions.

(1) Whatever other purposes may have prompted the mission of the two apostles, such as confirming the faith of the disciples, or assisting Philip in his labors, it is quite certain that the chief purpose was the impartation of the Holy Spirit. What they did on their arrival was certainly that for which they went: but the chief thing which they did was to confer the Holy Spirit; therefore this was the chief purpose of their visit. If, however, Philip could have conferred this gift, the mission would have been useless so far as its chief purpose is concerned. This affords strong evidence that the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit was bestowed through no human hands but those of the apostles; and this conclusion is confirmed by the consideration that in the only other instance of the kind recorded in Acts, that of the twelve in Ephesus (xix. 1-7), the gift was bestowed by the hands of an apostle. The case of Saul is not an exception (see the remarks on ix. 17); neither is that of Timothy; for

---

<sup>1</sup> That Peter and John were "sent" by the other apostles, conflicts with the Roman Catholic doctrine of the primacy of Peter, by showing that he was subject to his brethren.

although the latter is said to have received a gift through the laying on of the hands of the eldership (I. Tim. iv. 14), yet he received the same or some other gift by the putting on of Paul's hands (II. Tim. i. 6). From Paul he doubtless received the miraculous gift, and from the elders the gift of position as an evangelist.

(2) The fact that these disciples enjoyed pardon and membership in the church before receiving the miraculous gift, proves that this gift has no connection with the enjoyment of either of these blessings; yet the mystic power of an ultra spiritualism has involved some great minds in confusion as to this important matter. Witness the following from Neander in reference to the condition of the Samaritans previous to the visit of Peter and John: "They had not yet attained the consciousness of a vital communion with the Christ whom Philip preached, nor yet to the consciousness of a personal divine life. The indwelling of the Spirit was as yet something foreign to them, known only by the wonderful operations which they saw taking place around them."<sup>1</sup> This assertion is in direct conflict with the commission, and with the apostolic promise that they who would repent and be baptized should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It also conflicts with Paul's teaching, that the indwelling of the Spirit is characteristic of all who are Christ's (Rom. viii. 9-11); for certainly those who had been properly "baptized into the name of Christ," as the Samaritans had been (16), were his.

(3) The statement, "as yet he had fallen upon none of them: only they had been baptized into the name or the Lord Jesus," shows that there was no such connection between baptism and the miraculous gift of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Planting and Training of the Church, *in loco*.

Spirit, as that the latter might be inferred from the former. This gift, then, was not common to the disciples, but it was enjoyed only by those to whom it was specially imparted.

Seeing that this extraordinary gift of the Spirit was not necessary to the conversion and pardon of these persons, nor to the indwelling of the Spirit, it is proper to inquire for what purpose it was bestowed. We have already remarked under chapter i. 8, that the design of bestowing it on the apostles was to endow them with power to establish the kingdom, and to furnish miraculous attestation of their mission. In general, miracles were designed to indicate divine sanction of the procedure with which they were connected; but when the miracle assumed a mental form, it was intended also to impart to the person a supernatural mental power. The young church in Samaria had hitherto been guided by the teaching of Philip, and more recently by that of Peter and John; but these men must, in executing their high commission, soon depart to other fields of labor; and if, in doing so, they had left the church in the condition in which Peter and John found it, it would have been without means of increasing its knowledge of the new institution, and with none but the uncertain memories of the members of retaining with accuracy what it had already learned. To supply this defect, primarily, and secondarily to leave with the church the means of convincing unbelievers, the gift of inspiration was bestowed.<sup>1</sup> It was bestowed we may presume, not on all,

---

<sup>1</sup> The suggestion made by Alford, that another purpose of imparting the Spirit to the Samaritans was to remove the alienation between them and the Jewish brethren, by showing the latter that God gave to the Samaritans the same gifts as to themselves,



both men and women, but on a sufficient number of chosen individuals. The design of such gifts, and the way in which they were exercised in the congregation, are fully set forth by Paul in I. Cor. xii.-xiv. These gifts served a temporary purpose, until the facts, doctrine, commandments and promises of the new covenant were committed to writing by inspired men, when the prophecies, tongues, and miraculous knowledge of individual teachers gave place to the written word.

### 3. A WICKED PROPOSAL BY SIMON, 18-24.

Vv. 18, 19. In the preceding remarks on the incident before us, it has been assumed that the gift of the Spirit imparted was miraculous. This assumption is justified by the fact that it was a matter of observation to the bystanders, as is evident from the next statement of the text: (18) Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, (19) saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Spirit. This proposal shows, as does the previous statement of verse 17, that the Spirit did not come upon these persons directly from heaven, as upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost; but that it was imparted through the imposition of hands, and came from the person of the apostles in whom the Spirit dwelt. This is one mark of distinction between the

---

points to a probable effect of the gift; but after the Lord had personally directed the apostles to preach in Samaria (chap. i. 8), it is by no means certain that any prejudice on the subject remained in the minds of the disciples, especially as the Samaritans were a circumcised people.

baptism in the Spirit and the gift of the Spirit. See further under chap. xi. 16.

In order to account for the infamous proposal of Simon, we must remember his former mode of life, and consider the mental habits which it generated. As a sorcerer, it had been his business to increase his stock in trade by purchasing from other sorcerers the secret of tricks which he could not himself perform, and watching for opportunities to make such purchases. When he saw the apostles impart to men the power to work real miracles, he at once perceived that here was a chance for profit far beyond that which he had abandoned. His overruling avarice, mingled with a passion for popular applause, a passion which his former habits had also cultivated, prompted him to make the offer; and the blinding effect of these passions prevented him from seeing the wickedness of either offering money for this power, or of intending to sell it to others.

Vv. 20-23. Nothing could be more abhorrent to an apostle than such a proposal. It aroused the impulsive spirit of Peter, and his response is marked by his characteristic vehemence. (20) But Peter said to him, Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. (21) Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right before God. (22) Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee. (23) For I see that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. This description of Simon's spiritual condition is explicit and emphatic. The "gall of bitterness" is a forcible expression for the wretchedness of his condition; and "the bond of iniquity," for the dominion under which in-

iquity held him. His heart was not right before God, and he was on the way to perdition. The declaration, "Thou hast no part nor lot in this matter," is not to be limited to the matter of imparting the Spirit, as appears from the reason given: "for thy heart is not right before God." If his heart had been right before God, he would still have had no part or lot in imparting the Holy Spirit. The reference is to the whole subject in hand,<sup>1</sup> in which a baptized person would have a part if his heart was right.

Simon's destitute and miserable condition has been construed by many as proof that he had been a hypocrite from the beginning. Whether this inference is justifiable, depends upon the question whether conversion involves so complete a renovation that old mental habits are entirely eradicated, never to exert their power again. If this is true, then Simon was certainly not a genuine convert. But if, as both Scripture and experience teach, the turning of a sinner to God leaves his passions still within him in a latent state, ready to spring into activity under temptation, it must be admitted that Simon may have been a truly penitent believer when he was baptized; and inasmuch as Luke says, with all the facts before him, that he did believe (13), we must not deny this inspired testimony. The unfortunate man had become a child of God, but he was yet a babe; and all the weaker from the degradation to which his moral nature had been reduced before his conversion. He was therefore an easy prey to temptation, coming to him in

---

<sup>1</sup>The Greek words are ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τοῦτο, literally rendered, *in this word*, as in the margin of R. V.; but such is the latitude which usage attached to the word λόγος, that the rendering, *in this matter*, correctly expresses the meaning in this instance.

its old form, and in an unexpected way. He fell, as many a man still falls, when an old slumbering passion is suddenly aroused. Peter therefore does not say to him as to an alarmed man of the world, Repent and be baptized; but, as to a sinning disciple, "Repent and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee." The "perhaps" very clearly indicates a doubt whether forgiveness would be attainable. The doubt was based on the uncertainty in Peter's mind, whether the repentance of such a man under such circumstances could be sufficiently thorough to secure forgiveness.<sup>1</sup>

VER. 24. The doubt indicated by the "perhaps" of Peter was confirmed in a measure by Simon's response: (24) And Simon answered, and said, Pray ye for me to the Lord, that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me. This response shows plainly that Peter's scathing speech terrified Simon, but there it stops. He was told to pray for himself, and for the forgiveness of his sin; but instead of doing this, he calls on the two apostles to pray for him, and he limits his request to the thought of merely escaping the things which they had spoken. Here the record leaves him, and although he disappears in a more hopeful condition, he leaves no assurance of final repentance and salvation. Many traditions are related of his subsequent career by Justin Martyr, Cyril of Jerusalem, Irenæus, Tertullian, and the author of the Clementine Recognitions, all writers of the second century; but most of them are certainly

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter could have had no allusion to the unpardonable sin, as several commentators have supposed (Plumptre, Alford, *et. al.*); for he knew very well what that sin is (Mark iii. 28-30); and he knew that Simon had not committed it.

legendary, and none of them are at all reliable. It is not wise to fill the memory with idle tales in regard to Biblical characters.

#### 4. OTHER LABORS OF PETER AND JOHN, AND THEIR RETURN, 25.

VER. 25. The next statement of our author illustrates another phase of the labors on which the apostles had now entered. (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. The first clause of this sentence refers to their further testifying and speaking in the city of Samaria; and the last to their work on the way to Jerusalem. The route of travel from Samaria to Jerusalem led them through Shechem, so often mentioned in the Old Testament, and through Sychar, near Jacob's well, where Jesus had conversed with the woman of Samaria (Jno. iv. 39-43). If that woman was still alive, and if she had not already gone over to Samaria to hear Philip preach, she had now an opportunity to learn what Jesus meant by his puzzling remarks about "living water" (Jno. iv. 10-15). The apostles probably adopted a circuitous route to Jerusalem, so that they might touch other villages than those on the main thoroughfare; and in each they doubtless remained long enough to reap some of the fruits of their labor.

#### 5. PHILIP IS SENT TO AN ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH, 26-31.

VER. 26. When the congregation in Samaria had been supplied with spiritual gifts, and sufficiently instructed to justify leaving it to its own resources for edification, Philip was called to another field of labor,

and we are introduced to a case of conversion in which a single individual is the subject, and the details are given with unusual fullness. It is a case in which God is seen to lay plans, as it were, to bring about the result, and we are able to trace distinctly the method of his procedure.

The first step taken in the case was the mission of an angel from heaven ; but when the angel made his appearance on earth, it was not, as in case of many imaginary angelic visits for such a purpose, in the presence of the man to be converted, but in the presence of the preacher. (26) But an angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza: the same is desert. This is all that the angel has to say. His part of the work, which was simply to start the evangelist in the direction of the person to be converted, is accomplished ; so he retires from the scene.

The words, "the same is desert" (whether spoken by the angel, or appended by Luke, is immaterial), were intended to note the singularity of a preacher being sent away from a populous district to an uninhabited region. The term desert is not here to be understood as meaning a barren waste ; for no such waste has ever existed between Jerusalem and Gaza ; but as meaning that part of the way which leads through a comparatively unpopulated district.<sup>1</sup> Much error and confusion concerning this way, or road, is found in the older commentaries, which were written before the recent thorough explorations of the country ; but these, and especially the actual

---

<sup>1</sup> That the Greek word, *ἐρημος*, has this meaning, may be seen by reference to the following passages: Matt. xiv. 15, 19 ; Mark vi. 35, 39 ; Jno. vi. 10.



surveys made by the Palestine Exploration Fund of Great Britain, have cleared up the subject by showing that there was a Roman paved road leading from Jerusalem direct to Gaza, some traces of which are still visible, though the route, in the roughest part, is now impassable for vehicles. This road is laid down on the great map of Palestine made from the surveys, and can be easily traced by any one in possession of the map. The whole distance from city to city is about fifty miles, and the direction from Jerusalem is nearly due south-west. Some five or six miles from the latter city the road begins to descend from the central ridge, which it follows that far, through a rough and narrow ravine called *Wady el Mesarr*, into *Wady es Sunt*, known in the Old Testament as the valley of Elah. After traversing this valley a few miles nearly due south, the road turns to the west, and rises through another *wady* to the level of the great Philistine plain, which it follows the rest of the way to Gaza. The passage along the mountain ravine must be the part called desert, for all the rest of the way the road passes through the midst of villages, pastures, and cultivated fields; that is, it did so when the country was well populated. If Philip's path intersected the road in this desert, he traveled due south from the city of Samaria, and passed to the west of Jerusalem, all in compliance with the direction of the angel.

Vv. 27, 28. Philip promptly obeyed the voice of the angel, and by a journey of nearly fifty miles he came into the designated road in the rear of a chariot. The occupant was the man in whose behalf he had come, but as yet he knew nothing of him. (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 of her treasure, who had come to Jerusalem to worship; (28) and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. All that is said here about the man was learned by Philip afterward, and was doubtless communicated by him to Luke. His being a eunuch debarred him from the privilege of mingling in the Jewish congregation, or entering the Jewish court of the temple;<sup>1</sup> but it did not debar him from the court of the Gentiles, in which men of all nations, clean or unclean, were at liberty to worship. That he had been in Jerusalem to worship, and that he was now engaged in the study of the Jewish Scriptures, make it almost certain that he was either a Jew or a proselyte, more probably the former; and when we add to these considerations the circumstance that Luke introduces farther on the baptism of uncircumcised persons as if it were a startling innovation, we are constrained to think that it was Luke's intention that we shall regard this eunuch as a circumcised man. It was not uncommon for Jews born and reared in foreign lands to attain to eminent positions, such as this man enjoyed, and especially in the department of finance, for which they have always possessed natural fitness.

A remarkable prescience is observable in the timing of the angel's mission and the movements of Philip to the beginning and progress of the eunuch's journey. Philip must have started from Samaria at least as early

---

<sup>1</sup> While emasculated persons were shut out from the assembly of Israel as Gentiles were—the former for the purpose of preventing Jews from allowing themselves or their sons to be thus mutilated (Deut. xxiii. 1)—yet both, if obedient to the law of God, were encouraged to worship God, and to send in sacrifices with the assurance that they would be accepted (Isa. lvi. 1-8).

as the day previous to that in which the eunuch left Jerusalem; yet the Lord who sent the angel knew so well when the eunuch would start, how long it would take him to reach the point at which Philip came in behind him, and how long it would take Philip to reach the same point, that the angel's mission was so timed as to make all the movements fit one another: thus the providence of God united with the miraculous mission of the angel to bring about the intended conversion of the eunuch, and to send the gospel in him to a distant nation.

VER. 29. When Philip entered the road to which he was directed, his mission was accomplished so far as he could know from the message of the angel; for this was all that the angel had told him to do. Here he would doubtless have paused for further orders had not another divine admonition moved him on. Just at this moment the Holy Spirit began to take part in the proceedings; and, like the angel, he began, not with the sinner, but with the preacher. (29) **And the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.** The purpose of this communication was evidently the same as that of the angel, to bring the preacher and the subject for conversion face to face. But for it Philip might have allowed the chariot, which was already some distance ahead of him, to pass out of sight.

VER. 30. In order to do as the Spirit directed, Philip had to move energetically. (30) **And Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?** The man was reading aloud—a good way to keep the mind fixed on what we read. Considering the relative positions of the parties, Philip's question, **Dost thou understand what**

thou readest? strikes us as a rather abrupt if not an impertinent method of introducing himself to the grandee. It was, however, an appropriate question, and wisely propounded. Philip as yet knew not his man; he knew not whether to approach him as a fellow disciple, or as an unbeliever. He knew that if he was an unbeliever he could not tell the meaning of the well known prediction which he was reading, one of the plainest predictions in all the prophets concerning the sufferings of Christ. The Jews, not being willing to apply it to the Christ, because they expected him to be a great earthly king, knew not what to do with it. On the other hand, he knew that if the man was a believer the passage would be unmistakably clear to him. The purpose of the question, then, was to draw out the religious position of his man, so as to determine how to proceed with him further.

6. PHILIP PREACHES TO THE EUNUCH, BAPTIZES HIM, AND THEN PREACHES IN PHILISTIA, 31-40.

Vv. 31-35. The eunuch's answer to Philip's question was prompt and satisfactory: (31) And he said, How can I except some one shall guide me? And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him. (32) Now the place of the Scripture 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:

(33) In his humiliation his judgment was taken away:  
His generation who shall declare?  
For his life is taken from the earth.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This quotation is taken from Isaiah liii. 7, 8; but it follows the Septuagint, which was the Bible of all foreign born Jews, and which the eunuch must have been reading. The clause, "In

(34) And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other? (35) And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, preached unto him Jesus.

Philip now understands his man, and he better understands what had just taken place with himself. The man is a devout worshiper of God, who, though the treasurer of a distant kingdom, does not fail to come to Jerusalem, as the law requires, to worship. He has been there now; and, on his way home he is scarcely out of sight of the holy city when he takes in hand, as he rides along, the book of Isaiah. He is a thoughtful reader, carefully inquiring, as he reads, the meaning of every passage. He is an unbeliever in Christ, or he would not doubt to whom the passage he is reading refers. It so happens that he is reading and studying

---

his humiliation his judgment was taken away," is best explained by the fact that in the trial of Jesus he was deprived of right judgment by an unfair trial and condemnation. So Plumptre, Gloag, Hackett and Alford understand it. Meyer and others hold that the judgment that was taken away was his right to judge; but this right Jesus treated as one yet to be exercised in the future world (Jno. v. 22-38; xii. 47, 48), and therefore he was not robbed of it in his humiliation. The clause, "His generation who shall declare?" must be interpreted in the light of the clause, "for his life is taken from the earth." The fact that his life was taken, raised the question, Who shall declare his generation. The meaning depends on that of the expression, "his generation." This expression usually means a man's posterity, and the question implies a negative answer. The meaning seems to be, no one shall set forth his posterity, because he had no posterity when his life was cut off. The meaning suggested by Meyer, "Who shall declare the multitude of his spiritual offspring?" is read into the passage from subsequent developments, and could not well have been in the prophet's views; and it is not suggested by his words.

the very passage of all others in Isaiah which, when understood, will be most likely to bring him to Christ: and could Philip have failed to say to himself, "God sent the angel to me, to bring me here at the exact moment in which he foresaw that this man would be reading this very passage, and raising in his own mind a question concerning it which I can answer by the name Jesus?" There was no time to pause and wonder over this out-cropping of God's knowledge and wisdom; but doubtless Philip's soul was fired by it as he proceeded from that Scripture to preach Jesus as its fulfillment. And if his puzzled hearer had offered David's prayer, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," he realized an answer when he saw, beaming from the page which was so dark before, the glory of a suffering Saviour. The Scriptures were opened to him by the ministration of angels and of the Holy Spirit, but all became effective to him through the words of the preacher.

Vv. 36-40. The account of this conversion terminates, like those on Pentecost and those in Samaria, with the baptism of the person. (36) And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? (38) And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. (39) And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing. (40) But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached the gospel to all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.



The first natural water to which they came, unless it were a spring on the wayside, was the brook which flows through the valley of Elah, the brook which David crossed in going forth to meet Goliath.<sup>1</sup> It is a mountain stream, which goes dry in the summer, but flows with a strong current through the winter and the spring.<sup>2</sup> Such streams always wear out pools here and there very suitable for baptizing. If the chariot had already crossed this stream when the eunuch requested baptism, there was another in the Philistine plain, now called *Wady el Hasy*, which Robinson, the first to institute any intelligent inquiries on this subject, fixed upon as the place of baptism.<sup>3</sup> It is a perennial stream, and suitable for baptizing at any season of the year. It is not at all improbable, however, that the real place of this baptism was one of the many artificial pools with which the country abounded at that time, and the ruins of which are found in every section.<sup>4</sup> The rainless season of seven months, which is experienced there every year, made it necessary, when the country was filled with people and flocks and herds, to make extraordinary provision of water for stock, and for irrigating the summer crops; and no country was ever so well supplied in this way as Judea.

The question, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" was suggested immediately by the appearance of the water; but it could not have occurred to the eunuch had he not been previously instructed concerning the ordinance. He had learned not only that there was such

---

<sup>1</sup> I. Sam. xvii. 40.

<sup>2</sup> See an account of it in the author's *Lands of the Bible*, 259.

<sup>3</sup> *Biblical Researches*, ii. 514, note xxxii.

<sup>4</sup> See *Lands of the Bible*, 48.

an ordinance, but that it was the duty and the privilege of men to observe it when properly prepared for it. He also desired to be baptized, and his only question was whether he was a suitable candidate. As he had known nothing of Jesus as the Christ up to the moment of Philip's preaching to him, he had certainly learned nothing definite concerning the baptism which Jesus had ordained; and we are consequently forced to the conclusion that what he now knew he had learned from Philip's preaching.<sup>1</sup> From this we learn that in preaching to him Jesus, Philip had instructed him concerning baptism; that when men preach Jesus as they should, baptism is a part of the sermon. It was a part of Peter's sermon on Pentecost, and of Philip's preaching to the Samaritans; and we shall see, as we proceed with this commentary, that it had a place in every completed apostolic sermon addressed to sinners. The evangelists of the present day who omit it preach a mutilated gospel, and they do so to please men by catering to a sectarian prejudice which they should rather seek to uproot and destroy.

As soon as he had propounded the question, he commanded the chariot to stand still, showing that Philip's answer, which is not recorded, presented no hindrance. To some persons in a later age it appeared that Philip is here represented as making no answer, and that he acted too hastily; hence the interpolation into some

---

<sup>1</sup> The conceit that he had learned it from the words, "So shall he sprinkle many nations," near the close of the previous chapter of Isaiah, has been advanced by some controversialists; but it has not been approved by any of the critical commentators, and it is proved to be groundless by the fact that the Septuagint, which the eunuch was reading, has in that passage, instead of the Greek for sprinkle, the word, *θανατάζω*, which means *to astonish*.

copies of Acts of the words : " 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." <sup>1</sup> The interpolator obtained the idea which he inserted from such passages as Romans x. 8, 9 ; I. Tim. vi. 13 ; and Matt. xvi. 16, which show that such a confession was taken by the apostles ; and it is not improbable that this apostolic custom was still prevalent when the interpolation was made. <sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to frame a sentence in English or in Greek which could more unmistakably declare the fact that previous to the baptism of the eunuch both he and Philip went down into the water, and that after the baptism they came up out of it. It is painful to observe the disingenuousness with which some commentators, like many unlearned controversialists, have taxed their ingenuity to obscure this fact, <sup>3</sup> in the interest of a perverted

---

<sup>1</sup> In regard to scarcely any reading are the textual critics more unanimously agreed, or on better manuscript evidence, than the rejection of this verse as an interpolation. See the evidence in Tregelles, or Westcott and Hort, or in Tischendorf's Eighth Edition.

<sup>2</sup> It was found in at least one MS. in the latter half of the second century ; for it is quoted by Irenæus, who was in active life from the year 170 to 210. His words are : *ὡς αὐτὸς ὁ εὐνοῦχος πεισθεὶς καὶ παραντίκα ἀζῶν βαπτισθῆναι, ἔλεγε, Πιστεῦω τὸν υἱὸν εἶναι Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν* ; when the eunuch himself was persuaded, and thought proper to be baptized immediately, and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Cyprian quotes the passage as follows : " Behold water ; what is it that hinders me to be baptized ? " Then Philip said, " If thou believest from the whole heart, thou mayest." *Ecce aqua, quid est quod me impedit baptizari ? Tunc dixit Philippus, si credis ex toto cardo tuo licit* (Cyprian's Works, 318).

<sup>3</sup> As a recent and striking example, we quote the following remarks from the Expositor's Bible, by Prof. G. T. Stokes, on this

form of the ordinance of baptism. It is clearly seen that neither Philip nor the eunuch would have gone into the water if the purpose had been to merely sprinkle or pour a small quantity of water upon the latter. The same reasons precisely which now keep preachers who practice sprinkling out of the water would have kept Philip and the eunuch out of it. On the other hand, the same necessity which now compels those who practice immersion to go into the water for the purpose compelled Philip and the eunuch to do so; and from this conclusion the candid mind can find no escape. If we knew nothing at all of the meaning of the word baptize, whether in English or Greek, except the single fact that some say it means to sprinkle, and others that it means to immerse, this passage alone would settle the question forever with all whose minds are free to follow implicitly the obvious meaning of the Scriptures. The account of the eunuch's conversion administers rebuke at several points to many teachers of our age, and it should call them back with trembling to the teaching and practice of the inspired evangelists.

The removal of Philip after the baptism may have been miraculous, so far as the meaning of the expression "caught away" is concerned; and this meaning agrees best with the expression, "found at Azotus;" or it may have been by a sudden command, such as that which

---

passage: "The Ethiopian eunuch baptized by St. Philip in the wilderness could not have been immersed. He came to a stream trickling along, scarcely sufficient to lave his feet, or perhaps rather to a well in the desert; the water was deep down, and reached only, as in the case of Jacob's well, by a rope or chain. Even if the water could have been reached, common sense, not to speak of any higher motive, would have forbidden the pollution of an element so needful for human life" (page 143).

caused him to run and overtake the eunuch's chariot (29, 30); and this agrees better with the reason given why the eunuch saw him no more, "for he went on his way rejoicing." This reason implies that if he had not gone on his way, he might have followed Philip on *his* way. The evident purpose of the writer is to show that it was the Spirit who caused his departure from the presence of the eunuch, and to leave the exact method of his removal in obscurity, as a matter of no importance to his readers. The circumstance worthy of note is that Philip was not allowed to remain longer in company with his new convert, as he would naturally desire to do in order to his further instruction. It was God's will that the man should go on his way to his native land, and work out his own salvation (together, perhaps, with that of many other persons) by building upon the elementary instruction which he had now received. With many men this would doubtless be unsafe; but God knew his man; and it was because he knew him that he had taken the deliberate steps which we have traced to bring him to himself in Christ.

Notwithstanding this sudden separation from his teacher, and the necessity of going on his way with so little knowledge of his newly found Saviour, the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing." His rejoicing sprang from the experience of that which Paul afterward set forth to an audience of Jews: "Through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and in him every<sup>3</sup>one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified in the law of Moses" (xiii. 38, 39). It is impossible that Philip failed to tell him, as did Peter his converts, the connection of remission of sins with repentance and baptism; and now that he had complied

with the conditions of pardon, he rejoices in the experience of it.

Our conception of this case of conversion will lack completeness if we fail to look at it from another point of view which the account enables us to take. Should a friend have met the eunuch after he parted from Philip, and inquired as to the cause of the joy so manifest in his countenance, the recital would have presented the facts of the conversion from his point of view, rather than from that of the historian. He would not have begun the story, as our author does, with the visit of the angel to Philip; for of this he knew nothing; he would not have mentioned the command of the Holy Spirit, "Go join thyself to this chariot;" for of this he was equally ignorant; but his story would have been about this: I had been to Jerusalem to worship. I had started for home; and as I rode in my chariot I opened the book of Isaiah and commenced reading. I came upon the passage so much puzzling to our scribes, in which the prophet speaks of the humiliation and death of some one for the good of the world; and I was laboring hard to determine in my own mind of whom the prophet wrote those words, when suddenly there appeared running by the side of my chariot a footman, who inquired, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" His manner indicated that he understood it, and it seemed providential that he came to me at the very moment when I needed his help. I invited him to take a seat with me; I pointed to the passage, and stated to him my difficulty. In a short time he made it perfectly plain to me that the passage referred to the long looked for Messiah; and that this great personage, instead of reigning here on earth, as our scribes have taught us, was to die a sacrifice



for our sins ; to rise from the dead, ascend to heaven whence he came, and to establish his kingdom over both men and angels. He convinced me of the truth of all this, and showed me that through that man's blood, by faith in him and repentance and baptism in his name, we are to receive the remission of sins which the law could not give us. While he was still speaking to me these good tidings of great joy, we came to a certain water, and I requested the baptism in which he had instructed me. He baptized me ; he then turned away as abruptly as he had come to me ; but I have come on my way rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins, and in the assured hope of everlasting life. Such was the experience of this man up to the moment that the curtain of history drops and hides him from our view. Happily, as we lose sight of him the sounds that come back to us are notes of joy, and we may hope to meet him at the point where all our journeys end, and to rejoice with him forever. His ready faith and prompt obedience give evidence of such a character that we may believe he will bring many sheaves with him in the great harvest.<sup>1</sup>

The Azotus at which Philip was found is the Ashdod of the Old Testament, one of the five cities of the Philistines. It stood a few miles from the seashore, nearly at a right angle to the line of the eunuch's travel, and probably fifteen miles distant. From that place to Cæsarea, the terminal point of the labors of Philip here mentioned, is about sixty miles ; and the region in which

---

<sup>1</sup> Very naturally, the Christians of Ethiopia (now Abyssinia) afterward ascribed to the eunuch the introduction of Christianity into their country ; and they have some traditions in regard to his subsequent career, but none of them is sufficiently authenticated to deserve our attention.

he labored was the old land of Philistia as far north as Joppa, and the plain of Sharon thence thirty miles north to Cæsarea. At Azotus this plain is about sixteen miles wide, and about ten at Cæsarea; and all the way it is exceedingly productive. At that time it was thickly set with villages and small cities, many of which, in a state of decay, remain to the present time. It was a field for evangelization sufficient to occupy many years of Philip's life. We shall see traces of the probable effects of his work as we proceed.

---

## SEC. II. — THE CONVERSION AND EARLY LABORS OF SAUL.

(IX. 1-31.)

### 1. HIS JOURNEY TO DAMASCUS, 1-9.

Vv. 1, 2. From the conversion of a nobleman, whose home was in a distant land, our author now turns to that of the most noted enemy of the church at the time. He has already introduced Saul to his readers, in the account of Stephen's martyrdom; for this most laborious and self-sacrificing of all the apostles first appears on the page of history standing by when Stephen was stoned, with the clothing of the witnesses against him lying at his feet. His own statements concerning himself enable us to trace his history to a still earlier period. The early education and ancestral remembrances of a man have much to do with forming his character and shaping his career. Those of Saul were well calculated to thrust him into the very course of action in

which he first figures in Luke's narrative. He was born in the famous Greek city of Tarsus, on the banks of the river Cydnus in Cilicia.<sup>1</sup> This city was then a seat of Greek learning, almost rivaling Athens and Alexandria;<sup>2</sup> and on account of its situation on a navigable river, and near to the mountain passes leading into the interior of Asia Minor to the north, and of Syria to the east,<sup>3</sup> it was the center of an extensive commerce. Here he acquired in childhood a knowledge of the Greek language, and of the manners and customs of the Greeks, which served him a good purpose in after life. At the same time he was carefully guarded by other influences against the evil effects of the heathen society around him. He was of pure Jewish extraction, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, and descended from pious ancestors."<sup>4</sup> This insured his careful instruction in Jewish history, and in the law of Moses. His parents

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> "So great is the zeal of the inhabitants for philosophy and all other encyclical training, that they have surpassed even Athens and Alexandria, and every other place one could mention in which philosophical and philological schools have arisen" (Strabo, xiv. 4).

<sup>3</sup> The plain in which Tarsus is situated is bounded on the north and northwest by a lofty range of mountains, covered with snow the greater part of the year. The region beyond is reached by a pass through this range called the Gates of Cilicia, because it was the only means of access to Cilicia from the west. Another range bounds Cilicia on the east, and through it there are two other well known passes, called the Amanid and the Syrian Gates, which give access to Syria. Tarsus is now an insignificant town of about ten thousand inhabitants; but a railway has been recently constructed from the sea coast through and beyond Adanah, and this may lead to a partial renewal of its ancient importance.

<sup>4</sup> Phil. iii. 4, 5; II. Tim. i. 3.

were Pharisees,<sup>1</sup> and his understanding of the Scriptures was therefore modified by the peculiar interpretations and traditions of that sect.

Besides this religious instruction, he was taught the trade of a tent-maker.<sup>2</sup> The goat's hair which was used for the manufacture of rude garments and tent cloth, was produced in great quantities in the mountains of Cilicia, and the manufactured article acquired the name *κίλκιον* (Latin, *Cilicium*), from the name of the province. The fact that he afterward received an expensive intellectual education proves that his father put him to this humble trade, not through necessity, but in compliance with the Jewish conception, that some form of manual labor was an important part of the education of every boy.<sup>3</sup> The trade was of great service to him in some of the darker days of his subsequent life.<sup>4</sup>

It was only his childhood that was thus devoted to parental instruction and to the acquirement of the Greek language and a trade; for he was "brought up" at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Under the instruction of this learned Pharisee, whose prudence and calmness we have had occasion to notice in connection with the trial of the twelve apostles (v. 33-39), his knowledge of the law was enlarged, his zeal for it inflamed, and his Pharisaic prejudices intensified. His progress in this Bible school is thus described by himself: "I advanced

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxiii. 6.    <sup>2</sup> Acts xviii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> In the Talmud Gamaliel is quoted as saying, "Learning of any kind, unaccompanied by a trade, ends in nothing, and leads to sin;" Rabbi Meir, as saying, "Let a man always teach his sons pure and easy trades;" and Rabbi Judah, as saying, "Not to teach one's son a trade is like teaching him robbery" (Farrar's *Life of Paul*, p. 14, n. 1).

<sup>4</sup> Acts xviii. 3; xx. 34; I. Thess. ii. 9.    <sup>5</sup> Acts xxii. 3.

in the Jews' religion beyond many of mine own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers."<sup>1</sup> This preëminence in scholarship and zeal was accompanied by the strictest religious deportment, so that after the lapse of many years he could appeal to those who knew him in his youth, though now his enemies, to testify that according to the strictest sect of their religion he had lived a Pharisee; and he could even declare that as touching the law he was blameless.<sup>2</sup> Such was his character and reputation previous to his appearance on the pages of Acts.

It is not probable that Saul was in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, or for several years previous. If he had been, it is unaccountable that in all his speeches and epistles he makes no allusion to a personal knowledge of events in the life of Jesus. At the time of Stephen's death he must have been at least thirty years of age,<sup>3</sup> and he had probably been out of school for ten or more years. The supposition that he had returned to Tarsus previous to the beginning of John's ministry, and had reappeared in Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus, is most agreeable to all the known facts in the case. When the conflict arose between Stephen and the Jews of the foreign synagogue, Saul was almost certainly one of the Cilicians who encountered him (vi. 9); and his superior learning in the law naturally placed him in the front rank of the disputants. He was apparently a member of the Sanhedrin,<sup>4</sup> and he

---

<sup>1</sup> Gal. i. 14. <sup>2</sup> Acts xxvi. 4, 5; Phil. iii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> He is called "a young man" at the time, but his leadership implies an age as well advanced as would be consistent with styling him a young man, and points to about thirty.

<sup>4</sup> If we are to understand his remark (chap. xxvi. 10), "When they were condemned to death, I gave my vote against them,"

certainly took the part of a leader of that body when they turned into a mob and stoned Stephen; for "the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul;" and the formal statement is made that "Saul was consenting unto his death."<sup>1</sup> After the death of Stephen he still maintained the position of a leader in the persecution, until the church was dispersed. In the course of this persecution others besides Stephen were put to death, while many were scourged in the synagogues to make them blaspheme the name of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

When the church in Jerusalem had been scattered abroad, Saul doubtless thought that he had effectually destroyed the hated sect: but the news soon began to come back from various quarters, that the scattered disciples were establishing congregations in every direction. One less persistent than Saul might now have despaired of success in suppressing a faith which had thus far been promoted by every attack made upon it, and which had seemed to gather renewed life from apparent destruction; but he had a will that rose to higher resolve as obstacles multiplied before it, and thus he is represented in the text which must now come before us. (1) But Saul, yet

literally, he was certainly a member of some tribunal which decided the fate of the disciples in this persecution; and no other is known except the Sanhedrin. Against the supposition that he was a member of this body, nothing is alleged except a tradition among later Jewish writers, that no one could be a member who was not of mature age, or who was not a married man (Gloag, Lechler, Hackett on xxvi. 10). As for the latter qualification, Farrar gives very plausible if not conclusive reasons for believing that Saul was married in early life, and had become a widower (Life of Paul, chap. iv). Both objections, however, are without the support of well established facts.

<sup>1</sup> Chap. vii. 58; viii. 1. <sup>2</sup> Chap. xxvi. 11.



breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, (2) and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. The plurality of synagogues in Damascus here indicated shows that the city contained a very considerable Jewish population; and with this agrees the statement of Josephus, that not less than ten thousand Jews were slain in a tumult there in the reign of Nero.<sup>1</sup> When the news reached Jerusalem that the faith of Jesus was being propagated in this large Jewish community, the exasperation of Saul and his fellow persecutors knew no bounds; and as Damascus was the nearest foreign city of great importance, it was at once selected as the first point for the pursuit of the scattered disciples. Under ordinary circumstances such letters as Saul carried would not have empowered him to arrest men in a foreign city, and to bring them away in bonds; but he had reason to believe, from considerations which must now be only a matter of conjecture, that the authorities in Damascus would permit him thus to act; and that he was correct is apparent from the readiness with which the governor of the city afterward lent the aid of his guards for the purpose of arresting Saul himself.<sup>2</sup>

Vv. 3, 4. It is impossible for a man to be in a frame of mind less favorable to conversion to Christ, than was Saul when he started on this mad expedition. How striking the contrast between him, breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of Christ, as he started for a foreign city to arrest and imprison them, and the eunuch, reading thoughtfully the prophet

---

<sup>1</sup> Wars, ii. 25. <sup>2</sup> II. Cor. xi. 32.

Isaiah as he started on a peaceful journey to his distant home. Yet the gospel of Christ shows its wonderful power of adaptation by turning both into the way of salvation. The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus is about one hundred and forty miles. The most usual route of travel was northward along the dividing ridge of the mountain range through Bethel and Shechem to Jezreel; thence westward to Bethshan on the bluff leading down into the Jordan valley; thence up that valley to a stone bridge across the Jordan which is standing in good condition to this day;<sup>1</sup> and thence along the elevated plateau east of the Jordan valley to Damascus. During the last day's journey the road passes along the eastern base of Mount Hermon, whose snow-capped summit bounds the horizon on the left. The storm of passion with which Saul started on this journey would naturally have subsided in some degree during the four or five days of travel, leaving him in a mood better suited to the interview which Christ had made ready for him. (3) And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he came nigh unto Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven: (4) and he fell upon the earth, and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Luke omits several important details of the scene which he now describes, because they are supplied to his readers in two speeches which he quotes from Paul farther on.<sup>2</sup> It is proper that we also leave them out of sight while we attempt to realize the scene as Luke aims to set it before us. We are not here told how Saul knew that the light which suddenly shone

---

<sup>1</sup> See a description of this bridge in the author's *Lands of the Bible*, 354.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xxii. 6-10; xxvi. 12-18.

around him was a "light out of heaven:" it is sufficient to know that it was of such a character as to leave no doubt on this point. It was of such a nature that when it shone upon him "he fell upon the earth;" and he was too brave a man to be thus unnerved without an adequate cause. That it was a miracle, he must have instantly perceived; and when the voice came, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" the word persecute conveyed too plain a reference to his course toward the disciples to be misunderstood. It was also unmistakably manifest that the voice, as the light, came out of heaven; but who the speaker was, whether Stephen, or some other disciple whom he had slain, or some other mysterious personage, he could not know from these words, so he immediately inquires who it is.

Vv. 5, 6. (5) And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: (6) but rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou shalt do. It is impossible for us, who have been familiar with the glory of the risen Christ from infancy, to fully realize the thoughts and feelings which flashed like lightning into the soul of Saul, on hearing these words. Up to this moment he had held Jesus to be an impostor cursed of God and man, and his followers blasphemers worthy of death; but now this hated being is suddenly revealed to him in a blaze of divine glory. The evidence of eyes and ears can not be doubted. There he stands,<sup>1</sup> with the light of heaven and the glory of God around him, and he says, "I am Jesus." Stephen then was right, and I have shed innocent blood. "O

---

<sup>1</sup>That Saul saw Jesus, though not stated here, is expressly stated by Ananias (17), by Barnabas (27), and by Saul himself (I. Cor. xv. 8).

wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The die is cast. The proud spirit yields, and the current of that mighty soul is turned back in its channel, to flow forever deeply and strongly in the opposite direction.

VER. 7. At this point Luke reveals the fact that Saul was not alone, and he mentions briefly the deportment of the men who were with him. (7) And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but beholding no man. This is not the statement of a writer who is conscious of inventing a story, and taking care to bolster it up with fictitious evidence: otherwise he would not have admitted that the only persons who could have been joint witnesses with Saul of the presence of Jesus did not see him. The fact that they did not, if he really appeared, can be accounted for on one of only two suppositions; either that Jesus purposely kept himself concealed from them while appearing to Saul; or that they failed, for some cause unmentioned in the text, to turn their eyes in that direction. The real cause will appear farther on.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime these companions, though not able to say who spoke to Saul, were competent witnesses to the facts that the light appeared, that a voice was heard from the midst of it, and to the blindness of Saul which followed as an immediate result.

Vv. 8, 9. But for the last words spoken by Jesus, "Rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou shalt do," Saul would not have known what step next to take; but having received this command, he obeyed it as best he could. (8) And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw noth-

---

<sup>1</sup> See under chap. xxii. 9; xxvi. 14.

ing: and they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. (9) And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink. The words, "when his eyes were opened," do not imply that they had been closed from the instant that the light first appeared; for then he could not have seen Jesus. Moreover, had he closed them then, the light would not have blinded him. The narrative plainly implies that he gazed into the light as long as he could endure the glare; and that he closed his eyes when he could bear the pain no longer. When he arose, which may have been after some moments spent in an effort to steady his nerves, he instinctively opened his eyes, and found himself blind. The words, "they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus," imply that he and they were on foot, a very common mode of journeying in those days, and not on horses or camels, as imagination has so often painted them. His abstinence from both food and drink can be accounted for only by his extreme misery while brooding over his awful crimes and waiting to be told what to do. The three days are doubtless to be understood, according to the Jewish count, as including the remnant of the day in which he arrived, the following day, and so much of the third day as had passed when he obtained relief.

## 2. SAUL IS BAPTIZED, 10-19.

Vv. 10-12. The Lord purposely left Saul three days in the throes of agony which his new convictions had brought upon him, before telling him, according to promise, what he should do. This delay fixed the attention of all the unbelieving Jews who surrounded him, and tried in vain to comfort him, upon the cause of his distress and of his blindness; and thus, as we shall see

below, a good purpose was subserved.<sup>1</sup> The manner in which relief was at last sent to him is now described. (10) Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said unto him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. (11) 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 prayeth; (12) and he hath seen a man named Ananias coming in, and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight. In this communication the Lord speaks to Ananias as if Saul were totally unknown to him, and he reveals the fact, which we might have conjectured, that in the midst of his remorse Saul was engaged in earnest prayer. The vision here mentioned had been granted to Saul for the obvious purpose of giving him hope that his eyesight would be restored; and it was made to conform to that which actually occurred, in order that when it occurred Saul might see in the correspondence the hand of God. The street called Straight is still unmistakably identified in Damascus by its contrast with all the other streets of the city; for while all the others are very crooked, making curves or abrupt angles at intervals of from fifty to one hundred yards, this runs nearly a mile with only five slight angles. The mention of this street by name, together with the name of Judas, in whose house Saul was staying, affords no mean evidence of the authenticity of this narrative.

Vv. 13-16. This communication from the Lord imposed on Ananias a very unwelcome task. (13) But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to thy saints at Jerusalem:

---

<sup>1</sup> See under 19-22.



(14) and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name. (15) But the Lord said to him, Go thy way : for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel : (16) for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake. Here the term saints is applied to the disciples by Ananias in a way to indicate that it had already acquired this use, although this is the first occurrence of it in the New Testament. It designates them as men of holy living. The equivalent expression, them that "call on thy name," is also used for the same persons. The name referred to is that of the Lord Jesus ; for it is he who holds the conversation with Ananias. The latter speaks of Saul's persecuting career in Jerusalem as a matter of hearsay with himself, from which we infer that he was not one of those who had fled from Jerusalem after the death of Stephen, but rather one who had been baptized there during the peaceful period previous to that persecution. How he had heard that Saul came to Damascus to bind all who there called on the name of Jesus, when none seemed to know this but the companions of Saul, is not easily determined, unless we suppose that the apostles who had remained in Jerusalem had sent runners ahead of Saul's company, to warn the Damascus disciples of the impending danger. This is highly probable.

Ananias found, as all others have who have ventured to argue against a command of the Lord, that he listens to no such argument. The answer, "Go thy way," settled this ; but the Lord vouchsafed to inform him that he had placed an estimate on Saul far different from that which any one would have supposed. In the figure of a "chosen vessel" to bear the name of Jesus before Gen-

tiles and kings and Israelites, he compares Saul to a carefully selected casket, in which a jewel rich enough for a present to a king is to be deposited, that jewel being his own precious name. Jewelers always keep costly gems in caskets of corresponding value; and so, when Jesus is about to send his name to kings and the great ones of earth, he chooses this persecuting Saul as the fittest vessel in which to enclose it. The selection was a most surprising one to Ananias; but subsequent events proved its wisdom. Long afterward Saul himself employed the same figure of speech, having doubtless caught it from the lips of Ananias; but he changes it materially, saying, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not of us."<sup>1</sup> While to Christ he was a choice vessel, in his own eyes he was but a vessel of pottery. Ananias was perhaps not much less surprised when the Lord added, as showing a consequence of Saul's being so choice a vessel, "I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake." This remark fixes attention on the fact, observable in all of God's dealings with the choice spirits of this earth, that when he calls men to positions of high honor and distinguished usefulness, he calls them to a life of suffering. This proved afterward to be preëminently the case with Saul.

Vv. 17-19. By these words of the Lord the natural fear of the persecutor, which made Ananias object to going to him, was removed. (17) And Ananias departed, and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, he 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

---

<sup>1</sup> II. Cor. iv. 6, 7.

filled with the Holy Spirit. (18) And straightway there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight; and he arose and was baptized; (19) and he received food and was strengthened. It does not appear, from the narrative how Ananias had learned that Jesus had appeared to Saul on the way. It is most likely that he had learned it from what was told by those who conversed with Saul in the house of Judas, the report of it having spread rapidly among the Jews of the city. He addressed him with the endearing title, "brother," not because he was a brother Israelite, but because he was now a fellow believer, and in the way of obedience. That which fell from his eyes, compared to scales, was undoubtedly a deposit caused by the acute inflammation consequent upon the glare of the light from heaven. Observe, too, that it was not something that merely appeared to Saul as if it fell from his eyes, as some interpreters would have it,<sup>1</sup> but something which did so fall, as Luke expressly declares. In the statement, "and he arose and was baptized," there is an omission of the command to that effect, which must have been uttered; and this is further proof that Luke has purposely abbreviated the narrative. The omission is supplied in Paul's account quoted at xxii. 14-16. The place of the baptism is likewise omitted; but the river Abana runs through the midst of the city, and affords abundant facilities for baptism in itself, besides supplying many artificial pools in the courts of the larger buildings.<sup>2</sup>

The statement of Ananias, that he had been sent that Saul might "be filled with the Holy Spirit," is commonly interpreted as implying that the Holy Spirit was to be

---

<sup>1</sup> Lechler, Hackett, and others.

<sup>2</sup> See Plumptre *in loco*, and Lands of the Bible, 551, 552, 558.

imparted by imposition of hands.<sup>1</sup> But we have seen already that when the Samaritan converts of Philip were to receive the miraculous gift of the Spirit, two apostles were sent to them for the purpose of imparting it, from which we inferred that Philip had not this power. This makes us slow to believe that the power was given to Ananias; yet we would be shut up to this conclusion if there were no alternative. There is, however, an alternative which makes this conclusion not only unnecessary, but highly improbable. We have learned, from Peter's first discourse, that all who repented and were baptized received the Holy Spirit; and it follows that Saul received the Spirit when Ananias baptized him. This made his reception of the Holy Spirit dependent on the coming of Ananias, and it sufficiently accounts for the words of the latter, without resorting to the improbable supposition that he was empowered to do that which none but apostles could ordinarily do. Let it also be observed at this point that Ananias was almost certainly an unofficial disciple (verse 10), and that we here have an example of a baptism by unofficial hands. It shows that, whatever may be true as a matter of ordinary propriety, the validity of the ordinance by no means depends upon its administration by an officer of the church, or a preacher.

The fact that immediately after his baptism Saul "took food and was strengthened," implies that the remorse which had led to his extreme fast had then passed away; and this agrees with the promise of remission of sins in baptism. See more on this point under xxii. 16.

If now, before we leave this case of conversion, we pause to distinguish the human and the divine in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Plumptre, Gloag, Lechler.

agencies by which it was effected, and their connections one with the other, we shall better understand how Saul was brought to Christ. The foremost characteristic of this case is the fact that the Lord Jesus was himself the preacher. It was his word proclaimed out of the light from heaven, and proved to be divine by that miraculous light in which he appeared, that made Saul a believer, and brought him to repentance. Faith came, as in all other cases, from hearing the word. But while the Lord was the preacher, and while his word caused the sinner to believe and repent, there was still something for the sinner to do before finding peace, and for information concerning this the Lord sends him to Damascus instead of giving it himself. While waiting for this information, although he suffers the keenest pangs of penitence, and pours out his soul in prayer, his sins are still unforgiven, showing that justification is not immediately consequent upon faith and repentance. In this unhappy condition he remains for three days, because no one has come to tell him what to do. This is another peculiarity of his case, no other convert of whom we read having experienced a similar delay. The delay was the Lord's doing; for no one who could tell him what to do dared to go near him, and the Lord had not yet sent Ananias. As Saul knew not for whom to send, and as neither Ananias nor any other disciple would come if left to himself, a divine interposition was necessary, as in the case of Philip's mission to the eunuch; and so, instead of sending an angel, as in that case, the Lord himself spoke to Ananias. Thus a human messenger is made to tell the sinner what to do, even after the Lord himself has appeared to him, and the human messenger helps him to do what he is told to do by baptizing him. When

he is baptized his grief and fasting are at an end, his sins are forgiven, and here the story of his conversion comes to an end.

### 3. SAUL PREACHES IN DAMASCUS, 19-25.

Vv. 19-22. No sooner had Saul obeyed the gospel and received pardon than he began to devote all his energies to building up what he had sought to tear down. (19) And he was certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. (20) And straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God. (21) And all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of them who called on this name? and he hath come hither for this intent, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests. (22) But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ. The "certain days" (*ἡμέρας τινάς*) of verse 19 are most naturally understood as including the time of the preaching next mentioned; and the "straightway" (*εὐθέως*) of verse 20, as starting not from the close of the certain days, but from Saul's baptism. Undoubtedly the very day he was baptized all the disciples in the city gathered about him and took him at once into their fellowship; and on the very next Sabbath, whether it was one day or six days later, he began his preaching in the synagogue, this being his first opportunity. It may be that some of the synagogues were opened on other days of the week after he had begun to preach, thus giving him more frequent opportunities than the regular meetings allowed. The first effect of this preaching was amazement to hear the man who had "made havoc" of the church in Jerusalem, and had



come to Damascus for a similar purpose, preaching the faith which he had sought to destroy. The next effect is that they were "confounded" by Saul's proofs that Jesus is the Christ. In the words, "Saul increased the more in strength," the comparison is with the strength mentioned in 19 v., "he took food and was strengthened;" and the reference is to the restoration of his physical strength after the exhausting fast and agony of the three days previous. Such an experience would greatly enfeeble a very stout man, and he might be many days recovering from its effects.

This preaching by Saul was a protracted effort to convert to the faith the Jews who dwelt in Damascus; and although we have no evidence that any were convinced, they were at least "confounded." This was the result of Saul's fresh and independent testimony to the resurrection and glorification of Jesus. He had not, like the original apostles, seen the Lord after his resurrection and previous to his ascension, but he had seen him descend from heaven in his glorified body, and his testimony was fully equal to that which had been borne by Peter. If any man in Damascus doubted his truthfulness, his traveling companions could testify with him to the reality of the light from heaven, and the voice which proceeded out of the midst of the light, while his own blindness, better known to the unbelievers than to the believers, could not have resulted from conceiving or telling a lie. If in any mind the thought arose that he had been deceived by some optical or mental illusion, it was dissipated by the consideration that the blindness could not have resulted from such a cause. Thus the blindness served to cut off all escape from the conclusion that his report of the vision was true; and if the vision

was a reality, there was no room to doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. The blindness had been protracted, involving the delay of his baptism mentioned above (p. 179), for the very purpose of fixing it in the minds of the people, and especially in the minds of the unbelieving Jews, that it might finally serve this important purpose. Such is the force of his testimony as it appeared to those who heard him in Damascus. To ourselves it stands thus: If the vision which he claimed to have witnessed was a reality, then Jesus is the Christ, and his religion is divine. His blindness, which there can be no reason to doubt, precludes the supposition that he was deceived. Was he then a deceiver? His whole subsequent career, as related both by Luke and himself, declares that he was not: for all the motives derived from both time and eternity which can move men to deception were arrayed against the course which he afterward pursued. His reputation among men, his hopes of wealth and power, his love of friendship, and his personal safety, all demanded that he should maintain his former religious position. In making the change he knowingly sacrificed all of these, and, if he was practicing deception, he exposed himself to the punishment which he believed the wicked would receive in eternity. It is possible to believe that a man might, through miscalculation as to immediate results, begin to practice a deception involving such consequences, but it is incredible that he should continue to do so after his mistake was discovered, and that he should persist in it through a long life. It is incredible, therefore, that Saul was a deceiver; <sup>1</sup> and as

---

<sup>1</sup> It is evidence such as this which constrains the author of "Supernatural Religion," one of the most radical infidel works

he was neither deceived himself, nor a deceiver of others, his vision must have been a reality, and Jesus who appeared to him is what he proved him to be, the Son of God.<sup>1</sup>

Vv. 23-25. Saul now sees enacted in Damascus a scene like some in which he had played a part in Jerusalem, but with his own part reversed. He experiences some of the ill treatment which he had heaped upon others. (23) And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel together to kill him: (24) but their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates also day and night that they might kill him: (25) but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket. From this account it appears that when he heard of their plot he hid himself; but his enemies, thinking that he would try to escape through one of the gates of the city, and that thus they would be sure of finding him, kept constant watch for him. This watching also became known to his friends, which shows that they too were on the watch, and they provided for him another mode of escape. Along the eastern wall of Damascus some of the houses are built against the wall, with upper stories of wood resting on the top of the

---

published in England within the present generation, to say: "As to the apostle Paul himself, let it be said in the strongest and most emphatic manner possible, that we do not suggest the most distant suspicion of the sincerity of any historical statement he makes" (vol. iii. 496).

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lyttleton's small work on the conversion of Paul, in which he proved the divine origin of the Christian faith from this incident alone, has never been answered. The theories by which Renan, Baur and Strauss have attempted to account for Paul's belief that he saw Jesus, without admitting the fact, are considered in my *Evidences of Christianity*, Part III., chap. xi.

wall; and there are also a few such on the southern wall.<sup>1</sup> Out of a window in any of these a man might now be let down in the way described in the text;<sup>2</sup> and the same was doubtless true in ancient times. In case of a siege, when the wall must be surmounted by soldiers, these wooden superstructures could be torn away in a few hours.

This attempt to kill Saul is the third effect of his preaching on the unbelieving Jews. The first was amazement that he should preach Jesus at all (21); the second, confusion when they heard his testimony for Jesus (22); and third, their plot to kill him. This last effect was seen "when many days were fulfilled," an indefinite expression which might mean a few weeks, a few months, or a few years. We learn from Saul's own statement in Galatians (i. 17, 18), that his escape occurred three years after his conversion, and that within this period he had made an excursion into Arabia.<sup>3</sup> How

---

<sup>1</sup> Lands of the Bible, 559.    <sup>2</sup> Cf. II. Cor. xi. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Two contradictions are here alleged between Luke's account and that of Paul's: first, that Luke's "many days" can not include Paul "three years;" and second, that whereas Luke says that Saul preached in Damascus "immediately," Paul says he went "immediately into Arabia." As to the first, we may as well say, that when Joshua remarks to the Israelites, "Ye dwelt in the wilderness a long season" (Josh. xxiv. 7), while Moses says they were there forty years, there is here a contradiction, because a long *season* is not equal to forty years. Or, taking the opposite expression, as well say of Job's remark, "Man is of few days and full of trouble," that according to this men in Job's days lived only a *few days*, contradicting the statement that Job himself lived one hundred and forty years after his affliction (Job xiv. 1; xlii. 16). The case of Shimei is still more in point. When spared by Solomon on condition that he should not depart from Jerusalem, he "dwelt in Jerusalem many days;" yet he went out of the city "at the end of three years" (I. Kings ii. 36-40). As

far he had gone into Arabia, or how long he had remained there, he does not intimate; but he says that after that excursion he returned to Damascus, and it is easy to see that the attempt to kill him occurred after this return. He also says that "the governor under Aretas the king guarded the city of the Damascenes, in order to take me" (II. Cor. ii. 32); which shows that Damascus was then under the dominion of Aretas, who

---

for the second allegation, it is not true that Paul's language contradicts that of Luke. If we read it with the question in mind, Does he say that he went immediately into Arabia? I think we shall answer that he does not. He says: "But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them who were apostles before me: but I went into Arabia; and again I returned into Damascus" (Gal. i. 15-17). Here are four statements: first, that he did not confer with flesh and blood; second, that he did not go up to Jerusalem to the older apostles; third, that he went into Arabia; and fourth, that he returned into Damascus. Which of these does "immediately" qualify? Certainly not the last; for he did not immediately return to Damascus. And if not the last, why the third? These two are the things which he did; and they are set over by the conjunction "but" against the two things which he did not do. But does "immediately" really qualify either of these directly? Did he mean to say, I immediately did not confer? I immediately did not go? Or is there not something understood which immediately qualifies more directly? He is speaking of being called to preach; and what can he mean, but that he immediately commenced preaching without conferring with flesh and blood, without going up to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles. That, still further, in prosecution of this preaching, which he immediately began, he went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus, all of this, before he went up to Jerusalem to see Peter? If this is the train of thought in the passage, and it seems to yield no other, then instead of contradicting Luke's assertion that he preached immediately in Damascus, it confirms it.

was king of Arabia, and that the Jews had his coöperation in the attempt to arrest Saul in the gates. Furthermore, as Damascus was at that time under the king of Arabia,<sup>1</sup> the country south of and adjacent to it must also have been overrun by his forces, and for the time in which he held it it would be styled a part of Arabia. Saul's excursion, then, may have been into this region for the purpose of preaching in its cities and villages;<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Because there is no other historical account of this temporary possession of Damascus by Aretas, Paul's statement of it has been called in question; but he was thoroughly well informed concerning the political relation of the city at the time he was preaching in it; and as his statement is that of an eye witness, and a thoroughly reliable man, no better authority for the fact can be desired.

<sup>2</sup> I here quote from my *Evidences of Christianity*, Part III., chap. viii.: "The conjecture that Paul's excursion into Arabia was not for the purpose of preaching, but for the purpose of meditating on his new relations to Christ, and preparing himself mentally for the work now before him, although it is adopted by such men as Alford, Lightfoot and Farrar, appears to me to be so utterly at variance with the restless activity and burning zeal of the apostle, as to be altogether incredible. The addition to this conjecture, that he went as far as Mount Sinai, more than four hundred miles from Damascus, whither Elijah had retired before him, instead of confirming the original hypothesis, seems rather to weaken it; for Paul knew very well that when Elijah went thither he was rebuked by the Lord, who said, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' and that he was ordered back to his work. In the absence of all evidence for this conjecture, we should be governed in judging of the purpose of the excursion by what we know of Paul's habits during the remainder of his life; and by this standard we should judge that he was one of the last men on earth to waste any precious moments, not to speak of a year or two, in meditation in the desert, while the cause which he had espoused was now struggling for its very existence. See the views of Alford and Lightfoot in their commentaries on Galatians, and those of Farrar in his *Life of Paul*, chap. xi.



and it may have been his activity in this work which aroused the Jewish opposition to its highest pitch, and at the same time enabled them to enlist the Arabian governor in their plot.

#### 4. SAUL RETURNS TO JERUSALEM, AND IS SENT TO TARSUS, 26-30.

Vv. 26, 27. The mortification of Saul at being compelled to thus escape from the scene of his first labors in the gospel was long remembered to be mentioned many years after when he would speak of the things which concerned his weakness.<sup>1</sup> He had not yet seen any of those who were apostles before him, since he left them in Jerusalem to go on his murderous mission to Damascus. He now turns his steps in that direction, determined to go up and see Peter.<sup>2</sup> Early in the night's journey he passed the spot where Jesus had met him. We shall not attempt to depict his emotions when the walls of Jerusalem and the battlements of the temple came once more into view. As he approached the city, he saw the place of the crucifixion, and he may have passed near the spot where Stephen was stoned, and where he himself had stood "consenting to his death." He was about to meet again, on the streets and in the synagogues, his old allies whom he had deserted, and some of the disciples whom he had persecuted. The tumult of his emotions we leave to the imagination of the reader, and their portrayal to the pages of more voluminous writers,<sup>3</sup> while we follow Luke's account of his reception among the disciples. (20) And when he was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to

---

<sup>1</sup> II. Cor. xi. 30-33. <sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 18.

<sup>3</sup> See especially *Life and Epistles*, by Conybeare and Howson; and Farrar's *Life of Paul*.

join himself to the disciples : and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. (27) 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 Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. From this it appears that at first "all the disciples were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple;" and that his attempt to "join himself" to them was repulsed. However painful this may have been to him, it was probably not a surprise ; for how could he expect them to believe him a genuine disciple, after experiencing what they had at his hands ? It is scarcely possible that they had not heard some report of his conversion ; but as they must have supposed him capable of any device by which to gain an advantage over them, it was impossible for them, except on the strongest evidence, to believe that his conversion was genuine. Barnabas was the first to become fully convinced. Moved by the generous impulses characteristic of him, he may have sought an interview with Saul, or the latter, having some knowledge of Barnabas, may have approached him as the one most likely to grant him a candid hearing. In either case, it would not be difficult for Barnabas to credit the unvarnished story, told, as it must have been, with an earnestness and pathos which no impostor could assume. When Barnabas was once convinced, it was easy for him to convince the apostles, and for them to convince the brethren. All this was probably the work of a single day. Peter received him into the house where he was then residing, and entertained him fifteen days.<sup>1</sup> He now had ample time and a good opportunity to learn

---

<sup>1</sup> Gal. i. 18.

from Peter's lips the whole story of the life of Jesus, concerning which his previous knowledge must have been very limited. "Of the other apostles," he says in the same connection, "I saw none, save James the Lord's brother." From this we learn that this James, though not one of the twelve, was in some sense regarded as an apostle; and Luke undoubtedly includes him, and perhaps others of similar rank among the brethren, in the "apostles" to whom Barnabas brought Saul.<sup>1</sup>

Vv. 28-30. The brethren may have received Saul with some misgiving, but the course which he pursued must have won their confidence very soon. (28) And he was with them going in and out at Jerusalem, (29) preaching boldly in the name of the Lord: and he spoke and disputed against the Grecian Jews; but they went about to kill him. (30) And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. During his absence from Jerusalem the persecution which he had led had so far subsided that these foreign Jews were once more willing to debate the questions at issue; and in the intervals of his conversations with Peter, Saul met them in discussion; but ere two weeks had passed they found their new opponent equally invincible with Stephen; and in the madness of

---

<sup>1</sup>The assertion made by Zeller (i. 299), following Baur and other German infidels, that Luke contradicts Paul in saying that Barnabas brought the latter to "the apostles," is based on the double assumption that by the term apostles he means all of the apostles, or the majority of them; and that the term applies to none but the twelve. But Lightfoot, in his commentary on Galatians, has shown clearly that the term was applied to various others, as Paul and Luke both apply it to James the Lord's brother; and this fact refutes the charge. See for this use of the term, chap. xiv. 4, 14; Rom. xvi. 7; II. Cor. viii. 23; chap. xi. 13; Phil. ii. 25; Rev. ii. 2.

defeat they resolved that Stephen's fate should be his. In this emergency the brethren found opportunity to make amends for the suspicion with which they had at first regarded him, by taking him away to a place of safety. We learn from his own lips, farther on, that the concern of the brethren for his personal safety was not the controlling reason for his departure ; and that he had a very strong desire to stand his ground in Jerusalem, notwithstanding the purpose of the Jews to kill him.<sup>1</sup> After reaching Cæsarea, a short voyage on the Mediterranean and up the Cydnus brought him to Tarsus, the home of his childhood, and perhaps of his earlier manhood. He returns to the friends of his early days, a fugitive from two great cities, and a deserter from that strictest of sects in which he had been educated ; but he comes to bring them glad tidings of great joy. He disappears at this point from the pages of Luke, but he does not go into inactivity. His own pen at a later date fills this blank in the history, by informing us that he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, where he preached the faith which he once destroyed.<sup>2</sup> We shall yet meet with brethren in both these countries, who were doubtless brought to Christ by this preaching.<sup>3</sup> We shall find reason to believe, also, that during this interval he encountered a portion of the sufferings which he enumerates in the eleventh chapter of Second Corinthians, and that before the close of it he experienced his well known vision of paradise.<sup>4</sup> While he is passing

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxii. 18-21. <sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 21-24. <sup>3</sup> Acts xv. 40, 41.

<sup>4</sup> The epistle in which he mentions this vision was written in the year 57 ; and as the vision had been witnessed fourteen years previous, its date was the year 43, which, as appears from the chronology (*Int.* ix.) was the year in which Paul closed his labors in Syria and Cilicia, and went with Barnabas to Antioch.

through these experiences, our historian introduces to us some important and instructive scenes in the labors of the apostle Peter.

---

### SEC. III.—PETER PREACHES IN JUDEA, AND IS SENT TO THE UNCIRCUMCISED.

(IX. 31—XI. 18.)

#### 1. THE CHURCH ENJOYS PEACE AND PROSPERITY, 31.

VER. 31. Our author makes the transition from the labors of Saul to those of Peter, by stating the condition of affairs which invited Peter to leave Jerusalem and go abroad. (31) So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied. This time of peace had probably begun before Saul's return to Jerusalem, and had been interrupted by the persecution waged against him. Now that he was gone, it was restored. It might have been imagined by some that, as the church had sprung into existence amid strife and persecution, it would languish when opposition was withdrawn; but its present prosperity proved that it was not the obstinacy of human passion, but the legitimate working of unchangeable truth, which had brought it into existence. According to Gamaliel's philosophy (v. 34-39), its claim to a divine origin was now vindicated. The church was edified, in the sense of being built up in Christian character; and multiplied, in the sense of very rapid increase of numbers. It should be noticed that the term church, or con-

gregation, is here applied so as to include all the disciples in these three districts, the region of our Saviour's personal labors. It is a secondary use of the word, the whole body being contemplated as if congregated together.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. PETER, EVANGELIZING, COMES TO LYDDA, 32-35.

Vv. 32-35. When the Lord ordered Saul away from Jerusalem he said he would send him "far hence to the Gentiles;" but thus far no uncircumcised Gentiles had been admitted into the church. Luke is now about to show how Peter opened the gates of the kingdom for their admission; and he approaches the subject by recounting the labors which led Peter to the spot where the messengers who called him to this task found him. (32) And it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts, he came down also to the saints who dwelt at Lydda. (33) And there he found a certain man named Æneas, who had kept his bed eight years; for he was palsied. (34) And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ heals thee: arise and make thy bed. And straightway he arose. (35) And all that dwelt at Lydda and in Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. From this it appears that there were saints at Lydda before Peter's arrival. They may have been baptized in Jeru-

---

<sup>1</sup>The original (*ἐκκλησία*) is the common Greek word for an assembly of the people. It is used in this sense in chap. xix. 32, 39, 41, where it applies to an assembly of the people of Ephesus, whether orderly or disorderly. It is unfortunate that it is not everywhere translated congregation, as in the Geneva version, so that the uninformed English reader would see its exact meaning. Its figurative use when applied to more than a single congregation, as in the present instance, would then be apparent to every reader as well as to the learned.



saalem during the early days of the church there ; or they may have been brought in by Philip while he was evangelizing from Azotus to Cæsarea (viii. 40). It was doubtless their presence in the town which led Peter, as he was going "throughout all parts," to come thither. The "all parts" referred to were the parts of Judea, Galilee and Samaria, mentioned in the preceding verse ; and the remark shows that before reaching Lydda Peter had visited congregations in all of these districts. The almost unprecedented effect of this one miracle, causing the mass of the population of Lydda and of the surrounding plain of Sharon to turn to the Lord, is attributable to two causes : first, the fact that the man cured was, like the cripple cured at the Beautiful gate in Jerusalem (iii. 10 ; iv. 22), a widely known victim of an incurable disease ; and second, the fact that the people, like ripe fruit on a tree, which needs only a little shaking to bring it down, were already most favorably inclined to the truth.

### 3. PETER IS CALLED TO JOPPA, 36-43.

Vv. 36-38. From the midst of these happy and exhilarating triumphs of the gospel, Peter was called to a house of mourning in the city of Joppa. (36) Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation<sup>1</sup> is called Dorcas : this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. (37) And it came to pass in those days, that she fell sick

---

<sup>1</sup> For the words, "by interpretation," which so frequently occur in the English New Testament, we should have *by translation* ; for it is in every instance a matter of translation, and not of interpretation. Here the name Tabitha, translated into Greek, means Dorcas, and translated into English it means Gazelle.

and died: and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper chamber. (38) And as Lydda was nigh unto Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, intreating him, Delay not to come on unto us. Joppa has always been the principal seaport of Judea,<sup>1</sup> except during the comparatively short period in which the artificial harbor constructed by Herod at Cæsarea was in use.<sup>2</sup> It lies in a northwesterly direction from Jerusalem, from which it is distant thirty-eight miles by the macadamized road which now connects the two cities. Lydda is some two or three miles north of this road, and about twelve miles out from Joppa. The old road to Jerusalem, which was used before the turnpike was constructed, passed through Lydda, and entered Jerusalem from the north, while the present road enters it from the west. A walk of three hours brought the two men with their sad message to Peter. We are left by the historian entirely to conjecture as to the purpose for which Peter's presence in Joppa was desired, whether to minister comfort to the distressed little band of believers, in the way which is the only one left to modern preachers under such circumstances, or with the hope that he would raise the sleeping saint from the dead. It is more probable that the former was their thought; for it was not the custom of the apostles to bring back to life their deceased brethren and sisters merely because

---

<sup>1</sup> It is the port at which the rafts of cedar from Lebanon for Solomon's temple were landed (II. Chron. ii. 16); and also those for the second temple (Ezra iii. 7); and it is the one from which Jonah set sail, that he might flee to Tarshish (Jonah i. 3). It now has a population of between fifteen and twenty thousand, and is connected by regular lines of steamers, visiting it weekly, with all the ports of the Mediterranean Sea.

<sup>2</sup> See an account of it under chap. x. 1.

they had been useful in their lives ; otherwise Stephen and others who had been cruelly slain in the midst of their usefulness would have been resuscitated. The message to Peter, as we read it, was simply this : " Delay not to come on unto us." Doubtless the whole story of Dorcas was told to him ; for the hearts of the messengers were full of it, and Peter had his own thoughts about it as the three went on their way to Joppa.

Vv. 39-43. Death in that warm climate, where no facilities exist for preserving dead bodies, is followed by a speedy burial, usually before the close of the same day ; and if Peter was to be there in time to witness the burial of Tabitha, there was no time for delay. (39) And Peter arose 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 showing the coats and garments<sup>1</sup> which Dorcas made while she was with them. (40) But Peter put them all forth, 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. (41) And he gave her his hand, and raised her up ; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. (42) And it became known throughout all Joppa : and many believed on the Lord. (43) And it came to pass, that he abode many days in Joppa, with one Simon a tanner. Nothing could be more graphic than this brief narration, or more touching than the incident itself. Amid the march of imposing events which are moving before us, it drops in like

---

<sup>1</sup>The two words rendered coats and garments (*χιτῶνας* and *ἱμάτια*) mean *tunics* and *mantles*—the former the inner garment then worn, which fitted close to the body, and the latter the outer garment, which was loose and flowing.

a wild flower in a stately forest. It opens a vista through the larger events of the history, lets light in upon the social sorrows of the early saints, and discloses a scene with the like of which our own experiences have made us familiar. Here is the same tender care for the lifeless body, the same distress felt by all, the same desire for the presence of him who has been our religious counselor; the same company of weeping women, and of men standing by in mournful silence; the same recounting with sobbing voices of the good deeds done by the departed; and, beyond all this to which we are accustomed, a group of poor widows holding up before Peter as he comes in the tunics and mantles which Dorcas had made for them and their children while she was yet with them. What a memorial! How much richer and more to be desired than monuments of marble and bronze covered with flattering inscriptions! Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; and blessed are the living in whose softened hearts is treasured at such an hour the remembrance of such a life as Dorcas had lived. As Peter stood there for a moment in tearful silence, did he not seem to himself to be standing once more at the tomb of Lazarus, by the side of his Master, and surrounded by the Jews who wept with Mary and Martha? But he remembers that his compassionate Lord is now in heaven. With deep solemnity he motions the mourners all aside. He is left alone with the dead. He kneels down, and prays. The prayer of faith he knows is heard. With a voice of authority, and yet of tenderness, a voice which can be heard by the dead, he says to the cold body, "Tabitha, arise." Her eyes open, and she sees Peter. Does she recognize him, or is he a stranger to her? We know

not. She sits up, and looks him in the face. Not another word passes between them; but he gently gives her his hand, and helps her to her feet. He calls in the saints and widows, and there in her white shroud she stands before them alive. Here the narration closes, as well it might; for not even Luke's graphic pen could describe the scene which followed. And if the restoration of one saint to the little band which she has left is indescribable, what shall we say or think of that hour when all the sainted dead shall rise in glory and greet one another on the shores of life? Is not this event in Joppa intended to give us a slight foretaste of the joys of the resurrection morning? No wonder that this "became known throughout all Joppa," and that "many believed on the Lord." Joppa was now a field white for the harvest, and Peter found inviting work for many days. He came to weep with those who wept; he remained to rejoice with those who rejoiced.

#### 4. CORNELIUS, A GENTILE, DIRECTED TO SEND FOR PETER, x. 1-8.

Vv. 1, 2. The scene of the narrative changes from Joppa to Cæsarea,<sup>1</sup> about thirty miles north on the Medi-

---

<sup>1</sup> This city was founded by Herod the Great for the purpose of providing on the coast of Judea, which has no natural harbor, an artificial one in which ships could anchor at any time of the year. Its completion as a walled city, together with the completion of the artificial harbor, was celebrated in the year 13 B. C.; and all the procurators of Judea after Pilate made it their seat of government. After passing through many vicissitudes during the centuries of war and desolation to which all Judea was subjected, it was finally destroyed in the year 1226. Since then its harbor has silted up, the breakwater having long since crumbled beneath the ceaseless wash of the waves, and it is now too shallow

terranean shore, and we are introduced to another case of conversion, that of a Gentile and a soldier. (1) Now there was a certain man in Cæsarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. At first glance it might appear strange that a man whose character is thus described should need conversion. There are many men in the present day, in whose favor not so much can be said, who flatter themselves that their prospects for final salvation are good. They are honest in their dealings, honorable in their intercourse with men, good husbands and fathers, generous to their neighbors, and benevolent to the poor; what have they to fear at the hands of a just and merciful God? But Cornelius was all this, and beyond this he was a devout and prayerful man; yet it was necessary for even him to hear words whereby he might be saved (xi. 14). Our self-righteous men of the world must then be deceiving themselves. They forget that while they are discharging in a creditable manner their obligations to their fellow men, they are neglecting the much higher obligation to render direct service to God by observing the ordinances of his appointment. The most inexcusable of all sins is a refusal to render to God, our Maker and Redeemer, the homage which is his due. Moreover, in acting thus we do great harm by our example to our fellow-men, and most of all to those who love us most.

That Cornelius was an Italian, born and reared in a heathen land, is made almost certain by his Latin name,

---

for any sea-going vessels. Its ruins are among the most extensive and interesting in Palestine. For a description of them the reader is referred to the author's *Lands of the Bible*, p. 275 ff.



combined with the fact that he was an officer in an Italian cohort. How then could he have acquired the character which is here ascribed to him? No possible heathen education could have imparted it to him. It could be acquired only by contact with the Jewish people. From the very people, then, whom he was helping to keep in subjection to the Roman yoke he had learned the only true religion. With the exception of being uncircumcised, he stood before God as did any pious Jew of that age, or of this, who had not accepted Christ. Christ had now come in between all men and God, so that there was no access to the forgiveness of sins except through him, and we are to see how Cornelius was brought to Christ, and through him to God.

Vv. 3-6. The first step taken in bringing this good man to Christ is described in these words: (3) He saw in a vision openly, as it were about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in unto him, and saying to him, Cornelius. (4) And he, fastening his eyes upon him, and being affrighted, said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God. (5) And now send men to Joppa, and fetch one Simon whose surname is Peter: (6) he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.

The vision here described did not appear in a dream or a trance; but to a man wide awake, and, as we learn farther on (30), engaged in prayer. That he observed one of the Jewish hours of prayer (iii. 1), the hour of evening incense, is additional proof that he owed his religious character to Jewish instruction. The fear which the visible presence of the angel excited was instinctive; for there is no reason why men should fear angels or

spirits; yet all men, even the most godly, have been frightened when they have seen, or thought they have seen, supernatural beings.

From a modern point of view the words of the angel render it still more surprising (*cf.* remarks under 1, 2) that such a man should be made a special subject for conversion. If, in addition to all that is said of his exalted religious character, his prayers were heard, and his alms had gone up for a memorial before God, what did he yet lack of salvation from sin? Let a man with such an experience as his appear before any church at the present day, and say: "I have been for many years a devout man, worshiping God as well as I knew how, giving much alms to the poor, praying continually, and teaching my household the fear of God. Yesterday afternoon at three o'clock I was praying according to my custom, when suddenly an angel stood before me, and said, 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.'" Who would hesitate to pronounce him a thoroughly converted man? He certainly was a convert from heathenism to Judaism, yet the angel, as we learn from Peter's subsequent recital of the facts (xi. 14), after telling him to send for Peter, said, "He shall speak unto thee words whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house." Though the angel had spoken to him, and though God had heard his prayers, he must yet hear words from a man's lips before he will be saved. We must watch the narrative as it continues, to see what words were spoken, and what they contained that was so necessary.

Let us not fail to observe that here is the prayer of a man not yet wholly converted to Christ, and that the prayer is answered. But how different is the answer

from that which persons in a similar spiritual condition are taught to expect in our own time. The angel does not bring him word that his sins are forgiven ; nor does he leave him rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins because he is assured that his prayers are heard. Instead of this, he is told to send for a man who will tell him what he must do to be saved. If similar prayers were answered now, who can doubt that the same God would answer them in the same way, by telling the inquirer to send for a preacher, or for some other disciple, who would rightly instruct him ?

It is interesting and instructive to observe that we here have another instance of the intervention of an angel in securing the conversion of a man. In comparing the angel's work with that of the one who appeared in the case of the eunuch (viii. 26), we observe that though the latter appeared to the preacher, and the former to the person to be converted, both appeared for essentially the same purpose ; that is, to bring the preacher and the subject for conversion face to face. Thus we learn that supernatural interventions never superseded the indispensable work of the human agent. Even when the Lord himself, as in the case of Saul's conversion, appeared to the sinner, the human agency was still indispensable, and the Lord himself directed Ananias to go to the still unforgiven Saul. These facts can not be too urgently pressed upon the attention of an age like ours, in which they are totally ignored by the majority of religious teachers. In all three of these instances the supernatural intervention became necessary, because without it the parties would not have come together at all. Philip would not otherwise have known that there was an Ethiopian on the road to Gaza ; Ananias would

not have dared to approach Saul; and Cornelius would not have known that it was his privilege to send for Peter.

Vv. 7, 8. Although it was now late in the afternoon, Cornelius did not hesitate to start three messengers at once on the journey. (7) And when the angel that spake unto him was departed, he called two of his household servants and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; (8) and having rehearsed all things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. Here it appears that the religious zeal by which he had brought his household to the fear of God (2) had reached out also to some of the soldiers under his command. The soldier, in his Roman uniform, was sent along as a protection to the two servants; for then, as now, the attendance of even a single soldier, representing the supreme power of the empire, was a protection to travelers.

#### 5. PETER IS DIRECTED TO GO TO CORNELIUS, 9-23.

Vv. 9-16. The scene now changes again, and we pass from Cæsarea back to Joppa, where we left Peter in the house of the tanner. Our author anticipates the arrival of the messengers of Cornelius, by showing how the Lord prepared Peter for a favorable reception of their message. (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, about the sixth hour: (10) and he became hungry, and desired to eat: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance; (11) and he beheld the heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet, let down by the four corners upon the earth: (12) wherein were all manner of four-

footed beasts and creeping things of the earth and fowls of the heaven. (13) And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat. (14) But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that was common and unclean. (15) And a voice came unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, make not thou common. (16) And this was done thrice: and straightway the vessel was received up into heaven. Although Peter was in a trance, he was still completely at himself in thought and feeling; hence the outgush of his characteristic impetuosity, when he answered the command from heaven, "Not so, Lord." His thoughts went no farther in justification of his boldness than the fact that he had never in his life eaten anything unclean, as were some of the things he was commanded to eat; but in thus abstaining he knew that he was obeying a law which God had himself given to his fathers, and he could not at the instant take in the thought that God was now abolishing one of his own laws. When the sheet and the voice came to him the second and the third time, he was silent; for then he saw that God meant what he said, and no man was ever more prompt to obey when a command was understood. This vision came when Peter was engaged in prayer, because then he was in the most favorable mood for acquiescence in an unwelcome command; and when he was hungry, because the command had reference to the legal distinctions concerning animal food. He was on the housetop, because, in a small house, with perhaps only two or three rooms, he could find privacy better on the roof than below. A battlement may have hidden him from the view of persons on neighboring houses, if any were on their housetops in the heat of the day.

Vv. 17-20. The occurrence of this vision, and the movements of the messengers sent by Cornelius, like the journey of Philip and the movement of the eunuch's chariot (chap. viii. 26, 27), were well timed by the angels who had them in charge. (17) Now while Peter was much perplexed in himself what the vision he had seen might mean, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate, (18) and called, and asked whether Simon, who was surnamed Peter, were lodging there. (19) And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, three men seek thee. (20) But rise, get thee down, and go with them, nothing doubting: for I have sent them. Peter could not fail to see that by means of this vision God had abolished the legal distinction between clean and unclean animals; hence we infer that his perplexity and his protracted thought on the meaning of the vision had reference to something else. That which was abolished was a prominent part of God's law; and he may have been perplexed as to why it should be abolished. He may also have raised the question whether the rest of the law was also to be abolished; if so, this would perplex him still more. But he was not left very long in doubt; for in the skillful adjustment of the vision to the movements of the messengers of Cornelius, the latter had now arrived, and found the right house, and the Holy Spirit in Peter reveals to him that three men are below seeking for him, and bids him go with them. It is not necessary to think that Simon's house was outside the city, because, as many of the commentators have supposed,<sup>1</sup> his business

---

<sup>1</sup> This supposition is based exclusively on the statement of rabbis of a later age; but there is nothing in the law of Moses



was considered unclean; for, whatever may be true as to that, his tannery may have been outside the walls while his residence was inside.

Vv. 21, 22. As Peter goes down stairs to meet the men whose arrival was so strangely made known to him, he is still perplexed as to the meaning of the vision; but he soon begins to see a meaning in it which he had not suspected. (21) And Peter went down to the men, and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? (22) 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 to send for thee into his house, and to hear words from thee. Connecting this message, sent by the order of a "holy angel," with the vision, and with the command of the Spirit to go with the men, nothing doubting, Peter now in an instant sees that he is called by divine authority, through the angel, through the vision, through the Spirit, to do what he had always before thought sinful, to go into the house of a Gentile, and to speak to him the word of the Lord. Nothing less than an unmistakable divine call could have induced him to do this; but now he has no alternative unless he would withstand God. He now sees what he afterward expressed so happily, that he was to call no *man* common or unclean (25).'

## 6. THE MEETING OF PETER AND CORNELIUS, 23-33.

Vv. 23, 24. The messengers themselves were most probably Gentiles, and the soldier certainly was; and under ordinary circumstances Gentiles could scarcely

---

to justify it, and it is not at all certain that the business was regarded as unclean by the Pharisees of the apostolic age.

have found entertainment in the house of Simon the tanner. But his mind and that of Peter were sufficiently moved in the right direction by what had already occurred, to remove all hesitation about receiving them to the hospitalities of the house. (23) So he called them in and lodged them. And on the morrow he arose and went forth with them, and certain of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. (24) And on the morrow they entered into Cæsarea. And Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his kinsmen and his near friends. Peter did not start for Cæsarea as promptly as Cornelius had started his messengers to Joppa. He may have waited to the next day in order that the brethren who were to go with him, six in number (chap. xi. 12), might get ready; or because the place at which they had to spend the night on the way was at such a distance as to make it best to start in the morning. Cornelius knew the time that the journey would require, and so, with military promptness, he had a select audience ready and waiting. Notice, this audience was not composed of a miscellaneous crowd, but of kinsmen and near friends of Cornelius, who were doubtless invited to be present because of their known interest in the object for which they came together.

Vv. 25-29. It was not without emotion that Peter first approached the door of a Gentile's house, and it must have been with the deepest emotion that Cornelius first met the man for whom he had sent in obedience to the command of an angel. An overpowering sense of humility marked the deportment of the soldier, while the apostle bore himself with an easy dignity, which nothing but a noble nature and a high calling could have imparted to a fisherman. (25) And when it came to pass

that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. (26) But Peter raised him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. (27) And as he talked with him, he went in, and findeth many come together: (28) and he said unto them, Ye yourselves know 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 showed that I should not call any man common or unclean: (29) wherefore I came without gainsaying when I was sent for. I ask therefore with what intent ye sent for me. Cornelius worshiped Peter only in the sense of paying him that homage which, according to oriental custom, was due to one of greatly superior rank. The term is frequently used in this sense, and his knowledge of the true God forbids the supposition that he intended to pay divine honors to a man. He was moved to this homage in consideration of the high esteem in which Peter seemed to be held by the "holy angel." But Peter, not knowing his man as yet, could not know that only this kind of homage was intended,<sup>1</sup> and hence his remark "I myself also am a man." Peter's explanation of his departure from Jewish custom in entering the house of a Gentile shows that he now clearly understood the vision as including men in its scope; and his remark, based upon this understanding, was satisfactory to his hearers without the recital of the vision itself. The messengers had told him for what purpose he was sent for, but he thought it proper to have a statement of this purpose from the parties themselves, before proceeding further.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Matt. ii. 2, 8; viii. 2; ix. 18; xiv. 33; xv. 25; xviii. 26; xx. 20.

Vv. 30-33. Peter's inquiry was addressed to the company at large, but Cornelius was the proper person to answer it, and he did so in a most direct and satisfactory manner. (30) And Cornelius said, Four days ago, until this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house; and behold, a man stood before me in bright apparel, (31) and saith, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. (32) Send therefore to Joppa, and call unto thee Simon, who is surnamed Peter; he lodgeth in the house of Simon a tanner, by the seaside. (33) Forthwith therefore I sent to thee, and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore we are all present here in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord. His first remark in this answer shows that according to the mode of counting then prevalent, it had been four days since the appearance of the angel, although, according to our own method, as we can see by counting back, it was precisely three days. He here styles the being who had spoken to him "a man in bright apparel," but he evidently recognized him by the communication which he brought, if not by the peculiar brightness of his apparel, as an angel, as he is styled by Luke (3), and by the messengers (22). The last statement in the answer shows that the whole company had assembled in the conscious presence of God, for the express purpose of hearing, and of hearing as they should hear it, the message from God with which Peter was charged. When such an audience is assembled to hear such a preacher, the results most to be desired are sure to follow.

## 7. PETER'S SERMON TO THE UNCIRCUMCISED, 34-43.

Vv. 34, 35. The occasion furnished Peter a most happy introduction to the remarks which he had to submit, and like a trained rhetorician, which he was not, he proceeded to make use of it. (34) And Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; (35) but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him. The expansive thought here expressed was sufficient, in Peter's mind, to burst asunder the exclusive bonds of the Mosaic covenant; and it should be sufficient now to dispel from the minds of men the equally exclusive theory of an arbitrary predestination of certain men and angels to their eternal destiny. It is a positive and inspired declaration that God respects not persons, but character. To fear him and work righteousness, and not any other distinction between persons, is the ground of acceptability with him.

Vv. 36-39. As we have observed above, the experience which Cornelius had now related to Peter is such as would secure him instant recognition as a Christian among modern Protestants; but Peter was so far from thus regarding it, that he proceeds to preach to him the words whereby he might be saved; and first, as on Pentecost, he briefly describes the personal career of Jesus. (36) The word which he sent unto the children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), that saying ye yourselves know, (37) which was published throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached; (38) even Jesus of Nazareth, how that God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about

doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil; for God was with him. (39) And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew, hanging him on a tree. From the words, "ye know," with which this recital is introduced, we learn that the personal career of Jesus was already known to Cornelius and his friends; and that they were acquainted with the "good tidings of peace" which Jesus had preached to the children of Israel. Peter rehearses the story for the apparent purpose of confirming their belief in it by the assertion that he and his companions were witnesses of it all. That of which the auditors were as yet ignorant was their own interest in the message of peace, which had been looked upon as intended for Israel alone.

Vv. 40, 41. The crowning fact of the gospel comes next in the narrative, as it did in the sermon on Pentecost. (40) Him God raised up the third day, and gave him to be manifest, not to all the people, (41) but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he arose from the dead. Here, by way of commending the evidence of the resurrection, Peter states to his hearers a fact which has been so differently construed by unbelievers as to be made a ground of objection; that is, that the witnesses were chosen beforehand. He says that they were chosen by God; but he doubtless has reference to their choice by the Lord Jesus. Whether Peter or the unbelievers are right in this, depends entirely on the grounds of the choice. If they were chosen because of their willingness to testify without regard to facts, or because of the ease with which they might be deceived, it might be rightly regarded as a suspicious circumstance. But the reverse



is true in both particulars. Such was the situation of the witnesses that there was imminent danger to both property and person in giving their testimony, and therefore every motive to dishonesty prompted them to keep silence. They were also the least likely of all men to be deceived, because of their long and intimate familiarity with him who was to be identified. On the other hand, if he had appeared to all the people, a large majority of them would have been unable to testify with entire certainty to his identity. Peter, then, was right; for the fact that such witnesses were chosen beforehand proves that no deception was intended; but that, on the contrary, the aim was to provide the most reliable witnesses then living.<sup>1</sup> To Cornelius the testimony of Peter to what had been done was ample, from the fact of his having been warned of God by a holy angel to send for Peter; and the company had already declared themselves ready to hear all things that had been commanded him by the Lord (33).

---

<sup>1</sup> "If their point had been to have their story believed, whether true or false, or if they had been disposed to present their testimony, either as personal witnesses or as historians, in such a manner as to render it as specious and unobjectionable as they could—in a word, if they had thought of anything but the truth of the case as they understood and believed it—they would, in the account of Christ's several appearances, at least have omitted this restriction. At this distance of time, the account as we have it is perhaps more credible than it would have been in the other way, because this manifestation of the historian's candor is of more advantage to their testimony than the difference in the circumstances of the account would have been to the nature of the evidence. But this is an effect which the evangelists could not foresee, and is one which by no means would have followed at the time when they wrote" (Paley, *Evidences of Christianity*).

Vv. 42, 43. Having now sketched the career of Jesus, and stated the evidence of his resurrection, Peter proceeds in regular order to the next historical fact, the giving of the apostolic commission. (42) And he charged us to preach to the people, and to testify that this is he who is ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead. (43) To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins.

The command to preach to the people was expressed in the commission (Mark xvi. 15), and that they were to "testify that this is he who is ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead" was implied in the preface to the commission, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18). Before this, however, in the lifetime of Jesus, he had declared to the Jews that all judgment was given to him, and that the Father would judge no man (Jno. v. 21, 22). In the promise of remission of sins (43) we must not overlook the force of the words, "through his name." The promise is to every one who believeth on Jesus, but it "is through his name" that the promise is to be made effective. These very persons were a little later commanded to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" (48); and all are baptized "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. xxviii. 19). This perfectly harmonizes with Peter's command in his first sermon, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins;" and the passage by no means supports the doctrine of justification by faith only. Peter's reference to the prophets as the witnesses for this promise is a surprise, especially as it occurs immediately after his reference to

the apostolic commission in which was the most explicit statement of it. His probable purpose was not to indicate a primary reliance on the prophets, but to show that instead of being a new promise coming from Jesus alone, it was an old one taught generally in the Old Testament.

#### 8. THE UNCIRCUMCISED RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT AND ARE BAPTIZED, 44-48.

Vv. 44-46. Peter's sermon was interrupted and broken off by an incident that stands alone in apostolic history, and was a great surprise to Peter and his Jewish companions. (44) While Peter yet spake the words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them who heard the word. (45) And they of the circumcision who believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. (46) For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. The ground of amazement to the Jewish brethren was not the mere fact that these Gentiles received the Holy Spirit; for if Peter had finished his discourse, promising them the Holy Spirit on the terms which he had laid down on Pentecost, and had then baptized them, these brethren would have taken it as a matter of course that they received the Spirit. And if, after this, he had laid hands on them and imparted the miraculous gift of the Spirit, as in the case of the Samaritans, they would not have been so greatly surprised. The considerations which caused the amazement were, first, that the Holy Spirit was "poured out" upon them directly from God, as it had never been before on any but the apostles; and second, that this unusual gift was bestowed on Gentiles. This second circumstance

will be explained in discussing the design of this miracle under verses 47, 48, below. The fact that this gift of the Spirit was manifested by the miracle of speaking in tongues<sup>1</sup> distinguishes it from that gift of the Spirit promised to all who repent and are baptized (ii. 38); and the fact that it came directly from heaven, without the imposition of apostolic hands, distinguishes it from such gifts as that bestowed on the Samaritans, and that afterward bestowed on prominent members of many churches.<sup>2</sup> We have no event with which to classify it

---

<sup>1</sup> It is a matter of surprise to find so judicious a commentator as Plumptre expressing himself on this miracle as follows: "As there is no mention here of the utterance of praise being in any other language than those with which the speakers were familiar, there is no ground for assuming that this feature of the Pentecostal gift was reproduced, and the jubilant ecstatic praise which was the essence of that gift must be thought of as corresponding to the phenomena described in I. Cor. xiv. 7-9." It is less surprising to find Meyer expressing in substance the same opinion. They both overlook the fact to which Alford calls attention, that Peter, in describing the incident afterward, says: "God gave unto them *the like gift as he did also unto us*" (chap. xi. 17), thus identifying it with the gift of tongues bestowed on Pentecost. As Luke has once described speaking in other tongues on Pentecost, and showed that men of these other tongues understood the speakers, it was but natural that in his second reference to the same phenomenon he should use a briefer form of expression; and if, by "speaking in tongues," he does not mean other tongues than were natural to the speakers, his words are without meaning." The supposition that either this phenomenon or that mentioned in the fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians was mere "jubilant ecstatic praise," not uttered in any human tongue, is to suppose that these inspired persons spoke nonsense; and it is far more likely that the nonsense is with those who adopt this supposition. See Alford's notes on the latter passage, and on Acts ii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See xix. 1-7; I. Cor. i. 4-6; xiv; Gal. iii. 1-6; I. Thess. v. 19, 20.

except the gift bestowed on the apostles on Pentecost ; and thus it is actually classified by Peter farther on (xi. 15, 16). He says : " As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit 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 in water, but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit." In these words he identifies it as a baptism in the Holy Spirit ; and these two are the only events that are thus designated in the New Testament. The one was the divine expression of the admission of the first Jews into the new Messianic kingdom, and the other, that of the first Gentiles.

The baptism of Cornelius and his friends in the Holy Spirit previous to their baptism in water has been urged as evidence that remission of sins takes place before baptism. It could furnish such evidence if remission of sins was simultaneous with the miraculous gift of the Spirit ; but such is not the case. In every other instance of a miraculous gift, remission of sins preceded it. This is true of the apostles on Pentecost, for they had long before been accepted disciples of Christ ; it is true of the Samaritans, for they had been baptized by Philip before the apostles sent Peter and John to them to impart the miraculous gift ; it is true of the twelve disciples in Ephesus, to whom Paul imparted this gift after he had baptized them (xix. 1-7) ; and it is true of all in the Corinthian church who had received similar gifts (I. Cor. i. 4-7 ; xii. 1-7). In none of these instances was it connected with remission of sins ; therefore such a connection can not be assumed in the present instance. If it be thought incongruous that this miraculous power should be manifested in persons whose sins are not forgiven, let it be remembered that it was a miracle wrought

upon these persons for a purpose external to themselves (see below under 47, 48); and that, although they were unpardoned, they were godly persons according to Jewish faith. There is no greater incongruity, if the thought of incongruity could be tolerated at all, in their receiving a momentary miraculous gift of the Spirit, than in the previous mission of an angel to Cornelius to assure him that his prayers were heard and that his alms were had in remembrance by God.

This incident in the conversion of Cornelius can not in any way be held as a precedent for subsequent ages; for it was certainly a miracle, and no miracles are now wrought. We may as well expect sinners now to see an angel, as Cornelius did, before their sins are forgiven, as to receive the Spirit as he did.

Vv. 47, 48. The true explanation of this unusual circumstance, though given most fully in Peter's speech recorded in the next chapter (xi. 15-18), is clearly implied in the following words: (47) Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? (48) And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. There are two ways of ascertaining the purpose of an incident: the purpose may be stated; or we may learn what it is by the use which is made of it. Here there is no statement of the purpose of the gift of the Spirit; but Peter, who knew the purpose, plainly indicates what it was by the use which he makes of it. He uses it to remove from the minds of his Jewish companions any doubt which they might still entertain as to the propriety of baptizing Gentiles. This, then, is the purpose for which the miracle was wrought. Further-



more, we find Peter using it afterward in Jerusalem, to remove the same doubts from the minds of the Jewish brethren there (see last citation). Unquestionably, then, this was its purpose; and herein we find the reason why no such event as this ever occurred afterward, or is now to be expected; for when it was once demonstrated that uncircumcised Gentiles might be baptized, the question was settled forever, and needed not to be settled again.<sup>1</sup>

Before he was interrupted, Peter had proceeded with his discourse so far as to reach the subject of faith and the remission of sins; and baptism would have been the next word on his lips if he had continued according to the model of his sermon on Pentecost. The interruption, however, did not break the thread of his discourse; it only enabled him to advance with still greater confidence to the very conclusion which he had intended; for he first demands of the brethren whether any one could forbid baptism, and then commands the Gentiles to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Let us now recall the fact that Cornelius had been directed to send for Peter to hear words whereby he and all his house should be saved (xi. 14). Peter has come, and spoken these words. He has told the company of Christ, in whom they now believe. He has told them to be baptized, and it has been done. What the pious, prayerful, and almsgiving Cornelius had lacked of being a Christian

---

<sup>1</sup> On this point Dean Plumptre expresses himself in the following satisfactory manner: "The exceptional gift was bestowed in this instance to remove the scruples which 'those of the uncircumcision' might otherwise have felt as to admitting Gentiles, as such, to baptism; and having served that purpose, as a crucial instance, was never afterwards, so far as we know, repeated under like conditions" (*Com. in loco*).

has now been supplied, and nothing has been required of him but to believe in Christ and be baptized. This closes the account of another conversion, and it coincides in essential details with all that have gone before it in this narrative.

We should be glad to know more of Cornelius, so as to judge whether, even in times of peace, the profession of arms was considered by the apostles compatible with the service of the Prince of Peace. He is the only soldier of whose conversion we have an account in the New Testament, and of his subsequent career we know nothing. Not many years afterward the army in which he held a commission visited a most cruel and unjust war upon the Jews, and whether he continued in the service through that period we can never know in this life. Let it be noted, however, that this is an instance of a soldier becoming a Christian, not of a Christian becoming a soldier. It furnishes a precedent for the former, but not for the latter.

9. PETER'S DEFENSE FOR THESE PROCEEDINGS, XI.  
1-18.

Vv. 1-3. The novel and startling scene which had transpired in Caesarea was soon reported abroad. (1) Now the apostles and the brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. (2) And when Peter was come to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, (3) Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. While the persons who made this complaint against Peter are called "they of the circumcision," and are not said to include any of the apostles, it is clearly implied that the apostles, who in the first

verse are said to have heard of Peter's proceedings, had not expressed any approval of it. They doubtless thought and felt as the brethren did who made the complaint. They are now to be enlightened on the subject, as Peter had been, and the method in which it was accomplished is very instructive.

Vv. 4-17. (5) But Peter began, and expounded the matter unto them in order, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even unto me: (6) upon which when I had fastened my eyes, I considered, and saw the four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things and fowls of the heaven. (7) And I heard also a voice saying unto me, Rise, Peter; kill and eat. (8) But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath ever entered into my mouth. (9) But a voice answered a second time out of heaven, What God hath cleansed, make not thou common. (10) And this was done thrice; and all were drawn up again into heaven. (11) And behold, forthwith three men stood before the house in which we were, having been sent from Cæsarea unto me. (12) 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: (13) 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: (14) who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house. (15) And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning. (16) And I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized in water; but ye

shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit. (17) 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? In this speech Peter confines himself to a careful recital of those incidents mentioned in the preceding chapter which came under his own observation, and to the conclusion which he deduces from them. His argument is, that after seeing the vision, hearing the voice, and receiving the order of the Spirit to go with the men sent for him, he properly went into the man's house; and that when he saw that the Gentiles whom he had begun to address were baptized in the Holy Spirit, he could not withstand God. By this last remark, taken in its historical connection, he certainly meant that he would have been withstanding God had he refused to baptize the persons, or had he made a difference in other respects between them and Jews. He does not mention the act of baptizing them, neither had it been mentioned by the complainants. The latter had mentioned only the offense of going into the house of Gentiles, and eating with them, leaving out the much graver fault of baptizing them, because, if the former were wrong, much worse was the latter. This was a case in which the less included the greater. In his answer, Peter in express terms justified going into the house, and, by a necessary implication, the act of baptizing them.

VER. 18. The facts rehearsed by Peter had the same effect on the minds of the objectors that they had on that of Peter. (18) And when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life. Instead of being bigots, as they are sometimes

said to have been, these Jewish brethren, who had been hitherto untaught on the relation of uncircumcised persons to the Church of God, accepted the truth as soon as they heard it; and they accepted it not murmuringly, as men who were forced to its acceptance, but joyfully, as men who were glad to be relieved from a conviction which had caused them anxiety. They not only "held their peace," but they "glorified God" for what they had learned.

In this section of the history we have a striking example of one of the ways in which the apostles were led into all the truth, according to the Lord's promise (Jno. xvi. 13). Peter did not know by virtue of his inspiration that the uncircumcised were to be admitted to baptism; neither did the other apostles, after Peter had baptized some uncircumcised persons, know by virtue of their inspiration that he had done right. As a matter of course, the Holy Spirit could have illuminated all of their minds internally on this as on any other topic; but it chose, instead of this, to adopt a different method. By visions addressed to his eye, a voice addressed to his ear, messages sent to him through the command of an angel, reinforced by just one command from the Holy Spirit, Peter was guided into this new truth; and by a verbal account of the same to his brethren, the latter were brought to the same light. The latter indeed were convinced by the same facts which convinced Peter; the only difference being that the facts reached Peter through direct observation, while they reached the others through the words in which Peter recounted them. In precisely this way the power of all Scripture facts reaches the minds and hearts of men at the present day, and thus the Holy Spirit operates on us through the

word. This method had an obvious advantage in the instance before us in that, the other brethren, both inspired and uninspired, were not dependent on Peter's statement of an inward revelation to himself on this important subject, a method which might have left some in doubt; but they could see as clearly as Peter did the force of the evidence which convinced him. The consequence was that amid all the controversies which afterward disturbed some sections of the church in connection with circumcision, no doubt was ever afterward intimated of the propriety of baptizing uncircumcised Gentiles.

---

#### SEC. IV.—A CHURCH FOUNDED IN ANTIOCH, AND ANOTHER PERSECUTION IN JERUSALEM.

(XI. 19—XII. 25.)

##### 1. BEGINNING OF THE WORK IN ANTIOCH, 19-21.

Vv. 19-21. Our author, in pursuance of the plan of this part of his work, now turns back once more to the dispersion of the Jerusalem church, and surveys rapidly another section of the wide field before him. (19) They therefore that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen, traveled as far as Phœnicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to none save only to Jews. (20) But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. (21) And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number that believed turned unto the



**Lord.** From these verses we learn that while Philip was preaching in Samaria, Saul in Damascus and Arabia, and Peter, a little later, in all parts of Judea, Samaria and Galilee, other brethren were evangelizing among the Jews as far north as Phœnicia, the island of Cyprus, and the famous city of Antioch, the last being their farthest point in that direction. In preaching to "none save only to Jews" these brethren were but following the example of the apostles, until Peter opened the door to the Gentiles, as described in the last section. The statement that some of these, when they came to Antioch, preached also to the Greeks, limits this latter preaching, as respects the places named, to Antioch. It was not till they reached Antioch that they began to preach to Greeks. It appears also that these men came to Antioch at a latter period than did those who spoke only to Jews. It is clearly implied that something had taken place in the interval to cause this change; and as the last preceding series of events mentioned by Luke is connected with the baptism of Gentiles by Peter, he seems to have desired his readers to infer that this latter event preceded the preaching to Greeks in Antioch. This probability is reduced almost to certainty when we look to the chronology of these events. It is well ascertained that the death of Herod, mentioned in the twelfth chapter, occurred in the year 44 A. D.; and we learn from our present chapter that Barnabas and Saul labored together in Antioch one whole year previous to that event (26). Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, then, in the year 43; and the statements of verses 22-25 below imply that the former had not been many months in Antioch before he went for Saul; consequently, Barnabas must have been sent from Jerusalem not earlier than the latter part of

the year 42. But he was sent as soon as the brethren in Jerusalem learned of the successful preaching in Antioch ; and consequently we must conclude that the latter part of this preaching, that to the Greeks, had not taken place earlier than the early part of 42, or the last of 41 ; and as the baptism of Cornelius occurred in 40 or 41, this event preceded the preaching to Greeks in Antioch.<sup>1</sup> Thus the conclusion which is naturally suggested by the order of Luke's narrative is that which the closest investigation establishes, that uncircumcised Gentiles were not baptized until after Peter opened the door to them in Caesarea. But while Peter's work opened the way, this work in Antioch was the first vigorous invasion of the Gentile world by the advanced forces of the Lord's army.

The preaching in Phœnicia here mentioned, suggests the origin of the churches which are afterward found there ;<sup>2</sup> and the fact that the preachers who first spoke to Greeks in Antioch were from Cyprus and Cyrene suggests the probability that they had first done some preaching in their own homes, before going upon these foreign missions. This they had an abundance of time to do, in the five or six years which had passed since the death of Stephen. It is possible, as many have suggested, that Simon of Cyrene, who bore the cross of Jesus part of the way to Golgotha, was one of these Cyrenian preachers. In the words, "a great number that believed turned unto the Lord," we have a recognition of the fact that turning to the Lord is a different act from believing, and subsequent to it. As in iii. 19, where turning to the Lord follows repentance, the

---

<sup>1</sup> See the Chronology of Acts, p. xxviii. <sup>2</sup> Chap. xv. 3 ; xxii. 3, 4 ; xxvii. 3.

specific reference is to baptism, which is the turning act. An equivalent expression, used elsewhere, would be, a great number "believed and were baptized."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. BARNABAS IS SENT TO ANTIOCH, 22-24.

Vv. 22-24. Jerusalem was still the center and base of operations, being the headquarters of the apostles. The latter kept watch over all the movements of the other preachers, and sent help or counsel according to circumstances. Even when no apostles were present in the mother church, they doubtless made provision for such oversight by other competent persons. (22) And the report concerning them came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas as far as Antioch: (23) who, when he was come, and had seen the grace of God, was glad; and he exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord: (24) for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. It is not often that Luke pronounces an encomium on persons of whom he speaks, as he does here on Barnabas; but it was proper that the selection of the latter for this important mission should be justified by mention of the noble qualities which led to the choice. The purpose of his mission can be learned only by the work which he did in Antioch; and from this we learn that it was somewhat different from that of the mission of Peter and John to Samaria. It was not to impart miraculous spiritual gifts, which Barnabas had not the power to impart; but to do that for which Barnabas was famous, and from his superiority in which he had derived his present name—to exhort the brethren

---

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xviii. 8.

to cleave unto the Lord. The brethren in Jerusalem well knew the need of such exhortation to young disciples, and they sent for the purpose their best exhorter. Observe, too, that while he was exhorting the brethren, many who were not brethren became such. After men are convinced that Jesus is the Christ, they are very frequently brought to repentance and obedience by hearing exhortations addressed to the disciples.

### 3. BARNABAS BRINGS SAUL TO ANTIOCH, 25, 26.

Vv. 25, 26. Barnabas seems to have been engaged but a short time in these labors, when he felt the need of help more efficient than that of his predecessors, if they were still present, and for reasons not stated in the text his thoughts turned toward Saul, the former persecutor, whom he had befriended in Jerusalem. All that he knew of Saul's work since the brethren in Jerusalem had sent him away to Tarsus was the report which had come to Jerusalem: "He that once persecuted us now preacheth the faith of which he once made havoc" (Gal. i. 23); unless he had heard more since coming to Antioch, which is quite probable. At any rate, of all the men who were accessible to him, Saul was his choice for the work which was now opening in this great city,<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I can not introduce the city of Antioch to the reader unacquainted with its history so well as by quoting the following graphic description of it by Farrar: "The queen of the East, the third metropolis of the world, this vast city of perhaps five hundred thousand souls must not be judged by the diminished, shrunk and earthquake-shattered Antakieh of to-day. It was no mere oriental town, with flat roofs and dingy, narrow streets, but a Greek capital, enriched and enlarged by Roman magnificence. It is situated at the point of junction between the chains of Lebanon and Taurus. Its natural position on the northern slope of Mount

and so we read: (25) And he went forth to Tarsus to seek for Saul. (26) And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass that even for a whole year they were gathered together with the church, and taught much people; and that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. The united labors of two such men for a whole year, in a community to which the gospel had already been favorably introduced, could not fail of great results; and the ultimate results were far beyond any hope which they could then have entertained; for they were now erecting as it were the second capital of the Christian world, whence were

---

Silpius, with a navigable river, the broad, historic Orontes, flowing at its feet, was at once commanding and beautiful. The windings of the river enriched the whole wooded plain, and as the city was but sixteen miles from the shore, the sea breezes gave health and coolness. These natural advantages had been largely increased by the lavish genius of ancient art. Built by the Seleucidæ as the royal residence of their dynasty, its wide circuit of many miles was surrounded by walls of astonishing height and thickness, which had been carried across ravines and over mountain summits with such daring magnificence of conception as to give the city the aspect of being defended by its own encircling mountains, as though these gigantic bulwarks were but its natural walls. The palace of the kings of Syria was on an island formed by an artificial channel of the river. Through the entire length of the city, from the Golden or Daphne gate on the west, ran for nearly five miles a grand corso, adorned with trees, colonnades and statues. Originally constructed by Seleucus Nicator, it had been continued by Herod the Great, who, at once to gratify his passion for architecture and to reward the people for their good will towards the Jews, had paved it for two miles and a half with blocks of white marble. Broad bridges spanned the river and its various affluents; baths, basilicas, villas, theaters clustered on the level plain, and, overshadowed by picturesque and rugged eminences, gave the city a splendor worthy of its fame as only inferior in grandeur to Alexandria and Rome."

sent forth not long afterward the most fruitful missions of the apostolic age.

The new name which here and now originated proved the most potent name that has ever been applied to a body of men. The question, who originated it, whether Barnabas and Saul, or the disciples of Antioch, or the unbelievers of Antioch, has occasioned more discussion than its importance justifies. To an untrained reader of the Greek it might appear that the passage should be rendered, "they were gathered together with the church, and taught much people, and called the disciples Christians first at Antioch," thus representing Barnabas and Saul as the authors of the name ; but this rendering is condemned, and that of our text is justified by the almost unanimous judgment of scholars. To call the followers of Christ Christians is so obviously proper and natural that it might have occurred to almost any one acquainted with the Greek language ; and this renders it difficult to decide whether it was given by unbelievers, or by the disciples themselves. In favor of the former supposition is the fact that bodies of men very commonly receive the names by which they are permanently known from others ; but the supposition adopted by many, that this name was given by the enemies of the faith in derision, is groundless, as is very clear from the consideration that there is nothing in it belittling or contemptuous. It is just such a name as a number of grave and dignified friends of the cause, had they been sitting in council on the subject, may have adopted. For its divine approval, we need no other assurance than that found in its acceptance by the apostles. True, in the only later occurrences of it in the New Testament, it appears as the name by which the disciples were called, rather than that by



which they called themselves ;<sup>1</sup> but it is only natural that in the epistles, which are all addressed to Christians, other and more intimate titles should be usually employed.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. BARNABAS AND SAUL ARE SENT TO JUDEA, 27-30.

Vv. 27-30. As the husbandman annually exchanges the labor of tillage for that of gathering in his harvest, so Barnabas and Saul, after a year's toil in preaching and teaching, laid aside that work for awhile, in order to bear some of the fruits of the benevolence which they had cultivated to the suffering in another country. (37) Now in those days there came down prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. (28) And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine over all the world : which came to pass in the days of Claudius. (29) And the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren who dwelt in Judea : (30) which also they did, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. This is the first mention of the gift of prophecy among the disciples, but Agabus and his companions seem to have been already well known as prophets, which shows that their gift had been previously exercised. The conduct of the brethren at Antioch shows also that the predictions uttered by these prophets were implicitly believed ; for they did not wait till the predicted famine had actually set in, but they made pro-

---

<sup>1</sup> See chap. xxvi. 28, where it is found in the lips of king Agrippa II. ; and I. Peter iv. 16, where Peter uses it as the name under which the disciples were persecuted.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the significance and value of names for the followers of Christ, see Excursus, Vol. II.

vision for it in advance. This prompt action on their part, which seems to have been spontaneous, and not to have sprung from exhortations by Barnabas and Saul, is the more to their credit, from the consideration that the famine was to extend over their own country, and the world generally, as well as over Judea. Had they been characterized by the selfishness of our own age, they would have said, Let us see first how severe the famine is going to be with ourselves and our immediate neighbors; and then, if we have anything to spare, we will send it to our more distant brethren. They indulged in no such selfish parleying; but, knowing that in the crowded population of Judea, where there was more poverty at best than in the region around Antioch, which was made rich by foreign trade, a famine would be more distressing than here, they determined at once to take the risk for themselves, and to make sure at all hazard of relieving their poorer brethren. It is clear that they understood the wonderful benevolence of the Jerusalem church, not as a fanatical outburst of communism, but as an example to be imitated under like circumstances by all Christians. Barnabas and Saul could well afford to suspend for a few weeks their work of preaching and teaching for the purpose of promoting a benevolent enterprise such as the world had seldom or never witnessed before. There is no preaching so eloquent as that which sounds out from whole-hearted benevolence.

The manner in which the elders of the churches in Judea are here mentioned, without a previous notice of their having been appointed, shows the elliptical character of Luke's narrative, and it results from the circumstance that he wrote after the churches had been fully organized, and all of the officials and their duties

had become well known. The elders, being the rulers of the congregations, were the proper persons to receive the gifts, and to see to the proper distribution of them among the needy.

5. JAMES IS BEHEADED AND PETER IS IMPRISONED,  
XII. 1-11.

Vv. 1, 2. The historian does not follow Barnabas and Saul in their tour of the churches of Judea, but, leaving them in this work, he turns into Jerusalem, and introduces a thrilling episode concerning affairs then transpiring in that city. (1) Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hand to afflict certain of the church. (2) And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. The persecutions which we have hitherto noticed were conducted by religious partisans in Jerusalem, without assistance from the civil rulers; but here is one in which the reigning prince is the leader, while the old enemies of the truth are working behind the curtain, if at all. This Herod was a namesake of Agrippa, the noted minister of Augustus Cæsar whose life by Tacitus is one of the noblest of Latin classics, and he was commonly called Agrippa. He was a grandson of the Herod by whom the infants of Bethlehem were slaughtered, and a nephew of Herod the Tetrarch by whom John the Baptist was beheaded. He grew up in Rome, where he wasted what fortune he had inherited in princely extravagance; but while doing so he contracted an intimacy with Caius Cæsar, afterward the notorious Emperor Caligula. When the latter ascended the throne after the death of Tiberius, he elevated his friend Agrippa to a small kingdom composed of part of his grandfather's dominions, which was subsequently enlarged by Claudius

until it included all of the territory ruled by the first Herod. He was now in the zenith of his power, and was living in the utmost magnificence.<sup>1</sup> There is not a hint as to the exciting cause of this murder; and there are so many causes which may have instigated it that conjecture in regard to it is vain. A more profitable subject for reflection is the very singular fact that God could so soon spare from the world and the church one of the apostles, when he had only twelve; for this death occurred only about ten years after the death of Jesus. Surely James had accomplished but a very small part of the work which had been assigned to him and his fellow apostles in the great commission, when God permitted his life to be suddenly and cruelly cut off. How striking an illustration of the oft-repeated saying, that God's ways are not as our ways. And how distinctly must James have remembered, when his head was placed on the block, what Jesus had predicted of himself and his brother John on a memorable occasion when their ambition got the better of them.<sup>2</sup> By this time he understood better than then what it is to sit on the right hand of Jesus in his kingdom.

The death of James, the first apostle who suffered martyrdom, must have been a source of indescribable grief to the church in Jerusalem; and to an uninspired historian it would have furnished matter for many pages of eloquent writing: what shall we think, then, of Luke as a writer, who disposes of it in a sentence of seven words in Greek, represented by eleven in English? Surely there is an indication here of some supernatural

---

<sup>1</sup> For a full and most interesting account of his career, see Josephus' *Antiquities*, Books xviii., xix.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xx. 20-28.

restraint upon the impulses of the writer, and it is accounted for only by his inspiration.

Vv. 3-5. A man engaged in a wicked enterprise is often made timid by conscience when left to himself; but when applauded by the multitude he is emboldened to press forward in his mad career. Agrippa may have hesitated when he had shed the blood of an apostle—a crime which none of the previous persecutors in Jerusalem had dared to perpetrate; but when the people applauded he hesitated no longer. (3) And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. And those were the days of unleavened bread. (4) And when he had taken him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quarternions of soldiers to guard him; intending after the passover to bring him forth to the people. (5) Peter therefore was kept in the prison, but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him. Evidently the king was seeking the destruction of the Jerusalem church, as the Pharisees, under the leadership of Saul, had done before; but, in contrast with their method, he sought to accomplish his purpose by beheading the leaders, rather than by persecuting the members. He doubtless congratulated himself on the wisdom of the new method, when he had succeeded in slaying one apostle, and in locking up, ready for execution, the chief man of them all. He must have heard of a previous imprisonment of the twelve, and of their escape from the prison in the night without the knowledge of the guards (v. 17-23); so he determined to improve upon the method of confinement then adopted, as well as upon the general method of the persecution. Not content with confining Peter in a prison whose outer gate was of iron (10), he added a guard of sixteen

soldiers, some of whom he placed in front of that gate (6), and some at two distinct points between the gate and the cell in which Peter was confined (10). Finally, to make surety doubly sure, he had him bound with two chains to two soldiers, between whom he slept (6). When all these precautions had been taken, he doubtless said to the chief priests, I will show you how to keep a prisoner. Let him get out of my hands, if he can.

In the earnest prayer which the church was now making for Peter, the brethren were but following the example of the apostles themselves at the time of their first persecution (iv. 23-30). We have reason to believe that they were not praying for his release; for they well knew that without miraculous interposition this was impossible; and as God had not thus rescued James, they had no reason to believe that he would thus rescue Peter. Moreover, when he was released, as we see below (13-15), they were so far from expecting it or hoping for it, that they could not at first believe it, as they would have been ready to do had they been praying for it. It was most natural under the circumstances that their petition to God should take a different direction; for, remembering how Peter had once faltered in the presence of imminent danger, and fully expecting that he would now be required to face the block, they had good cause to pray that his faith and courage might not fail him in the final crisis, but that, like Stephen and like James, as we may suppose, he might glorify the Lord by a triumphant death.

Vv. 6-11. Time wore away in painful suspense until the last night of the Passover week, and this night was to the brethren the most painful one of all; but though Peter was undoubtedly expecting to die the next morn-



ing, he seems to have slept as soundly as the soldiers to whom he was chained. (6) 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. (7) And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shined in the prison cell : and he smote Peter on the side, and awoke him, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. (8) And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And he did so. And he said unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. (9) And he went out, and followed ; and he knew not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision. (10) And when they were passed the first and second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth into the city ; which opened to them of its own accord, and they went out, and passed on through one street ; and straightway the angel departed from him. (11) 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. It is no wonder that Peter thought he was dreaming while this deliverance was being accomplished, or that it required the sight of the moon<sup>1</sup> and stars above him, and of the houses around him, to convince him that he was actually out of prison. No miracle more complicated or more unexpected had ever been wrought.

---

<sup>1</sup> As the paschal lamb was eaten at the time of full moon, being the night between the fourteenth and fifteenth day of the lunar month, and as this deliverance was on the seventh night afterward, the moon was just a week past the full ; and as this was the dry season, it was almost certainly visible.

## 6. PETER LEAVES THE CITY, AND THE GUARDS ARE SLAIN, 12-19.

VV. 12-16. After coming to himself Peter was not long in deciding what to do. Either because the house of Mary was the nearest among the homes of the disciples, or because of the well known character of its inmates, or both, he went immediately thither. (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 were gathered together and were praying. (13) And he knocked at the door of the gate,<sup>1</sup> and a maid<sup>2</sup> came to answer named Rhoda. (14) And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the door for joy, but ran in and told that Peter stood before the gate. (15) And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she confidently affirmed that it was even so. And they said, It is his angel. (16) But Peter continued knocking : and when they had opened, they saw him, and were amazed. Mary was not only the mother of Mark, doubtless the Mark of the second Gospel, but also an aunt of Barnabas (Col. iv. 10). She was apparently a widow in good circumstances financially, and her commodious house was a place of resort for the brethren

---

<sup>1</sup> "The door of the gate," though an unmeaning expression with us, is strictly accurate as here used ; for the entrance to large houses in Palestine is through large folding gateways, wide enough for loaded animals to pass in, while, for the admission of persons when the large gate is closed, there is a small door through one of the folds of the gate, just large enough to admit one person at a time.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word, *παῖδισκη*, here rendered "maid," commonly means a young female slave. Whether slave or hired servant, Rhoda seems to have been in full sympathy with the inmates of the house in regard to Peter.

of the church. The many who were gathered together there that night were by no means all the church, as some writers suppose; for the church was at this time far too numerous to be collected in a single private residence. This was probably one of many houses in which brethren were gathered together praying on what all supposed to be the last night of Peter's life. Few nights more solemn had ever been experienced by the brethren of that oft persecuted church. The unwillingness of those in Mary's house to believe the words of Rhoda, and their amazement when they saw Peter with their own eyes, were but natural under the circumstances; and doubtless the same incredulity was manifested by other groups of brethren in the city, as the news gradually came to them during the rest of the night, and early the next morning. The thought, before they saw him, that it must be his angel, is based on the supposition that every man has an angel, which is a true Scriptural idea;<sup>1</sup> and that this angel might sometimes assume the voice and personal appearance of his ward, which is doubtless a superstition.

VER. 17. The deliverance of Peter by the angel was a clear indication that it was God's will that he should flee from his enemies, and his plans to this end were promptly formed. His visit to the house of Mary was for the purpose of relieving the anxiety of his brethren; but the greatest secrecy was necessary in order to prevent his plans from being frustrated, so his stay at Mary's house was but momentary. (17) But he, beckoning unto them with his 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

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 10; Heb. i. 14.

to the brethren. And he departed, and went to another place. Silence was necessary in order to prevent arousing some of the neighbors, who might learn what was going on and report to the authorities. James, and the brethren generally, were to be told of the release, in order that their anxiety for Peter both now and on the morrow might be allayed. The manner in which James is mentioned shows that he, since the death of the elder James, and in the absence of Peter, was the chief man of the church. The probability is that this was not James the sons of Alphæus, one of the twelve, but James the Lord's brother.<sup>1</sup> The "other place" into which Peter now went was doubtless some other place than Jerusalem; for in the latter it would be very difficult for him to safely hide himself. He purposely avoided telling the brethren where he was going, so that they could truthfully say, if questioned, that they did not know; and it is by no means certain that Luke had learned where it was when he wrote this narrative. When Peter appeared in Jerusalem again there was doubtless great curiosity among friends and foes alike to know where he had been concealed; but prudence even then may have suggested that he should keep the secret to himself.

Vv. 18, 19. Naturally the morning light brought great confusion to the soldiers; first to the two between

---

<sup>1</sup> He is the James who was associated with Peter in Jerusalem at the time of Paul's first visit to the city after his conversion (Gal. i. 19); and also with Peter and John, as the context in Galatians would indicate, in the conference about circumcision (chap. ii. 9); and at this time, intermediate between the two, it is a fair presumption that we have the same James. Of the apostle James, Acts furnishes us no information after the first dispersion of the Jerusalem church.

whom he had been chained, and afterward to them all. Herod, too, was surprised and chagrined. He learned that he had no more skill in keeping apostles imprisoned than had the chief priests before him. (18) Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. (19) 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 Judea to Cæsarea, and tarried there. According to the strict letter of Roman military law, the execution of the soldiers was a necessity. When those standing in front of the gate were examined, we can see that the only answer they could give was, We kept our post all night, we remained wide awake, and no one passed in or out of that gate. When the man who kept the key of the iron gate was called, he truthfully said that it had not been out of his hand, nor had it been placed in the lock. The two guards between the outer door and Peter's cell were positive that no one had passed by them during the night; and the two to whom Peter had been chained could only say, When we went to sleep he was here with the chains all secure, and when we awoke he was gone; and that is all we know. Of course none of these statements could be true unless a stupendous miracle had been wrought; and there was absolutely no alternative, but to admit the miracle, or to hold that all of the soldiers had conspired together to voluntarily release the prisoner. The last horn of the dilemma could not be accepted by any sane man, seeing that the soldiers knew perfectly well that their lives would pay the forfeit of such a release. It seems then impossible to believe that Herod doubted the reality of the miracle, or the truthfulness of the soldiers; but he was

determined not to admit the miracle, and he deliberately chose in preference to murder sixteen innocent men. There was not a man in Jerusalem who could doubt the true state of the case when the facts became known. No wonder that the bloody wretch soon left the scene of so foul a crime, and made Cæsarea his place of residence.

#### 7. THE DEATH OF HEROD, AND THE RETURN OF BARNABAS AND SAUL, 20-25.

Vv. 20-23. Our author continues the history of this murderous prince to its close. (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 their country was fed from the king's country. (21) And upon a set day Herod arrayed himself in royal apparel, and sat on his throne, and made an oration to them. (22) And the people shouted, saying, the voice of a God, and not of a man. (23) 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 spirit. The dependence of Tyre and Sidon on Herod's country for food was not absolute; for their own territory produced some grain, and Egypt was not very far away; but the territory of Phœnicia was only a narrow mountain range along the seashore, altogether insufficient for the support of these two large cities, and it was much cheaper to bring the additional supply from the country adjoining theirs than from Egypt; so, as a matter of public policy, peace with the former was much to be desired. It seems that those who came to Cæsarea to secure this peace were not a small body of ambassadors, but quite a multitude of the citizens. It was probably



by bribery that they made Blastus the chamberlain (treasurer) their friend, and it may be that through him some of the money reached the king. Josephus, who gives a more detailed account of Herod's death, says that the occasion of this oration, here called "a set day," was a festival which Herod was celebrating in honor of Claudius Cæsar; and that the royal apparel in which Herod was arrayed was a robe woven entirely out of silver, which glistened in the morning sun. He also says that Herod was seized with violent pains in the bowels, and that he lingered in great torture for five days. His account, though containing some details besides these given by Luke, and omitting some which Luke gives, contains nothing inconsistent with what is here said.<sup>1</sup> Thus was the righteous judgment of God, which is usually reserved for the future state, displayed in this world, as a warning to wicked men, and an encouragement to those who do well.

VER. 24. It was inevitable that this providential death of Herod, so soon after the murders which he had committed in Jerusalem, should seriously affect the public mind. We are not surprised, therefore, when Luke adds: (24) But the word of God grew and multiplied. It grew in the reverence with which the people regarded it, and it multiplied in the increase of its converts to the truth. Another formidable and boldly executed plot to destroy the faith in Christ only advanced it among the people, as all the others had done.

VER. 25. The account which we have just gone over, of the death of James, the imprisonment of Peter, and the miserable death of Herod, is thrown in between the arrival of Barnabas and Saul on their mission to the

---

<sup>1</sup>Antiquities, xix. 8.

poor saints, and their return to Antioch ; and the author seems to mean by this arrangement that these events occurred in this interval. Whether Barnabas and Saul went into Jerusalem to attend the passover which was being observed while Peter was in prison, is not stated ; and it is most probable that, on account of the danger imminent, they kept away. But after Herod left the city this danger was diminished, so before their return to Antioch they entered the city, though it is not probable that they found there either Peter or any of the other apostles. (25) And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministration, taking with them John whose surname was Mark. Here we are first introduced to the son of the Mary to whose house Peter went when released from prison by the angel. He was doubtless at home on that memorable night ; he was Peter's son in the Gospel ;<sup>1</sup> and he must have been very deeply impressed by the events of that passover. The Gospel which he afterward wrote furnishes none of his personal history, but we shall meet with him again more than once in this narrative. On returning to Antioch, Barnabas and Saul had very startling news to tell, in addition to their report concerning the mission on which they had been sent.

Here the second part of Acts comes to a close, and with it Luke's account of the general spread of the gospel. From this point his narrative is confined to certain prominent events in the career of the apostle Paul, and it assumes the character of a biography.

---

I. Peter v. 13.

## EXCURSUS A.

---

### CONNECTION OF BAPTISM WITH REMISSION OF SINS.

The thought of any connection at all between baptism and remission of sins is repulsive to many Protestants of the present age. This state of feeling is largely due, I am constrained to believe, to a misconception of the nature of remission of sins. The latter is confounded with a change of heart, and is supposed to be a renewing of the soul effected by the direct agency of the Holy Spirit. It is regarded as an inward experience, a matter of consciousness; and men are taught to look within themselves for the evidence of it, and to find that evidence in the state of joy which immediately succeeds it. To one who has this conception of remission of sins, and of the agency by which it is brought about, it must necessarily appear absurd to suppose that it is in any way dependent on baptism, unless, with the Romanists, we attach to baptism some kind of magical power to effect a change in the soul.

But this conception of remission of sins is a mistaken one. It is not found in the New Testament. On the contrary, remission of sins is clearly distinguished from that change within which we commonly style a change of heart. This latter change takes place in repentance; for in the course of repentance the love of sin is removed, sorrow for it intervenes, the love of righteousness springs up, and there is a deep resolve to sin no

more. But repentance is constantly distinguished in the Scriptures from remission of sins, and the latter is constantly assumed to be consequent upon the former, not included in it. This is seen in the frequent occurrence of the expression, "repentance and remission of sins." It is also seen in such expressions as these: "The baptism of repentance unto remission of sins" (Mark i. 4; Luke iii. 3); "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (Acts ii. 38). Here is not only a very marked distinction between the two, but remission of sins is most clearly set forth as subsequent to repentance.

This mistaken conception is still further corrected, and the true idea brought out, by observing the meaning of the word rendered remission (*ἀφεσις*). As defined in the lexicons, it means, primarily, "release, as from bondage, imprisonment, etc. Secondly, when connected with sins, it means, forgiveness, pardon of sins (properly, the letting them go, as if they had not been committed), remission of their penalty."<sup>1</sup> It is used in its primary sense in the quotation from the Septuagint, Luke iv. 18, 19, where it occurs twice in the sense of deliverance or liberation of captives. It is used in its secondary sense everywhere else in the New Testament, and in one place (Mark iii. 29, "hath never forgiveness") the term forgiveness is its only admissible rendering in English. But forgiveness, pardon, is not an act which takes place within the soul of the person who is guilty; it takes place within the mind of the person who forgives, and it can not be known to the person forgiven except by some medium of communication. This is obviously true

---

<sup>1</sup> Grimm. *Greek Lexicon N. T.*; also Trench, *Greek Synonyms*, *sub verbo*.

when one man forgives another ; and when it is God who forgives, it is an act of the divine mind in reference to the sinner, and not a change within the sinner himself. Furthermore, it is an act which, from its very nature, can not take place until there has already occurred within the sinner such a change of heart and purpose as can make it proper in God, even on the ground of atonement in Christ, to extend pardon. In other words, the whole inward change which the sinner is required to undergo, must take place before sin can be forgiven. This being true, the apparent absurdity of connecting remission of sins in some way with baptism is removed, and it is left an open question, whether, in addition to faith and repentance, God also requires baptism before forgiveness. To the minds of the majority of present-day Protestants, the mere announcement of this question brings up the objection that justification is by faith only, and that the possibility of baptism being a prerequisite is by this fact excluded. But while justification, which involves remission of sins, is undoubtedly dependent on faith as a condition, it is nowhere said or implied that it is dependent on faith alone ; that is, on faith apart from the outward manifestations of faith. If justification is withheld until faith manifests itself in some outward action, the sinner is still justified by faith, but it is by faith in action as distinguished from faith as a mere state of mind. Abraham is the typical example of justification by faith ; yet what we have just said is true of him, as his case is expounded by the apostle James. He says : " Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up his son Isaac upon the altar ? Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect ; and the Scripture

was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness " (ii. 21-23). Here the apostle, instead of seeing an inconsistency between justification by faith and justification by faith manifested in an act of faith, holds the latter in the case of Abraham to be the fulfillment of the former. In other words, the Scripture statement that Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness, was realized when Abraham by faith offered up his son on the altar. In precisely the same way, and in perfect harmony with justification by faith, a man may be justified by faith when, as an act of faith, he is baptized. The question is still open, then, whether this is the fact in the case.

It is still further objected that some statements respecting faith, not included in those connecting it with justification, exclude the possibility of forgiveness being connected with baptism. For example: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jno. iii. 16); and, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life" (*ib.* 34). Here it is plainly affirmed that the believer is in possession of eternal life; but it is still an open question whether this is affirmed of the obedient believer, or of the believer who has not yet manifested his faith by action; whether, to use James' phraseology, it is faith made perfect by works of faith, or faith yet silent in the soul. This question is to be determined, not by such general statements as these, but by specific statements as to the conditions on which forgiveness of sins is offered.

The persistent objector has yet another set of texts which, to him, preclude the connection of which we



speak, texts in which justification is affirmed of faith without works of law. For example: "We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law;" or, leaving out the articles, "apart from works of law" (Rom. iii. 28). But by works of law in this place Paul means such acts of obedience to law as would justify a man on the ground of innocence, and make him independent of the grace manifested in pardon. Now, acts of faith, such as the offering of Isaac on the altar, do not belong to this category. On the contrary, this act of Abraham, viewed in the light of law, would have been a crime. The same is true of the act of Rahab in receiving the spies and protecting them, which James specifies as the act by which she was justified (Jas. ii. 25). This act, viewed in the light of law, was treason, while that of Abraham was murder. Now baptism is certainly an act of faith, deriving its propriety from a positive command; and not a work of law in the sense attached to that expression by Paul; consequently, it may be required of a believer to be baptized before he is forgiven, and yet justification may be apart from "works of law."

All connection between baptism and remission of sins is supposed to be precluded on still another ground, the fact that salvation is a matter of grace and not of works: "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, that no man should glory" (Eph. ii. 8, 9). But here again, as in the epistle to the Romans, the works excluded from the ground of salvation are works of perfect obedience, by which, if any man had wrought them, he would be saved on the ground of merit. This would exclude grace. But remission of sins is in its very na-

ture a grace bestowed, and not a debt paid ; and whether it is bestowed on certain conditions or on no condition, it remains a matter of grace. Only in case the works done are of such a nature that the person doing them deserves salvation, can grace be excluded ; and in that case there would be no remission, because there would be no sins to be remitted. So, then, if God has seen fit to require the believer to be baptized before he forgives him, forgiveness is none the less a matter of grace than if he made no such requirement. When a state executive pardons a criminal, no one ever thinks of saying it is not an act of grace because the criminal is required, as a condition, to sign a pledge never to repeat his crime ; and if it were a case of theft, and the governor should require a restoration of the stolen property as a condition of pardon, no one would think of denying that the pardon was an act of grace.

Seeing now that a connection between baptism and remission of sins is not precluded by any of the doctrinal statements of the Scriptures, which have so commonly been supposed to have this force, we are at liberty to examine without prejudice those passages of Scripture which seem to declare such a connection, and to ascertain, if possible, what that connection is. First, then, we examine some passages which plainly teach that remission of sins follows baptism in order of time.

Foremost among these is Peter's well-known answer, in his Pentecost sermon, to the question, "Brethren, what shall we do?" It is foremost, because this is the first time that Peter, making use of the keys which had been committed to him (Matt. xvi. 19), opened the gates of the kingdom to believers by declaring what they should do to find admittance. He said, "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 Spirit." Here, as we have pointed out in the commentary under this passage, whether the preposition be rendered *unto*, *for*, or *in order to*, remission of sins is unmistakingly placed after repentance and baptism. No words can make this more certain. The same connection precisely is stated in almost identical terms by both Mark and Luke with reference to the baptism of John. They both say that John preached "the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins" (Mark i. 4; Luke iii. 3). Here John's baptism is called the "baptism of repentance," because repentance was the only prerequisite demanded of a believing Jew. If the baptism instituted by Christ were distinguished from it by a corresponding epithet, the latter would be styled the baptism of faith; not because faith is the only prerequisite, but it is the one most prominent in the preaching of the apostles. That this baptism of repentance was "unto remission of sins," unmistakably points to remission as subsequent to it in order of time. In all these passages, however, if "unto" is used strictly, the baptism is contemplated as bringing the baptized person *to* remission, and no lapse of time is supposed between the baptism and that to which it brings the person. When, therefore, we speak of remission following baptism, we mean that it follows immediately. The command of Ananias to Saul teaches the same thing. The words, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts xxii. 16), clearly imply that his sins were washed away (a metaphor for remission of sins) as the immediate result of baptism. These are all of the passages in which sins are mentioned in im-

mediate connection with baptism, and they unite in showing that remission of the former is an immediate consequent of the latter.

In another class of passages the same truth is set forth by implication. Paul makes the statement, and reiterates it, that we are baptized into Christ: "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom. vi. 3); "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put him on" (Gal. iii. 27). Now when a man is in Christ his sins are certainly forgiven, and before he is in Christ they are certainly not forgiven. They are forgiven in passing into Christ, and a part of the process by which one passes into Christ is the act of baptism; and it follows that, as he is not in Christ until he is baptized, until he is baptized he is not forgiven. The words of our Lord in the apostolic commission justify the same inference: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. xxviii. 19). The man who has not yet entered into the relation expressed by the words "into the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," is yet in an unforgiven state, whatever may be his belief and his emotions; and this relation is established as soon as all of his sins are forgiven; but he enters into this relation in the act of baptism, he is baptized into it, and it follows that his sins are forgiven in connection with his baptism.

Still another class of passages present *facts* which imply the same relation between baptism and remission. It is of the nature of forgiveness to impart joy to the person forgiven, and it is a matter of universal experi-

ence that the consciousness of unforgiven sins is a burden to the soul. If, then, in tracing the experiences of men whose conversion to Christ is described in the New Testament, we should find that they rejoiced before they were baptized, this would be evidence that remission of sins precedes baptism. On the other hand, if we find this rejoicing uniformly following baptism, we must accept the opposite conclusion. Now there is not one instance of the former on record; on the contrary, in every instance of the mention of this rejoicing, it comes after baptism. For example, it was after he was baptized that the eunuch went on his way "rejoicing;" while before baptism he was in a state of anxiety and perplexity (Acts viii. 34-40). Before Saul was baptized, and up to the moment that Ananias told him to arise and be baptised and wash away his sins, he was in great agony of soul, and had neither eaten nor drunk for three days; but as soon as he was baptized, his soul was at ease, "for he took food and was strengthened" (ix. 9-18). In like manner the Philippian jailer was in distress and perplexity before his baptism, but after he was baptized he brought Paul and Silas into his house and set food before them, "and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God" (xvi. 30-34).

A fourth class of passages teach the same doctrine by the manner in which they connect baptism with salvation. Salvation in Christ consists essentially in the forgiveness of sins; for only when the soul is redeemed from sins by the power of Christ working within, and the guilt of sin taken away by pardon, can a man be in a state of salvation. If, then, when salvation and baptism are spoken of together, it is in a way to indicate that there is no connection between them, this might

force us to re-examine the passages already noticed, to see if we had by any possibility misread them. Or if in such passages we should find that salvation is spoken of as if it precedes baptism, this might demand a similar re-examination. But neither of these conditions is found to exist; the reverse is uniformly the order which we find. In the commission we read, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 16). Here salvation is placed after baptism, and it is certainly the salvation which consists in forgiveness of sins; for the final salvation depends on much more than believing and being baptized. In the epistle to Titus we read, "When the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared, not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (iii. 4-7). Here, by the washing (literally, laver) of regeneration, the apostle means baptism, which is so called because it is a species of washing connected with the process of regeneration; and it is affirmed that by this and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (the inward work of the Spirit which precedes baptism) we are saved. At the same time, lest any might think of merit of any kind as the ground of this salvation, he says that this salvation is not accorded because of anything which we had previously done in the way of righteousness, but only because of God's mercy. Furthermore, he identifies the salvation thus spoken of with justification, by the added clause, "that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs ac-



ording to the hope of eternal life." Again we read in the first epistle of Peter that "eight souls were saved through water; which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (I. Pet. iii. 31). Here the negation of putting away the filth of the flesh is aimed against a Jewish misconception, and to us its meaning is obvious. The clause rendered, "but the interrogation of a good conscience," is confessedly obscure; but whatever its meaning, it leaves unaffected the fact previously stated, that water does now, in a true likeness to that of the flood, save us in baptism; and if baptism saves in any sense whatever, it must precede salvation, and bring the sinner to it.

Finally, the connection in question is implied in our Lord's remark to Nicodemus as to the conditions of entering into the kingdom of God: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God." All ancient Christian scholars, and all the abler expositors of modern times, agree in declaring with one voice, that by the term water Jesus here refers to baptism. Dr. Wall, in his history of Infant Baptism, says: "There is not one Christian writer of any antiquity, in any language, but who understands the new birth of water as referring to baptism; and if it be not so understood, it is difficult to give any account how a person is born of water, more than born of wood" (vol. i. 110). Alford testifies: "All the better and deeper expositors have recognized the coexistence of the two, water and the Spirit" (*Com. in loco*); and to the same effect it is said by Dr. Westcott: "All interpreta-

tions which treat the term water here as 'simply 'figurative and descriptive of the cleansing power of the Spirit, are essentially defective, as they are also opposed to all ancient tradition" (Com. on John *in loco*). In another part of his notes on the passage, Alford goes still farther in the direction of these assertions, and also gives the meaning of the verse, in these words: "There can be no doubt, on any honest interpretation of the words, that to be born of water refers to the token or outward sign of baptism—to be born of the Spirit, to the thing signified, or inward grace of the Holy Spirit. All attempts to get rid of these two plain facts have sprung from doctrinal prejudices, by which the views of expositors have been warped." We may set aside, therefore, as exceptional and sectarian, all interpretations which take out of this passage its obvious allusion to baptism, and we are justified in saying that according to the united judgment of unbiased scholars of all churches, Jesus here meant that except a man experience the inward work of the Holy Spirit, and be baptized, he can not enter into the kingdom of God. Now before a man is in the kingdom of God, his sins are unforgiven; and when his sins are forgiven he is no longer an alien, but a citizen of that kingdom. By whatever process, then, he enters into that kingdom, by that or in that he obtains the remission of sins; but that process is the birth of water and the Spirit, of neither alone, but of both; and therefore he obtains forgiveness not before, but when he is baptized. It is but an echo of these words of our Lord, when Paul says He saved us "through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus iii. 5).

These evidences establish, as clearly as any fact can

be established, an immediate connection between baptism and remission of sins, and they show with equal clearness that the divine act of forgiving sins takes place when the sinner, in whose heart the Holy Spirit has wrought faith and repentance, is baptized into Christ.

Here we might draw this discussion to a close but for the fact that by many this is supposed to be a heretical doctrine, unsupported by the scholarship of either past or present ages. To disabuse the reader of this impression, we proceed to show how these evidences have been regarded by men of learning. In the first place, the voice of antiquity is united upon it, as on the meaning of "born of water and the Spirit." Sufficient proof of this, without quoting individual authors, is found in the fact that the article on the subject in the Nicene Creed, adopted in the beginning of the fourth century without a dissenting voice, declares: "We believe in one baptism for the remission of sins." It is a well known fact also, that the Greek Church, the Armenian, and the Roman Catholic, still teach and have ever taught this doctrine, with the additional and unscriptural idea that baptism, independently of faith and repentance, takes away original sin in the case of infants. Infant baptism indeed owes its origin to this mistaken conception. The process is traced by Neander in the following well known passage: "But when, now, on the one hand, the doctrine of corruption and guilt, cleaving to human nature in consequence of the first transgression, was reduced to a more precise and systematic form, and on the other, from the want of duly distinguishing between what is outward and what is inward in baptism (the baptism by water and the baptism by the Spirit), the error became more firmly established

that without external baptism no one could be delivered from that inherent guilt, could be saved from the everlasting punishment that threatened him, or raised to eternal life; and when the notion of magical influence, a charm connected with the sacrament, continually gained ground, the theory was finally evolved of the unconditional necessity of infant baptism. About the middle of the third century, this theory was generally admitted in the North African Church." Among the evidences which he gives of the truth of this representation, is an extract from Cyprian (Epistle 59), in which the writer contends for the baptism of infants immediately after their birth, and closes with these words: "But if even the chief of sinners, who have been exceedingly guilty before God, receive the forgiveness of sins on coming to faith, and no one is precluded from baptism and from grace, how much less should the child be kept back, which, as it is but just born, can not have sinned, but has only brought with it, by its descent from Adam, the infection of the old death; and which may the more easily obtain the remission of sins, because the sins which are forgiven it are not its own, but those of another" (Church History, i. 313, 314).

The unfortunate circumstance that this doctrine of baptism for remission of sins, universally taught in the ancient church, was thus corrupted by the church of the dark ages, was undoubtedly the cause of a reaction against it among the leaders of the Protestant Reformation; yet Luther and Calvin, while repudiating the doctrine as taught by Rome, and failing to adopt it in its original form, did both stumble upon it in their exposition of various passages of Scripture in which it is plainly taught. Thus Luther, commenting on the

words (Gal. iii. 27), "All ye that are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ," makes these remarks: "This old man must be put off with all his works, that of the children of Adam we may be made the children of God. This is not done by changing of a garment, or by any laws or works, but by a new birth, and by the renewing of the inward man; which is done in baptism, as saith Paul: 'All ye that are baptized, have put on Christ.' Wherefore, to be appareled with Christ according to the gospel is not to be appareled with the law or with works, but with an incomparable gift; that is to say, with remission of sins, righteousness, peace, consolation, joy of spirit, salvation, life, and Christ himself. This is diligently to be noted, because of the fond and fantastical spirits, who go about to deface the majesty of baptism, and speak wickedly of it. Paul, contrarywise, commendeth and setteth it forth with honorable titles, calling it 'the washing of the new birth, the renewing of the Holy Spirit' (Titus iii.). And here also he saith, that all they which are baptized have put on Christ. As if he said, Ye are carried out of the law into a new birth, which is wrought in baptism. Therefore ye are not now any longer under the law, but ye are clothed with a new garment; to-wit, with the righteousness of Christ. Wherefore baptism is a thing of great force and efficacy" (Luther's Com. on Galatians). In these extracts Luther confirms the views expressed above, not only on the passage which he has immediately in hand, but also on our Lord's remark about the new birth, and Paul's in regard to the washing of regeneration. And all this comes from him who is the prime author of the modern doctrine of justification by faith alone.

John Calvin expresses himself to the same effect, and brings into view a still larger number of the passages which I have cited above. He says: "From baptism our faith derives three advantages, which require to be distinctly considered. The first is, that as proposed to us by the Lord, as a symbol and token of our purification; or, to express my meaning more fully, it resembles a legal instrument properly attested, by which he assures us that all our sins are canceled, effaced, and obliterated, so that they will never appear in his sight, or come into his remembrance, or be imputed to us. For he commands all who believe to be baptized for the remission of their sins. Therefore those who have imagined that baptism is nothing more than a mark or sign by which we profess our religion before men, as soldiers wear the insignia of their sovereign as a mark of their profession, have not considered that which is the principal thing in baptism; which is, that we ought to receive it with this promise: 'He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved' (Mark xvi. 16). In this sense we are to understand what is said by Paul, that Christ sanctifieth and cleanseth the church 'with the washing of water by the word' (Eph. v. 26); and in another place that 'according to his mercy he saves us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit' (Titus iii. 5); and by Peter, that 'baptism doth now save us' (I. Peter iii. 21)."<sup>1</sup> From this extract the reader can see at a glance that all the passages cited in it are understood by Calvin to have the very meaning which I have attached to them; and the fact that these

---

<sup>1</sup> Calvin's Institutes, B. iv. 15, §§ 1, 2. Similar views are expressed in §§ 3, 4; though in § 15 he inconsistently represents the sins of Cornelius as being forgiven before he was baptized.



interpretations are given by a theologian who did not consistently apply them in his system, gives them the greater weight because it shows that they are not the result of doctrinal prepossession, but of the simplicity and clearness with which they are expressed in the passages themselves.

It is well known, also, that another great reformer of more recent times, John Wesley, fell upon this doctrine in the course of his exegetical studies, although it constituted no part of his system. He says: "Baptism administered to real penitents, is both a means and a seal of pardon. Nor did God ordinarily, in the primitive church, bestow pardon on any, unless through this means" (*Notes on N. T.*, p. 350).

Not to multiply evidences of this kind to any unnecessary extent, we pass by the utterances of many other eminent scholars of orthodox churches, and add a few from writers of our own age, eminent for their learning and their exegetical skill.

H. B. Hackett, one of the most eminent scholars and commentators in the Baptist Church of America, in commenting on Acts ii. 38, says: "*In order to the forgiveness of sins*, we connect naturally with both the preceding verbs. The clause states the motive or object which should induce them to repent and be baptized. It enforces the entire exhortation, no one part of it to the exclusion of the other." On Acts xxii. 16, he says: "*And wash away thy sins*. This clause states a result of the baptism in language derived from the nature of that ordinance. It answers to 'for the remission of sins' in ii. 38—that is, submit to the rite in order to be forgiven." Clearer or more explicit testimony to the doctrine upheld in this excursus could not be uttered.

Dr. Jacobson, Bishop of Chester, and author of the notes on Acts in *The Speaker's Commentary*, under Acts xxii. 16 quotes with approval the words of Waterland: "Baptism was at length his [Paul's] grand absolution, his patent of pardon, his instrument of justification granted him from above; neither was he justified till he received that divine seal, inasmuch as his sins were upon him till that very hour."

Dr. J. A. Alexander, of Princeton, writes: "The whole phrase, to (or toward) remission of sins, describes this as the end to which the multitude had reference, and which, therefore, must be contemplated in the answer." Again: "The beneficial end to which all this led was the remission of sins" (*Com. Acts ii. 38*).

Lechler, author of *Commentary on Acts in Lange's Bible Work*, says under ii. 38: "The apostle promises to those who repent and receive baptism, (1) the remission of sins, and (2) the gift of the Holy Spirit." Under xxii. 16, he says: "We have here a noble testimony to the value which was assigned to holy baptism by the pure apostolic church. It was not a mere external ceremony, but a means of grace for washing away sins, and was the first actual entrance into the church of Jesus."

Dr. Gloag (Presbyterian), says in his *Commentary*, under xxii. 16: "Baptism in the adult, except in the peculiar case of our Lord, was accompanied by a confession of sin, and was a sign of its remission; hence called baptism in order to forgiveness of sins" (*Acts ii. 38*).

Plumptre, after quoting the words of Ananias to Paul, says: "They show that for the apostle baptism was no formal or ceremonial act, but was joined with repentance, and, faith being presupposed, brought with it the assur-

ance of a real forgiveness. In St. Paul's language as to the 'washing' (or bath) of regeneration (Tit. iii. 5), we may trace his continued adherence to the idea which he had thus been taught on his first admission to the Church of Christ" (*Com. on Acts*, xxii. 16).

Finally we quote the testimony of two eminent philologists. Meyer says under Acts ii. 38: "ἐς denotes the object of the baptism, which is the admission of the guilt contracted in the state before *μετανοῖα*." Grimm, in his great lexicon of the Greek N. T., defines ἐς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, Acts ii. 38, "to obtain the forgiveness of sins" (βαπτίζω II. b. aa.).

These citations are abundant to show that we have not misinterpreted the passages in question; and they show clearly that we are right in rejecting the rendering of the R. V., "unto remission of sins," and retaining that of the A. V., "for remission of sins." Peter's purpose in the expression was not to indicate the mere fact that baptism brings one to remission, but to state the blessing in order to the attainment of which his hearers were to be baptized. In other words, he states a motive for the act. In many other passages the R. V. is liable to the same criticism in its rendering of the preposition ἐς. We might add many more testimonies if it were necessary. They show that the connection between baptism and remission of sins for which we contend is one of the most universally recognized doctrines of the New Testament. We have occupied so much space with its presentation, from a desire to restore this most solemn ordinance of our Lord to the place which it occupied in the primitive church, and to bring into practice the views of its meaning so clearly expressed by the scholars of all schools and ages. It has been common, in these

latter days, to decry the doctrine, connected as it must be with the right action of baptism, because of consequences ascribed to it with reference to the salvation of myriads of pious persons in past ages who have not been really baptized; but such consequences, whether real or imaginary, can not alter the truth of Scriptures, while the consideration of them tends to bias our judgment and to hide the truth from us. It is the part of wisdom to unhesitatingly accept the truth as we discover it, knowing that we are to be judged in the great day according to the measure of light which we have, or may have; and that if our fathers were saved in neglect of any duty of which they were ignorant, we may not hope to be saved in neglect of any duty which is plainly pointed out to us. The right action of baptism is very rapidly gaining recognition among the serious minds of our time; let us endeavor to restore also its right design, and thus we may put to silence those "fond and fantastic spirits," as Luther styles them, "who go about to deface the majesty of baptism, and speak wickedly of it."













6458 TB 318  
11-16-00 32180 MS





Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries



1 1012 01291 3234





