

Bible Study
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7. Debate in Jerusalem Over Acceptance of the Gentiles (15:1–35)

Acts 15:1–35 stands at the very center of the book. Not only is this true of its position halfway through the text, but it is also central in the development of the total plot of the book. The first half of Acts has focused on the Jewish Christian community, particularly on the influential Jerusalem church. The Christian witness had begun there (chaps. 1–5). Through the Hellenists especially it had spread to Samaria and all of the land of the Jews (chaps. 6–9). Through the witness of Peter to Cornelius, the outreach of the Antioch church, and especially through the first major mission completed by Paul and Barnabas, the gospel had broken through to the Gentiles (chaps. 10–14). All the preliminary steps had been taken for a major effort to reach the Gentile world. The precedents had been established; the first major successes among the Gentiles had been witnessed.¹⁷⁷ The stage was set for Paul's mission to the heart of the Greco-Roman world as *the* missionary to the Gentiles.

There remained only one final hurdle, and that was the agreement of the whole church on the Gentile mission. There were still those among the Jewish Christians who had serious reservations about the way the outreach to Gentiles had been conducted. These reservations and the final solution to them worked out in a major conference in Jerusalem are the subject of 15:1–35. There the whole church agreed on the Gentile mission. The way was now open for the mission of Paul, and that will be the subject of the rest of Acts. Hereafter the Jerusalem church fades into the background. When it does reappear, as in chap. 21, it will be wholly in connection with Paul's Gentile ministry. The focus is entirely on him.

The debate in Jerusalem revolved around the issue of *how* Gentiles were to be accepted into the Christian fellowship. The more conservative Jewish Christians felt that they should be received on the same basis that Jews had always accepted Gentiles into the covenant community—through proselyte initiation. This involved circumcision of the males and all proselytes taking upon themselves the total provisions of the Mosaic law. For all intents and purposes, a Gentile proselyte to Judaism *became a Jew*, not only in religious conviction but in lifestyle as well. That was the question the conservative group of Jewish Christians raised: Should not Gentiles be required to become Jews in order to share in the Christian community? It was a natural question. The first Christians were all Jews. Jesus was a Jew and the Jewish Messiah. God had only one covenant people—the Jews. Christianity was a messianic movement within Judaism. Jews had always demanded of all Gentile converts the requirements of circumcision and rituals of the Torah. Why should that change?

Evidently the requirements *had* changed. There was no indication that Peter had laid such requirements on Cornelius, or the Antioch church on the Gentiles who became a part of their

¹⁷⁷ For the centrality of 15:1–35 in the total outline of Acts, see J. C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in Its Historical Setting* (London: SPCK, 1970), 66.

fellowship, or Paul and Barnabas on the Gentiles converted in their mission. This was a cause for serious concern from the more conservative elements. Not only was it a departure from normal proselyte procedure; it also raised serious problems of fellowship. How could law-abiding Jewish Christians who seriously observed all the ritual laws have interaction with Gentile Christians who did not observe those laws? The Jewish Christians would run the risk of defilement from the Gentiles. These were the two issues that were faced and resolved in Jerusalem: (1) whether Gentile converts should submit to Jewish proselyte requirements, especially to circumcision and (2) how fellowship could be maintained between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

In Gal 2 Paul told of a conference in Jerusalem that had many similarities to Acts 15:1–35. Although the two accounts contain significant differences, the similarities seem to outweigh these, and it is probable that they relate to the same event.⁷²⁸ Both dealt with the issue of circumcision, Paul and Barnabas defended their views against the more conservative Jewish Christians in both accounts, and the final agreement was reached in both that the Gentiles would not be required to submit to Jewish proselyte circumcision. In Gal 2:1–10 Paul did not go into the question of table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians (though Gal 2:11–14 clearly concerns table fellowship between Gentile and Jewish Christians), but that issue was a natural outgrowth of the decision not to require Gentiles to live by the Torah. That it comprised part of the agenda at the Jerusalem Conference is highly plausible.⁷³⁹ In any event, it will be assumed in the commentary that follows that Paul and Luke were referring to the same conference, and where appropriate Paul's account will be cited to supplement that of Acts. Acts 15:1–35 falls into four natural parts. The first comprises an *introduction* and relates how the debate arose in Antioch and led to the conference in Jerusalem to attempt some resolution (vv. 1–5). The second part focuses on the *debate* in Jerusalem (vv. 6–21) and primarily centers on the witness of Peter (vv. 6–11) and of James (vv. 12–21). The third part deals with the final

²⁷⁸ One of the major reasons scholars are hesitant to equate Gal 2 and Acts 15 is that of fitting together the visits of Paul related in Galatians and Acts. This problem is given disproportionate significance, and many follow Ramsay's suggestion that Gal 2:1–10 refers to the visit of Acts 11:30–12:25. This is to ignore totally the question of content, the really important consideration. Acts 11:30–12:25 deals only with an offering for famine relief. Acts 15 deals with the requirement of circumcision for Gentile converts, as does Gal 2. The problem of the visits can be treated with less drastic surgery, such as assuming that Paul failed to mention the brief famine visit because he had no contact with any apostles on that occasion. This was the solution proposed by Zahn and followed in the commentaries of Rackham (239), Stagg (157), and Robertson (*WP* 3:221–22). See also the discussion in chap. IV, n. 136. For additional arguments for equating Gal 2:1–10 with Acts 15, see R. Stein, "The Relationship of Gal 2:1–10 and Acts 15:1–35: Two Neglected Arguments," *JETS* (1974): 239–42.

³⁷⁹ A number of German scholars would divide Acts 15:1–35 into two separate occasions: (1) the original Jerusalem Conference when only the issue of requirements for Gentile converts was debated and (2) a letter from Jerusalem ("the decrees" of 15:22–29), which was sent later, after the dispute over table fellowship arose in Antioch (to which Paul referred in Gal 2:11–14). See Schneider, 2:189–91; A. Weiser, "Das 'Apostelkonzil' (Apg. 15:1–35)," *BZ* 28 (1984): 145–67.

solution, which takes the form of an official letter sent to Antioch (vv. 22–29). The narrative *concludes* where it began—in Antioch—with the delivering of the letter by two delegates of the Jerusalem church (vv. 30–35).

(1) The Criticism from the Circumcision Party (15:1–5)

¹Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” ²This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. ⁴When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.”

15:1–2 There were many Gentiles in the church at Antioch (cf. 11:20f.). There is no indication that they had been circumcised when they joined the Christian fellowship. This was disturbing to some Jewish Christians who came from Judea and insisted that circumcision in strict obedience to the Jewish law was necessary for salvation (v. 1).⁸⁴⁰ Evidently they shared the views and perhaps were even some of the same persons as the “circumcision party,” who are identified in the Western text as belonging to the sect of the Pharisees and who challenged Peter for having table fellowship with Cornelius (11:2). The group evidently represented the strict Jewish viewpoint that there was no salvation apart from belonging to the covenant community, the people of Israel. To be a part of that community a Gentile must take on the physical sign of the covenant, the mark of circumcision, and live by all the precepts of the law of Moses, ritual as well as moral. In the sharp debate that this demand provoked, Paul and Barnabas were the main opponents to this Judaizing perspective (v. 2). They had laid no such requirements on the Gentiles converted in their recent mission. It is altogether likely that the large number of such converts in their successful mission had attracted the attention of this Judaizing group in the first place.

The group soon realized that such a basic issue could not be settled in Antioch. It needed the attention of the whole church, since all Christians, Jew and Gentile, would be affected by its resolution. An “ecumenical conference” was arranged in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the “mother church.” The apostles were there. It was the suitable site to debate such an important issue. It is unclear who appointed Paul and Barnabas and “some other believers” to represent Antioch in Jerusalem. The Western text has the Judaizing group summoning Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem “to be judged.”⁸⁵¹ More likely the Antioch church appointed them as its official delegates to the meeting. Paul mentioned that Titus accompanied him and Barnabas to Jerusalem (Gal 2:1), so he may well have been one of the “others” of Acts 15:2.

15:3–4 The distance between Antioch and Jerusalem was in excess of 250 miles, and the apostles may well have spent a month or so on their journey. They used the opportunity to visit

⁴⁸⁰ The Western text has the group make two demands: circumcision *and* conduct according to the law of Moses. This is perhaps a harmonization with v. 5.

⁵⁸¹ I. M. Ellis, “Codex Bezae at Acts 15,” *IBS* 2 (1980): 134–40.

congregations along the way. It could almost be described as a “campaign trip,” since most of these congregations would likely be sympathetic with their viewpoint that Gentiles should not be burdened with circumcision and the Torah.⁸⁶² This would be especially true of the Christians of Phoenicia whose congregations were likely established by the same Hellenists who reached out to the Gentiles in Antioch (11:19–20). The congregations along their route rejoiced at the news of Paul and Barnabas’s success among the Gentiles. Evidently they did not share the misgivings of the Judaizing Christians. When the Antioch delegation arrived in Jerusalem, they were well received by the “apostles and elders” (v. 4). These would be the central groups in the deliberation. Peter would be the spokesperson for the apostles, and James would represent the elders. Just as Paul and Barnabas had reported the success of their mission to the sponsoring church at Antioch (14:27) and to the congregations on their way (15:3), so now they shared with the leaders in Jerusalem what *God* had done through them. The emphasis on God’s blessing was essential. That God’s *leading* was so evident in accepting the Gentiles apart from the law would determine the final outcome of the conference.

15:5 The reception was somewhat cooler from a group of believers “who belonged to the party of the Pharisees” (v. 5). It was perhaps some of their group who had first stirred up the controversy in Antioch. They at least shared the same viewpoint: Gentiles who become Christians must undergo Jewish proselyte procedure. They must be circumcised. They must live by the entire Jewish law. It was not the moral aspects of the law that presented the problem but its ritual provisions. The moral law, such as embodied in the Ten Commandments, was never in question. Paul, for instance, constantly reminded his churches of God’s moral standards in his letters. The ritual aspects of the law presented a problem. These were the provisions that marked Jews off from other people—circumcision, the food laws, scrupulous ritual purity. They were what made the Jews Jews and seemed strange and arbitrary to most Gentiles. To have required these of Gentiles would in essence have made them into Jews and cut them off from the rest of the Gentiles. It would have severely restricted, perhaps even killed, any effective Gentile mission. The stakes were high in the Jerusalem Conference.

It should come as no surprise that some of the Pharisees had become Christians. Pharisees believed in resurrection, life after death, and the coming Messiah. They shared the basic convictions of the Christians. Because of this they are sometimes in Acts found defending the Christians against the Sadducees, who had much less in common with Christian views (cf. 5:17; 23:8f.). A major barrier between Christians and Pharisees was the extensive use of oral tradition by the Pharisees, which Jesus and Paul both rejected as human tradition. It is not surprising that some Pharisees came to embrace Christ as the Messiah in whom they had hoped. For all their emphasis on law, it is also not surprising that they would be reticent to receive anyone into the fellowship in a manner not in accordance with tradition. That tradition was well-established for proselytes—circumcision and the whole yoke of the law.

(2) *The Debate in Jerusalem (15:6–21)*

⁶The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

⁸⁶² P. Gaechter, “Geschichtliches zum Apostelkonzil,” *ZTK* 85 (1963): 339–54.

⁹He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? ¹¹No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

¹²The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³When they finished, James spoke up: “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. ¹⁵The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶“ ‘After this I will return
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,

¹⁷that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things’

¹⁸that have been known for ages.

¹⁹“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.

The central section of Acts 15:1–35 relates the debate in Jerusalem over the circumcision issue. There were two major witnesses, both in defense of the view that the Gentiles should not be burdened by circumcision and the law. Peter spoke first (vv. 7–11), followed by James (vv. 13–21). Both speeches are preceded by brief summary notices that set the larger context of the conference (vv. 6, 12).

Peter’s Witness (15:6–11)

15:6 Verse 6 relates the gathering for the conference. Since it mentions only the apostles and elders, many interpreters see this as a reference to the private conference Paul mentioned in Gal 2:2 with “those who seemed to be leaders.” These interpreters would see the full church being first gathered together for the “discussion” in v. 7 or even later—with the mention of the whole assembly in v. 12. If Luke mentioned Paul’s private conference at all, it would more likely be the initial meeting with the apostles and elders in v. 4. Verses 6–29 are a continuous narrative, and one would assume the whole group was gathered together for the discussion—the apostles and elders, other members of the Jerusalem church (including the Pharisaic Christians), Paul and Barnabas, and the other members of the Antioch delegation. The apostles and elders were singled out as the leaders of the assembly. They initiated the formal inquiry.⁸⁷³

⁸⁷³ For the view that ἰδεῖν περί is a Latinism based on *videre de* and indicating a former investigation, see J. L. North, “Is *idein peri* (Acts 15, 6, cf. 18, 5) a Latinism?” *NTS* 29 (1983): 264–66.

15:7–9 The meeting began with a lively discussion (v. 7). After the various viewpoints had been aired, Peter rose to speak. He began by reminding the assembly of his own experience in the household of Cornelius (v. 7b). Even though it was “some time ago,” possibly as much as ten years before, the experience had made an indelible impression on Peter. God had chosen him to witness to the Gentiles (cf. 10:5, 20, 32). Peter could expect the Jerusalem Christians, including the circumcisers, to remember this because he had given them a full report following the incident (cf. 11:1–18). What he had learned on that occasion was that God looks on the heart, not on external matters. God is no respecter of persons (10:34). Perhaps Peter had in mind the distinction made by the prophets that God does not look to the external circumcision of the flesh but the internal circumcision of the heart (Jer 4:4; 9:26; cf. Rom 2:29). God had convicted Cornelius, looked to the inner circumcision of his heart, and accepted him on that basis. God had proved his acceptance of Cornelius and the Gentiles at his home by granting them the gift of his Spirit. God only grants his Spirit to those he has accepted (cf. 10:44, 47; 11:17). The fact that they had received the Spirit just as Peter and the Jewish Christians had was proof that God had accepted Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles on an equal footing (v. 9). He “purified their hearts” by faith. Peter undoubtedly was thinking of his vision: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (10:15). For the Jew circumcision was a mark of sanctity and purity, of belonging to God’s people and being acceptable to him. But in Cornelius God had shown Peter that true purity comes not by an external mark but by faith. In the account of Cornelius in chap. 10, his faith is never explicitly mentioned but is certainly evidenced in his following without question every direction God gave him. Here Peter made explicit what was implicit there: Cornelius had been accepted by God on the basis of his faith.

15:10–11 In v. 10 Peter gave his conclusion drawn from the experience with Cornelius. It was an emphatic no to the question of Gentile circumcision and the “yoke” of the law. God had accepted the Gentiles at Cornelius’s house without either of these. How could Jewish Christians demand anything more than the faith already shown? To demand more would be to put God to the test, to act against God’s declared will, to see if God really meant what he had already shown in accepting Gentiles apart from the law.⁸⁸⁴ Peter’s statement in v. 10 is strong but should not be misconstrued. By speaking of the “yoke” of the law, he did not mean that the law was an intolerable burden that Jewish Christians should abandon. Peter was using a common Jewish metaphor for the law that had the same positive meaning Jesus had given it (Matt 11:29f.).⁸⁹⁵ Peter did not urge *Jewish Christians* to abandon the law, nor did they cease to live by it. Peter’s meaning was that the law was something the Jews had not been able to fulfill. It had proven an inadequate basis of salvation for them. Neither they nor their fathers had been able to fully keep the law and so win acceptance with God (cf. Rom 2:17–24). For the Jewish Christians the law would remain a mark of God’s covenant with them, a cherished heritage. It could not save them. Only one thing could—faith, believing in the saving grace of the Lord Jesus (v. 11).

⁸⁸⁴ For the concept of “tempting/testing” God, cf. Deut 6:16; Exod 17:2; Ps 78:18; Matt 4:7.

⁸⁹⁵ For the law as a “yoke” see *m. Abot* 3:5. The rabbis saw the Torah not as an instrument of enslavement but as a yoke that bound them to God’s will. It was a gift of his mercy. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); J. Nolland, “A Fresh Look at Acts 15:10,” *NTS* 27 (1980): 105–15.

Faith alone, grace alone—one could hardly sound more like Paul. Paul had said much the same thing at Pisidian Antioch (13:38f.). It is something of an irony that Paul had to remind Peter of this same truth just a short time later in Antioch when his actions went counter to his convictions (Gal 2:14–17). It is interesting to observe Peter’s progression throughout his speech. He began by pointing out how God had accepted the Gentiles “just like he accepted us” (v. 8). Now the shoe was on the other foot. The Gentiles had become the example for the Jews—“we are saved, just as they are” (v. 11). God’s acceptance of the Gentiles had drawn a basic lesson for the Jews as well. There is only *one* way of salvation—“through the grace of our Lord Jesus.” The emphasis on grace in 15:11 fits well with the emphasis on God’s sovereign activity in the salvation of the Gentiles. Peter’s ultimate point was that God is free to save whomever and however he pleases.

James’s Testimony (15:12–21)

15:12 At the end of Peter’s speech the entire assembly sat in silence. The hubbub with which the conference began (v. 7) now ceased. Paul and Barnabas had already shared their missionary experience with the leaders (v. 4).⁸¹⁰⁶ Now they gave their testimony before the entire congregation (v. 12). Their emphasis was again on *God’s* initiative in the mission, his work through them, the signs and wonders that had attested to his presence and affirmation of their ministry.⁸¹¹⁷ This missionary report was the entire role that Paul and Barnabas had in the conference. The main arguments were offered by Peter and James, the leaders of the apostles and elders. Paul and Barnabas evidently offered no defense of their position on the Gentile question other than the implicit argument that God had endorsed it. This was wise procedure. Often those who are most involved in an issue cannot be heard objectively by their opponents. A third party can address the issue with less passion and more authority. This was the role filled by Peter and James, who were in essence the spokespersons for the two missionaries.

15:13 When Paul and Barnabas had completed their testimony, James rose to speak (v. 13). It was James the brother of Jesus. Paul also mentioned James’s role at the Jerusalem Conference (Gal 2:9; cf. 1:19) and called him one of the “pillars” of the church, along with Peter and John. James had evidently become the leading elder of the Jerusalem congregation. His leadership of the church has already been indicated in 12:17. Upon Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem he appears to have been the sole leader of the congregation, and the apostles no longer seem to have been present in the city (21:18–25). Here James continued the defense of Peter’s position that the Gentiles should not be required to be circumcised or embrace the Jewish law. Peter’s argument had been based primarily on his personal experience, which had shown that God had accepted the Gentiles by sending his Spirit on them solely on the basis of their faith. James furthered Peter’s position by giving it scriptural grounding (vv. 14–18). Then, realizing that such a solution

¹⁰⁸⁶ Luke usually had “Paul and Barnabas,” but the order of names is reversed in v. 12. This may reflect Luke’s awareness that because of his long personal association with the Jerusalem church Barnabas held a certain priority there.

¹¹⁸⁷ The Western text offers a significant variant in v. 12, adding at the beginning, “And when the elders had agreed to the words spoken by Peter, the whole assembly became silent.” The silence is thus interpreted as the Judaizers having been silenced.

would create real problems for Jewish Christians in their fellowship with Gentile Christians, he offered a suggestion for alleviating that situation (vv. 19–21).⁸¹²⁸

15:14–18 James began by referring to Peter’s just-completed witness to God’s acceptance of the Gentiles at Cornelius’s home and described it as God’s “taking from the Gentiles a people for himself” (v. 14).⁸¹³⁹ James used the word *laos* to describe the Gentiles, a term usually applied to Israel. In Zech 2:11 (LXX 2:15), the Septuagint also applies the term *laos* to the Gentiles who will in the final days come to dwell in the renewed Zion and be a part of God’s people.⁹¹⁴⁰ Something like this seems to be the meaning here. In Christ God brings Jew and Gentile together into a single *laos*, a single people “for his name.”⁹¹⁵¹

James now showed how the coming of the Gentiles into the people of God was grounded in the Old Testament prophets. Basically he quoted from the Septuagint text of Amos 9:11–12, with possible allusions from Jer 12:15 and Isa 45:21.⁹¹⁶² In the Hebrew text of Amos 9:11–12, the prophet spoke of the coming restoration of Israel, which God would bring about. The house of David would be rebuilt and the kingdom restored to its former glory. Edom and all the nations over which David ruled would once again be gathered into Israel. The Greek text differs significantly and speaks of the remnant of humankind and all the nations seeking the Lord.⁹¹⁷³ In

¹²⁸⁸ In James’s speech of Acts 15:13–21 there are a number of verbal coincidences with the Epistle of James, as has been noted by J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of James* (London: Macmillan, 1897), 3–4.

¹³⁸⁹ James referred to Peter as “Simeon,” an Aramaizing form used of Peter elsewhere in the NT only in 2 Pet 1:1. Some early church fathers, notably Chrysostom, confused the Simeon of Acts 15:14 with the Simeon of Luke 2:29–32. Others have identified him with Simeon the Black (Acts 13:1). Clearly James was referring to Peter’s speech in v. 14. See E. R. Smother, “Chrysostom and Symeon (Acts xv, 14),” *HTR* (1953): 203–15.

¹⁴⁹⁰ See J. Dupont, “*Laos ex ethnon*,” *Etudes*, 361–65; Dupont, “Un Peuple d’entre les nations (Actes 15:14),” *NTS* 31 (1985): 321–35; N. A. Dahl, “A People for His Name (Acts xv. 14),” *NTS* 4 (1957–58): 319–27.

¹⁵⁹¹ Acts 15:14–18 is a key passage in traditional dispensational theories. The reference to “first” in v. 14 is taken to refer to the coming of the Gentiles; v. 16 is taken as the subsequent restoration of Israel. See W. M. Aldrich, “The Interpretation of Acts 15:13–18,” *BibSac* 111 (1954): 317–23. The context of the Jerusalem Conference, however, does not call for prophecy. James was describing what was happening in his day, Jew and Gentile coming together into a single people of God. See W. C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles (Amos 9:9–15 and Acts 15:13–18): A Test Passage for Theological Systems,” *JETS* (1977): 97–111.

¹⁶⁹² Jeremiah 12:15 seems to be behind the opening words, “After this I will return” (v. 16). Isaiah 45:21 may lie behind the phrase “known for ages” (v. 18), but the phrase may also have been drawn from the reference to the “ages” in Amos 9:11. See G. D. Kilpatrick, “Some quotations in Acts,” *Les Actes*, ed. J. Kramer, 84–85.

¹⁷⁹³ The problem is, of course, that James’s argument is best carried by the Septuagint text. It is not impossible that James knew Greek and quoted the Septuagint text in a conference that had a number of Greek-speaking delegates. Even if Luke was responsible for providing the Septuagint text (for his Greek readers), the key phrase

both traditions there is the concept of “the nations which are called by my name,” which links directly with “a people for his name” (“for himself,” NIV) in v. 14. This is the main concept James wished to develop. In the Gentiles, God was choosing a people for himself, a new *restored* people of God, Jew and Gentile in Christ, the true Israel. In the total message of Acts it is clear that the rebuilt house of David occurred in the Messiah. Christ was the scion of David who fulfilled the covenant of David and established a kingdom that would last forever (2 Sam 7:12f.; cf. Acts 13:32–34). From the beginning the Jewish Christians had realized that the promises to David were fulfilled in Christ. What they were now beginning to see, and what James saw foretold in Amos, was that these promises included the Gentiles.⁹¹⁸⁴

15:19–20 Having established from Scripture the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God, James drew his conclusion to the question of *requirements* for Gentile membership (v. 19). Gentiles should not be given undue difficulties; no unnecessary obstacles should be placed in their way. Though somewhat more restrained in expression, his conclusion was basically that of Peter (v. 10): Gentiles should not be burdened with the law and circumcision. The leading apostle and the leading elder were in agreement. The issue was all but settled. Resolving it, however, raised another problem. If Gentiles were not being required to observe the Jewish ritual laws, how would Jewish Christians who maintained strict Torah observance be able to fellowship with them without running the risk of being ritually defiled themselves? James saw the question coming and addressed it in his next remark (v. 20). Gentiles should be directed to abstain from four things: from food offered to idols, from sexual immorality (*porneia*), from the meat of strangled animals (*pnikton*), and from blood (*haima*).

When looked at closely, all four of these belong to the ritual sphere. Meat offered to idols was an abomination to Jews, who avoided any and everything associated with idolatry. “Strangled meat” referred to animals that had been slaughtered in a manner that left the blood in it. Blood was considered sacred to the Jews, and all meat was to be drained of blood before consuming it. The prohibition of “blood” came under the same requirement, referring to the consumption of the blood of animals in any form.⁹¹⁹⁵ These three requirements were thus all ritual, dealing with matters of clean and unclean foods. The fourth category seems somewhat less ritual and more moral: sexual immorality (*porneia*). It is possible that this category was also originally intended in a mainly ritual sense, referring to those “defiling” sexual relationships the Old Testament condemns, such as incest, marriage outside the covenant community, marriage with a close relative, bestiality, homosexuality, and the like.⁹²⁰⁶ It is also possible that a broader meaning was intended including all illicit “natural” relationships as well, such as fornication,

“nations [Gentiles] called by my name” occurs in *both* the Hebrew and Greek texts, and either would have suited James’s argument.

¹⁸⁹⁴ See J. Dupont, “Apologetic Use of the Old Testament,” *Salvation of the Gentiles*, 139. See also M. A. Braun, “James’ Use of Amos at the Jerusalem Council: Steps Toward a Possible Solution of the Textual and Theological Problems,” *JETS* 20 (1977): 113–21.

¹⁹⁹⁵ On “blood” as a sign of paganism, see I. Logan, “The Decree of Acts xv,” *ExpTim* 39 (1927–28): 428.

²⁰⁹⁶ That *πορνεία* should be seen in a wholly ritual sense is argued by M. Simon, “The Apostolic Decree and Its Setting in the Ancient Church,” *BJRL* 52 (1970): 437–60.

concubinage, and adultery. Gentile sexual mores were lax compared to Jewish standards, and it was one of the areas where Jews saw themselves most radically differentiated from Gentiles. The boundary between ritual and ethical law is not always distinct, and sexual morality is one of those areas where it is most blurred. For the Jew sexual misbehavior was both immoral *and* impure. A Jew would find it difficult indeed to consort with a Gentile who did not live by his own standards of sexual morality.⁹²¹⁷

The four requirements suggested by James were thus all basically ritual requirements aimed at making fellowship possible between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Often referred to as “the apostolic decrees,” they belonged to a period in the life of the church when there was close contact between Jewish and Gentile Christians, when table fellowship especially was common between them. In a later day, by the end of the first century, Jewish Christianity became isolated into small sects and separated from Gentile Christianity. There no longer existed any real fellowship between them. The original function of the decrees no longer had any force, and they tended to be viewed in wholly moral terms. This tendency is very much reflected in the textual tradition of Acts 15:20, 29 and 21:25, particularly in the Western text, which omits “strangled meat,” adds the negative form of the golden rule, and reads “idolatry” rather than idol meat. There are thus four moral prohibitions: no idolatry, no sexual immorality, no murder (“blood” now viewed as the shedding—not consuming—of blood), and “do not do to another what you wouldn’t wish done to yourself.”⁹²²⁸

15:21 The question might be raised: Why were the original decrees ritual rather than moral in the first place? The answer quite simply is that the moral rules, such as the Ten Commandments, were already assumed. *All* Christians, Jew and Gentile, lived by them. The Gentiles needed no reminder of such basic marks of Christian behavior. Morality was not the issue at the Jerusalem Conference.⁹²³⁹ Fellowship was, and the decrees were a sort of minimum requirement placed on the Gentile Christians in deference to the scruples of their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ.¹⁰²⁴⁰ They were really not something radically new. The Old

²¹⁹⁷ For the interesting suggestion that the decrees were designed to give social identity to Gentiles as being Christians alongside Jewish Christians, see C. Perrot, “Les Décisions de l’Assemblée de Jerusalem,” *RSR* 69 (1981): 195–208.

²²⁹⁸ For further treatment of the complex textual tradition of the “decrees,” see T. Boman, “Das textkritische Problem des sogenannten Aposteldekrets,” *NovT* 7 (1964): 26–36; G. Resch, *Das Aposteldecree nach seiner ausserkanonischen Textgestalt* (Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche, 1905); A. F. J. Klijn, “The Pseudo-Clementines and the Apostolic Decree,” *NovT* 10 (1968): 305–12.

²³⁹⁹ Some scholars would disagree strongly with this and maintain that the decrees were primarily ethical from the beginning; e.g., S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Law* (Cambridge: University Press, 1983), 73–102. H. Sahlin argues that the Western reading is original and based on the three “cardinal sins” of the rabbis, “Die drei Kardinalsünden und das neue Testament,” *ST* 24 (1970): 93–112.

²⁴¹⁰⁰ The basis of the decrees in providing a means for fellowship of Jewish and Gentile Christians is also argued by M. A. Seifrid, “Jesus and the Law in Acts,” *JSNT* 30 (1987): 39–57. A. Weiser describes it as providing a “modus vivende” between the two: “Das ‘Apostelkonzil’ (Apg. 15:1–35),” *BZ* 28 (1984): 145–67.

Testament lays down similar rules for the resident alien dwelling in Israel and for much the same purpose: to assure the purity of the Jewish community and to allow for social interaction between the Jews and the non-Jews in their midst. In fact, all four of the “apostolic decrees” are found in Lev 17 and 18 as requirements expected of resident aliens: abstinence from pagan sacrifices (17:8), blood (17:10–14), strangled meat (17:13), and illicit sexual relationships (18:6–23). Perhaps this is what James meant in his rather obscure concluding remark (v. 21): the law of Moses is read in every synagogue everywhere; so these requirements should come as no shock to the Gentiles. They are in the Old Testament and have been required of Gentiles associating with Jews from the earliest times. James’s remark could also be taken in another sense, which would fit the context well: there are Jews in every city who cherish the Torah. Gentile Christians should be sensitive to their scruples and not give them offense in these ritual matters, for they too may be reached with the gospel.¹⁰²⁵¹

(3) *The Decision in Jerusalem (15:22–29)*

²²Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. ²³With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:
Greetings.

²⁴We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—²⁶men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

15:22–23a James had provided a suitable solution that jeopardized neither the Gentile mission nor the fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. All parties seem to have been satisfied and to have agreed to James’s suggestion (vv. 22–23a). They decided to draft a letter presenting the solution and to send two delegates from the Jerusalem church to Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas. The two delegates would be able to give their personal interpretation

²⁵¹⁰¹ Verse 21 is difficult, and a wide variety of interpretations have been offered. In addition to the two given in the commentary, it has also been viewed as meaning that the Gentiles had already heard the law propounded and hadn’t responded; it would thus be futile to impose it on them: D. R. Schwartz, “The Futility of Preaching Moses (Acts 15, 21),” *Bib* 67 (1986): 276–81. J. Bowker sees v. 21 in the context of a formal *taqqaneh* or “alleviation of Torah.” Verse 21 serves to reassert the primacy of the Torah even though it has been relaxed with regard to Gentile proselyte procedure: “The Speeches in Acts: A Study in Proem and Yelammedenu Form,” *NTS* 14 (1967–68): 96–111.

of the letter's contents and of the conference in Jerusalem. They are described as "leaders" in the church of Jerusalem, a term that is not further defined. In v. 32 they are called "prophets." Of Judas Barsabbas ("Sabbath-born") we know nothing more. He may have been related to the Joseph Barsabbas of 1:23, but even that is uncertain. Silas, who is a major New Testament character, is another story. He accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey and is mentioned often in that connection (nine times in the Greek text of 15:40–18:5; fourteen times in the NIV since it often supplies subjects). Silas is a shortened form of the Greek name Silvanus, and the Greek name has led some to suggest that he may have been a Hellenist. That would certainly be likely if he is the same Silvanus who served as Peter's amanuensis (1 Pet 5:12). He definitely seems to be the Silvanus whom Paul mentioned as a coworker in several of his epistles (2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). The churches of Corinth and Thessalonica were established on Paul's second missionary journey when Silas accompanied him. It was thus natural for him to include Silas/Silvanus when writing to them. Like Paul, Silvanus may have been a Roman citizen. Acts 16:37f. seems to indicate so. It is interesting to note that Paul's mission companions came from those who represented the Jerusalem church (cf. Barnabas, 11:22). This is another way in which the close bond between Paul's missionary activity and the Jerusalem church is exemplified. Not only did the Jerusalem Christians approve Paul's law-free Gentile mission in principle at the conference, but they ultimately furnished his personnel as well.

Verses 23b–29 give the letter sent from the Jerusalem church to the Christians in Antioch. It was written in a very formal style, beginning with the salutation typical of Greco-Roman letters, listing first the senders, then the recipients. This was followed by the customary greeting (*chairein*). The only other places in the New Testament where this characteristic Greek greeting form was used are in Acts 23:26 and in the Epistle of James 1:1. The letter ends on an equally formal note with "farewell" (*errōsthe*), the Greek equivalent of the Latin *valet*.¹⁰²⁶² The formality is most pronounced in the long "periodic" sentence that runs from v. 24 through v. 26, one long complex sentence very tightly woven together. There is only one other periodic sentence in all of Luke-Acts, Luke's prologue to his Gospel (1:1–4). Since the overall style of the letter is so markedly Greco-Roman, one has the impression that the basically Jewish congregation of Jerusalem was making every effort to communicate clearly and in the style of their Greek-speaking brothers and sisters at Antioch.

15:23b–24 The letter was written in the name of the Jerusalem leaders, "the apostles and elders." The recipients were denoted "the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia." Actually, this could be considered almost as a single address. Syria-Cilicia was administratively a single Roman province, and Antioch was a city within it. It was at Antioch that the debate had arisen (15:1), and so it was to Antioch that the Jerusalem leaders sent their response. Verse 24 provides some additional clarification concerning the Judaizers of 15:1. They may have come from Jerusalem, but they were in no sense official representatives of the church. In fact, the language of the letter expresses some dismay with this group. They are described as "troubling" (literally "plundering" or "tearing down") the minds of the people in Antioch. The word was a military metaphor (*anaskeuazō*), meaning originally *to plunder or loot a town*. The Jerusalem

²⁶¹⁰² This form occurs nowhere else in the NT except in a variant reading in Lysias's letter (Acts 23:30).

leadership was obviously not happy with the wholly unauthorized Judaizers and their so upsetting the Gentiles of Antioch.

15:25–26 Verses 25–26 basically recapitulate the content of v. 22 with the additional commendation of Barnabas and Paul as those who had “risked their lives” for the name of Jesus. The verb used here (*paradidōmi*) can mean either *to devote* or *to risk*, and the distinction between the two in this context would be slim. It was in their wholehearted devotion to Christ that the two missionaries had incurred so many dangers. The Jerusalem leaders referred to them as their “dear friends” (*agapētos*, “beloved”). One is reminded of Paul’s account of the conference (Gal 2:9), where he spoke of the Jerusalem leaders’ giving them the “right hand of fellowship.”

15:27–28 Verse 27 continues to delineate the circumstances of the letter, noting the role of Judas and Silas. Only at v. 28 does the “meat” of the letter begin. The assembly had decided not to burden the Gentiles—no circumcision, no law, only these “necessary things” (author’s translation). The idea was really that there was to be no burden on the Gentiles. Instead of a burden, the Gentiles were to be asked to follow the four proscribed areas of the “apostolic decree”—not as a law, but as a basis for fellowship. The addition of the Holy Spirit in v. 28 is significant. Just as the Spirit had been instrumental in the inclusion of the Gentiles (15:8, 12), so now in the conference the Spirit had led the Jerusalem leaders in considering the conditions for their inclusion.

15:29 Verse 29 lists the four provisions of the apostolic decree just as originally proposed by James (v. 20). There is one slight variation. Whereas James had spoken in terms of “food polluted by idols,” the letter defined this with the more precise term “food sacrificed to idols” (*eidōlothytōn*). The proscriptions will be referred to one more time in Acts (21:25) and there in the same four terms that appear in 15:29. Evidently these regulations continued to be taken seriously in large segments of the church. Two of them, food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality, appear in the letters to the churches in Revelation (Rev 2:14, 20). Tertullian attests to the churches of North Africa abstaining from blood and illicit marriages. In the fourth century the Syrian church forbade sexual immorality, the consumption of blood, and strangled meat.¹⁰²⁷³ It has often been argued that Paul either didn’t know of the decrees or flatly rejected them, since he never referred to them in his letters. Some have observed further that in his own account of the Jerusalem Conference, Paul stated that “nothing” was added to his message (Gal 2:6). This does not necessarily conflict with the existence of the decrees. The conference did approve Paul’s basic message of a law-free gospel for the Gentiles—no circumcision, no Torah, no “burden.” The decrees were a strategy for Jewish-Gentile fellowship, and that was something different. The assumption that Paul showed no knowledge of the decrees in his letters is also questionable. In 1 Cor 5–10 Paul seems to have dealt with two of its provisions: sexual immorality in chaps. 5–7 and food sacrificed to idols in chaps. 8–10. The latter treatment is particularly instructive, where Paul advised the “strong” not to eat idol meat in the presence of the “weak.” This reflects the basic “accommodation” principle of the decrees—to enable

²⁷¹⁰³ Simon, “Decrees,” 455–59.

fellowship between Christians. True, Paul did not accept the decrees as “law”; he did seem to embrace their spirit.¹⁰²⁸⁴

(4) *The Decision Reported to Antioch (15:30–35)*

³⁰The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³²Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. ³³After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ³⁵But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

15:30–33 Paul and Barnabas and the other delegates returned to the church of Antioch along with the two representatives of the Jerusalem church, Judas and Silas. Upon their arrival, the church was assembled and the letter read in the presence of all. Everyone found its message “encouraging” (v. 31),¹⁰²⁹⁵ undoubtedly because it confirmed their practice of accepting the Gentiles without demanding circumcision and the obligations of the Torah. As prophets (v. 32) Judas and Silas were able to go beyond their role of interpreters of the Jerusalem Conference and to further strengthen and encourage their brothers and sisters at Antioch. In the New Testament prophecy is primarily the gift of inspiration whereby one delivers a word from God that addresses the present needs in the life of the church.¹⁰³⁰⁶ The two were well received in Antioch and remained there some time, ministering to the church through their gift of inspiration. When they departed, they were sent off with the ancient blessing of *shalom*, that the peace of God would abide with them.¹⁰³¹⁷

[15:34] Verse 34 is one of the Western readings that found its way into the *Textus Receptus* and from thence into many of the sixteenth and seventeenth century translations. It is the consensus of textual criticism that it was not in the original text of Acts and is thus omitted in modern translations. It reads: “But Silas decided to remain with them. Only Judas departed.” Undoubtedly the scribe responsible for this addition wanted to solve the problem of Silas’s being present in Antioch again in v. 40. In so doing, a much more serious conflict was created with v. 33, which clearly states that they (plural) both returned to Jerusalem. There really is no problem with v. 40 anyway, because it takes place some time later (v. 36), allowing plenty of room for Silas to return to Antioch from Jerusalem.

15:35 Verse 35 concludes the narrative of the Jerusalem Conference in summary fashion. Now that the Gentile question had been settled, the church prospered under the teaching and preaching of Paul and Barnabas and “many others.” The “many others” are significant. This

²⁸¹⁰⁴ See M. D. Goulder, “Did Luke Know Any of the Pauline Letters?” *PIRS* 13 (1986): 97–112. Goulder argues that the form of the decrees may have been influenced by 1 Corinthians.

²⁹¹⁰⁵ The word is παράκλησις, which can mean *comfort* or *exhortation*. Either nuance fits this particular context. The letter both comforted them and encouraged them by the conciliatory spirit of its exhortations.

³⁰¹⁰⁶ Codex Bezae adds that they were prophets “full of the Spirit,” to emphasize what is already implicit in the term “prophecy” itself.

³¹¹⁰⁷ “Go in peace.” Cf. Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48; Acts 16:36; and Paul’s customary greeting of “grace and peace” (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; etc.).

verse is the final glimpse into the life of the Antioch church. Paul and Barnabas would soon be leaving for mission fields elsewhere. The church was left in good hands. There were “many others” who were competent to carry on its witness.

Summary. The concord reached at the Jerusalem Conference was a most remarkable event and established a major precedent for dealing with controversy within the Christian fellowship. One should realize the sharp differences that existed between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Jewish Christians were faithful to all the traditions of their heritage. They observed the provisions of the Torah, circumcised their male children, and kept all the Jewish holy days. They did not cease to be Jews when they became Christians. James was himself a perfect example. In their accounts of his later martyrdom, both Josephus and Eusebius noted the tremendous respect the nonbelieving Jews gave him because of his deep piety and scrupulous observance of the law.¹⁰³²⁸ Not requiring Gentiles to be circumcised upon entry into the covenant community was a radical departure from the Jewish tradition. That James and his fellow Jewish Christians were willing to bend on such a basic principle is testimony to two things about them. First, they were open to the leading of God. Throughout the account God’s leading is stressed—in his sending the Spirit on Cornelius (v. 8), in the “signs and wonders” that God worked through Paul and Barnabas (v. 12). It was this evidence of *God’s* acceptance of the Gentiles that determined the decision of the council to accept Gentiles with no further burden. And the Spirit of God was present with them in the conference, leading them in their decision (v. 28). This is a consistent picture in Acts: wherever Christians are open to God’s Spirit, there is unity.

Second, the Jewish Christian leadership showed a concern for the world mission of the church that overshadowed their own special interests. They took a step that was absolutely essential if the Gentile mission was to be a success. To have required circumcision and the Torah would have severely limited the appeal to Gentiles, perhaps even killed it. Yet the Jewish Christians only stood to lose by not requiring Jewish proselyte procedure of the Gentile converts. It was bound to create problems with nonbelieving Jews. That it indeed did so is indicated in a later passage in Acts (21:20–22). If the Jerusalem leadership had only been concerned about the effectiveness of their own witness among the Jews, they would never have taken such a step. That it did so is testimony of their concern for the total mission of the church. Their vision stretched beyond their own bailiwick—indeed, to the ends of the earth.

VI. Paul Witnesses to the Greek World (15:36–18:22)

Paul saw himself above all as Christ’s apostle to the Gentiles (e.g., Rom 1:5; 15:18; Gal 2:8). This calling is very much confirmed by the account of his missionary activity in Acts. His witness to the Gentiles was first revealed at his conversion (9:15) and was exemplified by his joining Barnabas in the evangelization of the Gentiles in Antioch (11:26). On the first missionary journey this special calling was confirmed for him—in the conversion of the Roman proconsul on Cyprus (13:12), in the mass response of the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch (13:48), and in the formation of a group of disciples among the pagans at Lystra (14:20). At Jerusalem, Paul’s witness to the Gentiles was confirmed by the apostles and elders of the mother church, and the

³²¹⁰⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 20.200 and Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.23. For the tradition of James’s martyrdom, see commentary on Acts 21:18.

way was cleared for his further ministry. Paul was now ready for a major outreach to the Gentiles, and this comprises the subject of chaps. 16–20.

He was first led to a major ministry in Macedonia and Achaia (15:36–18:22). After returning for a brief visit to Jerusalem and a “furlough” in Antioch (18:22f.), he set out again for the Greek cities of the Aegean, this time centering around the city of Ephesus (18:24–21:14). Luke’s account is selective. His purpose was not to give a complete account of all Paul’s missionary activities. One is well aware of this from Paul’s epistles. Acts does not cover the establishment of churches at Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea; nor does it go into the complex relationship between Paul and Corinth during the period of his Ephesian ministry. It is even virtually silent about the collection that took up so much of Paul’s time before his final return to Jerusalem. Luke simply did not provide a full “history” of Paul’s missionary activity. What he did do was to hit the high points, provide a basic framework for Paul’s mission, and show how in Paul’s ministry the commission to the “ends of the earth” was carried forward.

Acts 15:36–18:22 covers what has customarily been referred to as Paul’s second missionary journey. The term is particularly applicable for the first part of the narrative, where Paul was extensively involved in travel from Antioch to Troas (16:1–10). The pace slowed down thereafter with more extensive stays and the establishment of the churches in Philippi (16:11–40), Thessalonica (17:1–9), and Berea (17:10–15). After a seemingly brief visit to Athens with his notable address from the Areopagus (17:16–34), Paul concluded this period of work in Corinth, staying there at least eighteen months, perhaps half the time of the total mission (18:1–17). Most of his time was thus spent in a major urban center, which set the pattern followed in Ephesus on his third mission.

1. Parting Company with Barnabas (15:36–41)

³⁶Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

15:36–41 Paul’s second major mission began like the first in the city of Antioch. Paul and Barnabas had been preaching and teaching there after their return from the Jerusalem Conference (15:35). “Some time later” Paul suggested to Barnabas that they revisit “all the towns” where they had established churches on their first mission (15:36). The imprecise time expression is perhaps more significant as Luke’s way of marking a major new division in the narrative.³³¹ A new division indeed does begin at this point—Paul’s second major mission. Actually, Paul did not fulfill in person his desire to revisit “all” the churches of their first mission. He did not return to Cyprus. As things turned out, however, all the churches were revisited, with Barnabas going to Cyprus (v. 39).

³³¹ The expression *μετὰ* plus an expression of time in the accusative case was Luke’s usual manner of marking major divisions in the second half of Acts. Cf. 18:1; 21:15; 24:1; 25:1; 28:11, 17.

The reason for their going their separate ways was not a happy one and involved a major disagreement between them (vv. 37–39). John Mark was the center of contention. He was Barnabas’s cousin, and Barnabas suggested that he accompany them as he had on their first mission (13:5). Paul did not think this a wise move since Mark had abandoned them on that occasion (13:13).³⁴² It is possible that there was an additional source of tension between Paul and Barnabas. Galatians 2:11–13 speaks of an incident that took place in Antioch, evidently after the Jerusalem Conference, in which Peter and Barnabas gave in to pressure from “certain men” from James and withdrew from table fellowship with Gentiles. Paul sharply confronted Peter on that occasion for his “hypocrisy” and was none too happy with Barnabas for following Peter’s example. Even though Paul had now been sufficiently reconciled to Barnabas to request his companionship on the mission, there may have been lingering wounds and possibly still some differences over Paul’s “law-free” Gentile outreach. Mark may himself have represented a more conservative Jewish-Christian outlook. However that may be, Paul did eventually become reconciled to Mark and mentioned him as a coworker in several of his letters (cf. Col 4:10; Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:11). Standing in the background was Barnabas, always the encourager, showing faith in Mark when others had lost theirs and eventually redeeming him—ironically, *for Paul*. Barnabas and Mark departed for further work on Cyprus. Though disagreements are regrettable, at least in this instance there was a fortunate outcome. Now there were two missions instead of one. Paul needed a suitable replacement for a traveling companion and chose Silas (v. 40).³⁵³ For this journey Paul had pretty much made the decision on his own. Still, as for the first mission, he had the support of the Antioch church and was commended by the brothers and sisters there to the grace of the Lord for his new undertaking. Paul and Silas headed north from Antioch by foot and visited the churches of Syria and Cilicia along the way. Since the “apostolic decrees” were originally addressed to all the churches in Syria and Cilicia (15:23), one would assume that Paul and Silas shared these with them.³⁶⁴ This is all the more likely since Silas was one of the two originally appointed by the Jerusalem church to deliver the decrees (15:22).

2. Revisiting Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium (16:1–5)

¹He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. ²The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As

³⁴² The Western text of v. 38 is somewhat harder on Mark, stating that he abandoned them and did not accompany them “in the work to which they had been sent,” thus having him abandon his commission. See E. Delebecque, “*Silas, Paul et Barnabé à Antioche selon le Texte ‘Occidental’ d’Actes 15, 34 et 38,*” *RHPR* 64 (1984): 47–52.

³⁵³ For Silas see the commentary on Acts 15:22. For the rather unique view that Silas did not accompany Paul from Antioch but only joined him later at Corinth, see S. Dockx, “*Silas a-t-il été le compagnon de voyage de Paul d’Antioche à Corinthe?*” *NRT* 104 (1982): 749–53.

³⁶⁴ As so often with the Western text, nothing is left to conjecture. It adds to v. 41 “handing over the commands of [the apostles] and elders.” See Y. Tissot, “*Les Prescriptions des Presbytres (Actes xv, 41, d),*” *RB* 77 (1970): 321–46.

they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

16:1–5 According to plan, Paul proceeded northward, this time on foot, through the Cilician gates to the cities where he and Barnabas had established churches on the first mission tour. This time they went from east to west and so reached the towns in the reverse order from their first visit—Derbe first, then Lystra, and finally Iconium. At Lystra they found a disciple by the name of Timothy. Evidently Timothy’s conversion dated back to Paul and Barnabas’s first witness in that city (cf. 14:20). Luke added that Timothy was well spoken of by the Christians in Lystra and Iconium. Derbe is not mentioned because it lay some sixty miles southeast of Lystra.³⁷⁵

Lystra was only twenty miles or so from Iconium, and a close relationship between the Christians of the two cities would have been natural.

Luke’s note that Timothy’s mother was Jewish and his father Greek (v. 1) is essential to understanding why Paul had Timothy circumcised (v. 3). Many scholars have argued that Paul would never have asked Timothy to be circumcised, since he objected so strenuously to that rite in Galatians (cf. 6:12f.; 5:11). That, however, is to overlook the fact that Galatians was written to Gentiles and Timothy was considered a Jew. There was no question of circumcising Gentiles.

The Jerusalem Conference agreed on that. Gentiles would not be required to become Jews in order to be Christians. The converse was also true: Jews would not be required to abandon their Jewishness in order to become Christians. There is absolutely no evidence that Paul ever asked Jews to abandon circumcision as their mark of membership in God’s covenant people.

According to later rabbinic law, a child born of a Jewish mother and a Greek father was considered to be Jewish. The marriage of a Jewish woman to a non-Jew was considered a nonlegal marriage; and in all instances of nonlegal marriages, the lineage of the child was reckoned through the mother.³⁸⁶

According to this understanding, Timothy would have been considered a Jew. His father, however, being a Greek, would not have had his son circumcised; and the local Jews were aware of this (v. 3). Thus Paul had Timothy circumcised. Paul always worked through the Jewish synagogues where possible. To have had a member of his entourage be of Jewish lineage and yet uncircumcised would have hampered his effectiveness among the Jews. It was at the very least a matter of missionary strategy to circumcise Timothy (1 Cor 9:20). It may have been much more. Paul never abandoned his own Jewish heritage. He may well have wanted Timothy to be true to *his* (cf. Rom 3:1f.). In any event, Paul had no missionary companion more thoroughly

³⁷⁵ Some of the church fathers, such as Rufinus and Origen, saw Timothy as coming from Derbe. This may have come from a misreading of Acts 20:4, where Timothy is listed immediately after Gaius of Derbe.

³⁸⁶ *Mishna Qiddushin* 3:12. See S. Belkin, “The Problem of Paul’s Background,” *JBL* 54 (1935): 41–60. For an opposing view, which argues that the Mishnaic law was not in force in Paul’s day and that Timothy would have been considered a Gentile, see S. J. D. Cohen, “Was Timothy Jewish (Acts 16:1–3)? Patristic Exegesis, Rabbinic Law, and Matrilineal Descent,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 251–68. For the view that Timothy’s circumcision was actually that of Titus in Gal 2:3–5, see W. O. Walker, “The Timothy-Titus Problem Reconsidered,” *ExpTim* 92 (1981): 231–35.

involved in his subsequent work than Timothy. Paul considered him a “son” (cf. 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Tim 1:2). Not only did he address two letters to him, but he also listed him as cosender in six others (2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1). He considered him his “fellow worker” (Rom 16:21; cf. 1 Cor 16:10) and, indeed, as much more—“as a son with his father” in the work of the gospel (Phil 2:22).³⁹⁷ Now three, the missionary group continued along the way, visiting the churches “from town to town.” Luke did not specify the towns they visited, but one would assume they were Iconium and Pisidian Antioch and any other villages where there may have been a Christian community resulting from the first missionary tour. They shared the decrees from the Jerusalem Conference. All of these churches were in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia and not a part of Syro-Cilicia, to which the decrees were addressed. Perhaps they felt that these churches were involved because they were the product of the Antioch mission. Luke did not mention Paul’s promulgating them in any other cities after this, and Paul never mentioned them in his letters.⁴⁰⁸

Verse 5 concludes the narrative of Paul’s return visit to these churches of his first mission. This summary statement⁴¹⁹ is not perfunctory, however. It underlines the importance of Paul’s concern to fortify and nurture the churches of his prior missionary efforts. He was not only concerned with planting the seed but also to see them grow and bear fruit. This led him to undertake the rigorous trip to southern Galatia through rugged terrain and mountain passes. He accomplished what he sought: the churches were strengthened. They flourished. They were more prepared than ever to carry on when he left.

3. Called to Macedonia (16:6–10)

⁶Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

⁸So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

16:6 Having completed their visit of the churches established on Paul’s first mission, the three now headed north, probably from Antioch in Pisidia. Somewhere along the way they determined to go to “Asia.” Just what is intended by “Asia” is uncertain. The term was used in various ways. It could refer to the Roman province of Asia, which included Lycia, portions of Phrygia, and Mysia, as well as ancient Asia. It could be used in a much narrower sense as the cities along the Aegean coast, with Philadelphia as the eastern limit. It probably is in this narrower sense that Paul determined to go to Asia, perhaps to the major city of Ephesus, where he eventually did spend the greater part of his third mission. At this point he was stopped from

³⁹⁷ For the portrait of Timothy in the Pastoral Epistles, see J. P. Alexander, “The Character of Timothy,” *ExpTim* 25 (1913–14): 277–85.

⁴⁰⁸ W. Ramsay (*St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* [1897; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], 182–84) suggests that the rise of the Judaizing problem may have led Paul to abandon the decrees because of abuse in a legalistic direction by that group.

⁴¹⁹ For other summaries, cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31, 42.

so doing by the Holy Spirit. The medium of the Spirit's revelation is not given. The important point is that he was stopped. God had other plans for him at the time.

16:7 The route of the missionaries from this point is anything but clear. They obviously traveled northward because they eventually came to Mysia. The questionable point is how far eastward they traveled. To what does "the region of Phrygia and Galatia" refer?¹⁴²⁰ The most natural reading would give a consecutive travel narrative, starting from Antioch, moving into northern Phrygia, and then evidently swinging eastward into portions of northern Galatia before arriving in the northeast corner of Mysia where it bordered Bithynia. A good guess is that it was somewhere around Dorylaeum, where they were stopped in their travel plans a second time. Their intention was to go into Bithynia, probably to witness in the populous cities along the Marmara Sea like Nicomedia, Nicea, and Byzantium. Again they were prevented, this time by "the Spirit of Jesus," possibly a special vision of the risen Jesus but more likely a variant expression of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴³¹ The third expression of the divine leading is indicated in terms of God's calling (v. 10). The geographical scheme is certainly not the dominant motif in this section: the divine leading *is*. Father (v. 10), Son (v. 7), and Spirit (v. 6) together led Paul to the decisive new breakthrough—the mission to Macedonia, the witness on European soil.

16:8 The missionary group must have been thoroughly perplexed as they were led away from the cities of Bithynia through the wild backwoods country of Mysia over to the coast and down to Troas.¹⁴⁴² Troas lay in the region associated with Troy, some thirty miles to the south of the ancient city. It had been founded in the fourth century b.c. by Antigonus and from the start was primarily a port city. An artificial harbor constructed there provided the main sea access to Macedonia and was a significant harbor for sea traffic to and from the Dardanelles.¹⁴⁵³ Having

⁴²¹⁰ W. Ramsay (*St. Paul the Traveller*, 210–12) argued that the two terms should be taken as a single entity, the Phrygio-Galatian region, referring to the area of southern Galatia around Antioch. This, however, creates an overlap with 16:1–5 and allows no progress in the travel narrative. More likely Luke meant by "Galatia" the old kingdom of Galatia in the north and not the southern portions of the Roman province of Galatia which Luke had heretofore designated as Phrygia, Pamphilia, Pisidia, Lycaonia, etc. If so, Paul perhaps established at this time the churches to which he later addressed the Galatian epistle. For a full discussion see J. Polhill, "Galatia Revisited: The Life-Setting of the Epistle," *RevExp* 49 (1972): 437–43. For "Phrygia" used adjectivally in support of Ramsay's view, see C. J. Hemer, "The Adjective 'Phrygia,'" *JTS* 27 (1976): 122–26 and "Phrygia: A Further Note," *JTS* 28 (1977): 99–101.

⁴³¹¹ For the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus, cf. Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11.

⁴⁴¹² W. P. Bowers suggests that they already must have had some thought of a Macedonian mission because they took the unlikely route to Troas ("Paul's Route through Mysia: A Note on Acts xvi, 8," *JTS* 30 [1979]: 507–11).

⁴⁵¹³ For a thorough treatment of Troas, see C. J. Hemer, "Alexandria Troas," *TB* 26 (1975): 79–112.

been given the status of a colony city by Augustus, Troas had a sizable population and would itself have been a suitable candidate for a major mission.¹⁴⁶⁴

16:9 But God had other plans and sent a vision to Paul, perhaps in a dream in the middle of the night. A man of Macedonia appeared to him begging him to come and witness to the Macedonians. Scholars have often speculated about whether this person might be defined more closely. Ramsay suggested he may have been Luke himself, that possibly Paul had needed a physician's aid and consulted him in Troas. This is based on the fact that the "we" narrative first occurs in verse 10, indicating Luke's presence.¹⁴⁷⁵ It is an attractive view, but ancient tradition connects Luke with Antioch, not Macedonia, and the Philippian narrative contains not the slightest inkling that he was on home territory. Somewhat more fanciful is the view that the man in the vision was that most famous of all Macedonians, Alexander the Great. Alexander had a vision of "one world"; Paul would make it a reality through the gospel.¹⁴⁸⁶ Luke gave us no basis for such speculations. The identity of the man as a Macedonian was all that counted.

16:10 Paul realized that this vision was God's medium for calling him to a mission in Macedonia (v. 10). Timothy and Silas readily agreed, once Paul had shared the experience with them. Since the text states that "we got ready," the first certain occurrence of the narrative first-person speech in Acts, the most likely assumption is that Luke joined the missionary party at this time.¹⁴⁹⁷ Now four shared the vision of evangelizing Macedonia.¹⁵⁰⁸

4. Witnessing in Philippi (16:11–40)

The remainder of chap. 16 concerns Paul's work in Philippi. It falls into four separate scenes. Verses 11–15 relate the group's journey to Philippi and the conversion of a prominent woman named Lydia. Verses 16–24 deal with the healing of a possessed servant girl and its unfortunate result. Verses 25–34 tell of the conversion of the Philippian jailer. Verses 35–40 treat the final encounter of Paul the Roman citizen with the city magistrates.

(1) *Founding a Church with Lydia (16:11–15)*

⁴⁶¹⁴ A church may have been established at Troas as early as this first visit of Paul. Acts 20:5–12 indicates a Christian community existed there. Paul spoke of his witnessing there on a later occasion (2 Cor 2:12; cf. 2 Tim 4:13).

⁴⁷¹⁵ Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, 200–205.

⁴⁸¹⁶ W. Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, DSB (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 131f.

⁴⁹¹⁷ For the significance of the "we" passages, see the discussion on authorship in the introduction. Recently V. K. Robbins has argued that the "we" is a literary device associated with sea narratives ("By Land and By Sea: The We-Passages and Ancient Sea Voyages," *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the SBL Seminar*, ed. C. Talbert [New York: Crossroad, 1984]), 215–42. The difficulty with this is that the "we" extends into the narrative far beyond the voyage (cf. 16:17) and only occurs in three of the ten or twelve voyages in Acts. See G. Krodel, *Acts*, PC (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 303.

⁵⁰¹⁸ O. Glombitza points to the significance of the accusative case in v. 10 as the object of εὐαγγελίσασθαι ("Der Schritt nach Europa: Erwägungen zu Act 16, 9–15," *ZNW* 53 [1962]: 77–82). It is not a matter of *preaching* the good news *to* the Macedonians (dative case) but of "evangelizing them," bringing them into a new existence through the gospel.

¹¹From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. ¹²From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

16:11 Verses 11–12 relate the journey from Troas to Philippi. The weather must have been good and the winds favorable because their ship sighted Samothrace the first day. Samothrace was a mountainous island with a peak rising 5,000 feet above sea level. It lay off the Thracian coast on a direct line between Troas and Neapolis, the port of Philippi. The next day they arrived at Neapolis. In Acts 20:6 the voyage from Philippi to Troas took considerably longer—five days in all.

16:12 The group would have taken the Via Egnatia the ten miles or so to Philippi. This route was the main east-west highway through Macedonia, beginning at Dyrrhachium on the Adriatic coast, traveling through Thessalonica, Amphipolis, and Philippi and terminating at Neapolis. Paul often traveled this road.

Philippi was settled from ancient times largely because of the copper and gold deposits in the region. Formerly known as Krenides, it was seized in the fourth century b.c. from the native Thracians by Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. Philip renamed the city for himself and enlarged the gold-mining operations. It came under Roman domination in 168 b.c. and was enlarged in 42 b.c. when Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius on the plains southwest of the city. In 31 b.c., after defeating Antony at the battle of Actium, Octavian granted the city the status of a colony. Subsequently a number of military veterans were settled there. The Roman influence was particularly strong in Philippi as reflected in Paul's Letter to the Philippians and in the present narrative. When Macedonia had first come under Roman influence, it had been divided into four administrative districts. Although these were later dissolved into a single provincial structure with Thessalonica as capital, the distinction between the four districts seems to have persisted. This is perhaps reflected in Luke's designating the city as "the leading city of that district of Macedonia" (v. 12).⁵¹⁹ Actually, Amphipolis was the larger city and had been capital of the district before the provincial reorganization. Perhaps Luke reflected a local claim that Philippi was Macedonia's "foremost city," a claim not totally unjustified when one considers its illustrious history.

16:13 The four missionaries evidently set themselves up in the city and waited until the next Sabbath before beginning their witness. According to Paul's usual pattern, they sought out the Jewish place of worship first. In this instance there does not seem to have been a Jewish

⁵¹⁹ The problem is somewhat more complicated than the NIV would indicate. The best manuscripts read "the first city of the district of Macedonia." The Western text reads "the capital" (κεφαλή) of Macedonia. Only a couple of Latin minuscules have the reading "a leading city of the first district of Macedonia," but this reading fits the facts best.

synagogue at Philippi.²⁵²⁰ Instead, they learned of a place of prayer outside the city gates.²⁵³¹ It was by a river, probably the Gangites, which lies about a mile and a quarter from the city gates. The Romans were sometimes uneasy about foreign cults. Judaism was a recognized religion; but perhaps because there was no formally constituted synagogue, the women had to meet outside the city.²⁵⁴² If there were no Jews present and all the women were Gentile “God-fearers” like Lydia, this may have made their gathering even more suspect in the city. In any event, the gathering of women was the closest thing to a synagogue at Philippi; and Paul took the usual posture a speaker assumed in a synagogue, sitting down, to address the women. Most likely the event took place in the open air beside the river.

16:14 Among the women gathered there, one stood out. Her name was Lydia, the same as the ancient territory in which her native city of Thyatira was located. She is described as a dealer in goods dyed purple, a likely occupation since Thyatira was indeed a center of the purple dye trade.²⁵⁵³ Lydia’s business is not an incidental detail. It marks her as a person of means. Purple goods were expensive and often associated with royalty; thus the business was a lucrative one.²⁵⁶⁴ Lydia’s invitation to the four missionaries to stay in her home in itself indicates that she had considerable substance, such as guest rooms and servants to accommodate them adequately. Of all Paul’s churches, the Philippians’ generosity stood out. They continued to send him support in his missionary endeavors elsewhere (Phil 4:15–18; cf. 2 Cor 11:8). One is tempted to see Lydia as a principal contributor. It is surely to go too far with such speculations, however, to argue that Paul married Lydia and that she was the “loyal yokefellow” of Phil 4:3.²⁵⁷⁵ Women like Lydia were particularly prominent in Paul’s missionary efforts in this portion of Acts—the women of Thessalonica (17:4) and of Berea (17:12), Damaris in Athens (17:34), and

⁵²²⁰ At least ten males were required to form a synagogue. Since only women are mentioned in the gathering outside Philippi, there were likely not sufficient Jewish males to constitute a synagogue there.

⁵³²¹ “Place of prayer” is sometimes used to designate a synagogue, and some interpreters argue that there was an actual synagogue building in this instance. Synagogues were often, but not necessarily, located close to a water supply because of their needs for the rites of purification.

⁵⁴²² The ruins of an arched gateway stand outside the walls of Philippi. It has been suggested that this gateway is the one mentioned in v. 13 and served as a marker for the area within which no foreign cults could be observed. See W. A. McDonald, “Archaeology and St. Paul’s Journeys in Greek Lands,” *BA* 3 (1940): 18–24.

⁵⁵²³ E. Haenchen (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 494) mentions a monument excavated at Thessalonica with which the purple dyers of that city honored a fellow tradesman from Thyatira.

⁵⁶²⁴ There were evidently two methods for producing the expensive purple dyes. One was to extract the color from the glands of the murex shell. This is the known method employed in the extensive dye industry at Sidon. Another method still employed in the region of ancient Thyatira extracted the dye from the juice of the madder root.

⁵⁷²⁵ Several Victorian exegetes, such as E. Renan and T. Zahn, argued just that (Haenchen, *Acts*, 494). “Yokefellow” is masculine gender in Phil 4:3 and probably should not be understood as the designation for a wife.

Priscilla in Corinth (18:2). Priscilla and Lydia took an active role in the ministry of their churches.²⁵⁸⁶ This was in part due to the more elevated status of women in the contemporary Greek and Roman society. This was particularly true in the first century when women were given a number of legal privileges such as initiating divorce, signing legal documents, even holding honorary public titles. The prominent role of the women in Acts is perhaps due even more to the message Paul brought them: “In Christ Jesus, there is neither male nor female” (Gal 3:28).²⁵⁹⁷

Lydia was a “worshiper of God” (16:14), one of those devout Gentiles like Cornelius who believed in God but had not become a full convert to Judaism. There was an extensive Jewish community at Thyatira, and she had perhaps first come to her faith in God there. As he had with Cornelius, God responded to her faith and “opened her heart” to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ which Paul proclaimed. As always with divine grace, it was God’s Spirit moving in her heart that led to faith.

16:15 Lydia made the missionaries’ acceptance of her hospitality the test of whether they *really believed* she had become a believer, “Come and see for yourself if the Lord has come to rule in my life” (author’s paraphrase). It was an offer they could not refuse. But she did not merely open her home to the missionaries; she allowed it to become the gathering place for the entire Christian community (v. 40). Perhaps the wealthiest member of the Philippian church, Lydia embraced the ideal of the early church, not laying claim to what was hers but freely sharing it with her sisters and brothers in Christ (4:32).

Not only did Lydia share her goods, but she shared her faith as well. As the leader of her household, she led them to join her in commitment and baptism (16:15). This is the first time the baptism of a “household” is *narrated* in Acts. Another will follow shortly (v. 33). There is no evidence whatever that this included infants, and it cannot be used in support of infant baptism. Previous references to Cornelius’s household indicate that those who were baptized both heard and believed the message (10:44; 11:4, 17). Throughout Acts baptism is based on personal faith and commitment, and there is no reason to see otherwise in the household baptisms.²⁶⁰⁸

(2) *Healing a Possessed Servant Girl (16:16–24)*

¹⁶Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” ¹⁸She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.

⁵⁸²⁶ For an excellent treatment of Lydia, see R. Ryan, “Lydia, a Dealer in Purple Goods,” *TBT* 22 (1984): 285–89.

⁵⁹²⁷ See W. D. Thomas, “The Place of Women in the Church at Philippi,” *ExpTim* 83 (1971–72): 117–20.

⁶⁰²⁸ For the view that household baptisms included infants, see J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (London: SCM, 1960). For the opposing viewpoint, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1972), esp. 312–20.

¹⁹When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

²²The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. ²³After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

16:16 Verse 16 opens a new scene but connects with the previous one to make a continuous narrative. On one of the occasions when the four missionaries were going outside the city to the place of prayer, they were encountered by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. The Greek speaks literally of a “python spirit.” The python was the symbol of the famous Delphic oracle and represented the god Apollo, who was believed to render predictions of future events. The serpent had thus become a symbol of augury, and anyone who was seen to possess the gift of foretelling the future was described as led by the “python.” Greeks and Romans put great stock on augury and divination. No commander would set out on a major military campaign nor would an emperor make an important decree without first consulting an oracle to see how things might turn out. A slave girl with a clairvoyant gift was thus a veritable gold mine for her owners.

16:17–18 Like the demoniacs during Jesus’ ministry, the possessed girl was evidently able to see into the true nature of Paul’s preaching, particularly into the reality of the God he proclaimed (cf. Luke 4:34; Mark 1:24). She constantly followed the missionaries about, shouting that they were servants of the “Most High God” and proclaimers of “a way of salvation” (author’s translation).

None of this would have been very clear to Gentiles. The term “God most high” was a common Old Testament term for God, but the same term was equally common in the Gentile world and was particularly applied to Zeus. Neither would “way of salvation” be immediately clear to a Gentile. The Greco-Roman world was full of “saviors.” Savior/deliverer, salvation/deliverance were favorite terms. The emperor dubbed himself “savior” of the people. All of which is to show why Paul finally became irritated with the girl’s constant acclamations.

These acclamations may have been true enough, but they were open to too much misunderstanding for pagan hearers. The truth could not be so easily condensed for those from a polytheistic background. Jesus might be seen as just another savior in the bulging pantheon of Greek gods.²⁶¹⁹ So Paul, in a form reminiscent of Jesus’ exorcisms, commanded the spirit to exit the girl. The spirit did so immediately.

16:19 That was not the only thing to vanish. With the spirit the owners’ prospects for further profit also exited. Luke probably intended the wordplay. He used the same verb (*exēlthen*) for the demon’s coming out in v. 18 as for the money’s going in v. 19. The latter created the problem. Healing a possessed girl was one thing; but when that involved considerable economic loss, that was a wholly different matter. The scene was reminiscent of the Gerasene pigs

⁶¹²⁹ For this view that the girl’s acclamation was open to serious misunderstanding by pagans, see P. R. Trebilco, “Paul and Silas—‘Servants of the Most High God’ (Acts 16, 16–18),” *JSNT* 36 (1989): 51–73.

incident (Mark 5:16–17). The profit motive was a frequent obstacle to the gospel in Acts. It was certainly the downfall of Simon Magus (8:19f.). It would lead Demetrius and his fellow Ephesian silversmiths to violently oppose Paul (19:24–28). Here the greed of the slave girl’s owners was in marked contrast to the generosity of Lydia, who shared her house with the missionaries and the Philippian Christians. One’s relationship to material goods marks a major distinction between believers and nonbelievers in Acts. (Note how “believer” and “stay at my house” are closely linked in v. 15.)

The first-person narrative stops at v. 17 and does not reappear in Acts until Paul’s return to Philippi in 20:6.⁶²³⁰ Some scholars have seen this as an indication that Luke remained behind to minister in Philippi and did not rejoin Paul in his travel until this return visit at the end of his third mission.⁶³³¹ This is placing a great deal of faith in a basically stylistic matter, assuming that Luke always took pains to distinguish his presence by the use of the first person. What does seem to be indicated in the present context is that Luke and Timothy dropped out of the picture at this point. Only Paul and Silas got the brunt of the owners’ ire and were dragged before the magistrates (v. 19). The scene is filled with local color and very much fits what is known from elsewhere about Philippi. The apostles were dragged into the marketplace (agora). In the excavations at Philippi, this agora, or forum, has been uncovered. On its northwest side stood a raised podium with stairs on two sides. This would have been the city tribunal where civil cases were tried. The city prison was located immediately adjacent to the agora. Although these ruins date from the second century a.d., it is likely that they were built on the same sites as the agora and prison where Paul and Silas were tried and incarcerated.⁶⁴³²

16:20–21 The officials mentioned in vv. 20, 35 correspond to the pattern of authority for Roman colonies. The “magistrates” (*stratēgoi*) of v. 20, who probably were the same as the “authorities” of v. 19, would be the two men (known in Latin as the *duuviri*) who tried civil cases and were generally responsible for maintaining law and order. The “officers” mentioned in vv. 35, 38 (*rhabdouchoi*) were designated *lictors* in Latin and were responsible to the magistrates. They were the enforcement officers. Their symbol of office was a bundle of rods with an axe protruding from the middle, tied together with a red band called the *fasces*. (This symbol was revived in modern times by Mussolini for his “fascist” movement.) The rods were not mere decorations but were used in scourgings. The lictors in Philippi would have used them in the beating of Paul and Silas (v. 22). In fact, the word used for “beating” (*rhabdizein*) means literally *to beat with rods*, the customary manner of Roman scourgings.

The owners of the slave girl were careful in their charges to avoid the real issue of her healing and their resulting loss of profit. Basically their charges were threefold. The first was calculated to awaken latent prejudices in the crowd: “These men are Jews.”⁶⁵³³ The second was extremely

⁶²³⁰ See H. J. Cadbury, “‘We’ and ‘I’ Passages in Luke-Acts,” *NTS* 3 (1957): 129.

⁶³³¹ See F. F. Bruce, “St. Paul in Macedonia,” *BJRL* 61 (1979): 337–54.

⁶⁴³² McDonald, “Archaeology and St. Paul’s Journeys,” 20–21.

⁶⁵³³ Roman satirists evidenced strong anti-Semitic tendencies in the first century. Diaspora Jews generally lived in their own enclaves; and their customs appeared narrow and superstitious to Gentiles, particularly their rite of circumcision, abstention from eating pork, and scrupulous observance of the Sabbath. See J. Polhill, “Circumcision,” *MDB*, 156.

nebulous but would have evoked the attention of the magistrates who were responsible for “law and order”: They “are throwing our city into an uproar.” The last charge seems to be the only one with any substance: They are “advocating customs unlawful for us Romans.” This is generally interpreted as illegal proselytizing for Judaism,³⁶⁶⁴ but the evidence is that Jews were not forbidden to proselytize until the time of Hadrian, well into the second century.³⁶⁷⁵

16:22–24 None of the charges were valid, but they had their effect. The appeal to anti-Jewish sentiments and to nationalistic Roman pride won over the crowd (v. 22). The insinuation of a threat to civil order evidently won over the magistrates (v. 23). The magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped for scourging,³⁶⁸⁶ and the lictors applied their rods. This probably was one of the three instances Paul mentioned in 2 Cor 11:25 when he received the Roman punishment of a flogging with rods. Finally, they were thrown into prison and placed under the tightest security. The prison keeper placed them in the innermost cell of the prison, the dungeon, we would say. Their feet were placed in wooden stocks, which were likely fastened to the wall. Often such stocks were used as instruments of torture; they had a number of holes for the legs, which allowed for severe stretching of the torso and thus created excruciating pain. Luke did not indicate that any torture was involved this time. The entire emphasis is on the tight security in which the two were held. This makes the miracle of their subsequent deliverance all the more remarkable.

(3) *Converting a Jailer’s Household (16:25–34)*

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose. ²⁷The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

²⁹The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

⁶⁶³⁴ For instance, Haenchen (*Acts*, 496, n. 5) states that it was illegal to proselytize Roman citizens and notes that this would have been particularly true in a city like Philippi with colony status.

⁶⁷³⁵ See A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 81–82. Awareness that Jewish proselytism was not illegal in Paul’s day leads D. R. Schwartz to suggest that the circumstantial participle in v. 20 should be translated as a concessive—“*although* these men are Jews, they are teaching unlawful customs” (“which Jews would *not* do,” being implied; “The Accusation and the Accusers at Philippi [Acts 16, 20–21],” *Bib* 65 [1984]: 357–63).

⁶⁸³⁶ Verse 22 reads literally, “And the magistrates, tearing off their garments, commanded rodding.” The “their” is ambiguous and could be seen as the magistrates tearing their own garments in horror at Paul and Silas’s “crime.” Since prisoners were always stripped for lashing, the present context seems more naturally to call for the stripping of Paul and Silas. See K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. 5: *Additional Notes* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 272–73.

³¹They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

³²Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

The reader of Acts is not surprised to find Paul and Silas miraculously delivered from their confinement. It had happened before: to the apostles in 5:19–26 and to Peter in 12:5–19. The present narrative perhaps has more in common with the apostles’ deliverance, since in both these instances the primary emphasis is not on the rescue as such but on the divine power manifested in bringing about their freedom, which provides a stronger base for witness. In chap. 5 the apostles did not run away but willingly returned to the Sanhedrin for their scheduled trial. The miracle considerably strengthened their position before the Sanhedrin, however, and paved the way for Gamaliel’s counsel (5:38f.). In the present narrative the same holds true. Though freed, Paul and Silas did not attempt to escape. The miracle served not to deliver them but rather to deliver the jailer. It served as the basis for Paul and Silas’s witness to him and for his conversion. The story thus falls into two divisions, the first relating Paul and Silas’s deliverance (vv. 25–28) and the second the conversion of the jailer and his household (vv. 29–34).

The Deliverance (16:25–28)

16:25–28 It was the middle of the night. Paul and Silas were singing hymns of praise to God. In Acts, Christians are always full of hope. Peter slept peacefully the night before his trial (12:6); Paul and Silas sang. Their praise and good cheer was in itself a witness to God, and the other prisoners listened intently. The area around Philippi often experiences earthquakes and tremors, but this one happened at just the right time. The prison doors probably were locked by bars; these flew up, and the doors opened. Everyone’s chains came loose. The chains may have been attached to the walls and wrenched loose by the violence of the quake. The jailer was aroused by the earthquake and spotted the open doors. Supposing that the prisoners had already escaped, he drew his sword to kill himself, preferring death by his own hand than by Roman justice. Jailers and guards were personally responsible for their prisoners and in some instances were executed for allowing them to escape (cf. 12:19). The jailer’s prisoners had not escaped; and when Paul looked up in the open doorway and saw what he was about to do, he shouted for him to stop, assuring him they were all still in the cell. To this point the reader would have expected the story of Paul and Silas’s escape.⁶⁹⁷ It was not to be so. The miraculous release did not lead to their escape but to the far more significant event of the jailer’s conversion.

The Witness (16:29–34)

⁶⁹⁷ There are many interesting parallels between this narrative and other “rescue” stories in the ancient literature. The closest are found in the noncanonical Jewish tradition with regard to Joseph’s imprisonment (*T. Jos.* 8:4–5). See W. K. L. Clarke, “St. Luke and the Pseudepigrapha: Two Parallels,” *JTS* 15 (1913–14): 598f. There are similar elements, such as loosened bonds and doors flying open in an escape story in Euripides (*Bacchae*, 443–48).

16:29–34 Calling for lamps or torches, the jailer rushed in and fell at the feet of Paul and Silas. It may have been a gesture of worship, but Paul did not object, as at Lystra (14:15). It was certainly an expression of subservience.³⁷⁰⁸ Paul had saved his life, and Paul’s God, who had reduced in an instant all his efforts at prison security, was obviously one to be respected. It has often been argued that his question (“What must I do to be saved?”) was intended in the secular sense of the word “salvation,” that he was asking how his life should be spared. But his life had already been spared. No one had escaped. More likely he asked about his salvation in the full religious sense. Perhaps he had heard the servant girl’s proclamation that Paul spoke of the way of salvation (v. 17). Perhaps he had heard Paul’s preaching or reports of his preaching but had not fully understood. Perhaps he had fallen asleep to the sound of Paul and Silas’s hymns to God. Now he was ready for understanding. The miracle of the earthquake and the prisoners who wouldn’t flee arrested his attention and prepared his heart to receive Paul’s message. His question is a classic expression that has lived through the centuries and must be asked by everyone who comes to faith. Paul’s answer is equally classic. It cannot be put any simpler: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your whole household” (cf. 11:14).

At some point the jailer’s household entered the scene. Luke did not specify when. Perhaps the mention of the household triggered the jailer’s awareness that Paul and Silas were about to share something his whole family should hear. In any event, all were present when Paul and Silas shared the words of the Lord. Here Luke made explicit what was implicit in the Lydia story: the whole household heard the gospel proclaimed. There was no “proxy” faith. The whole family came to faith *in God* (v. 34). Coming from a pagan background as they did, their newfound faith had a double dimension—faith in Jesus as Savior and faith in God as the one true God.

The witness to Christ was primary and took precedence over everything else. Now the jailer became aware of the two prisoners’ suffering and bathed the wounds from their beating. Perhaps this took place in the courtyard where the household water supply would be located. Throughout Luke’s story he focused attention on the various signs evidencing conversion (i.e., speaking in tongues, expressions of joy, and hospitality). Here the evidence of conversion is the jailer’s washing of the apostles’ wounds. There then took place an even more significant “washing,” when the jailer’s family was baptized.³⁷¹⁹ Then the jailer treated Paul and Silas in a most unusual fashion for prisoners. He took them into his house and fed them at his own table.⁴⁷²⁰ They were no longer prisoners in his eyes; they were brothers in Christ.

(4) Humbling the City Magistrates (16:35–40)

³⁵When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.” ³⁶The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.”

⁷⁰³⁸ Leaving nothing to the imagination, the Western text adds that the jailer resecured all the other prisoners before leading Paul and Silas out of the cell (v. 30).

⁷¹³⁹ Surely all those who understood and responded to Paul and Silas’s preaching—not the infants. See n. 28.

⁷²⁴⁰ The text gives no warrant for seeing the “meal” as the Lord’s Supper, as is maintained by some commentators.

³⁷But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”

³⁸The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.⁷³

16:35–36 Luke did not tell us why the magistrates changed their minds and decided to release the two prisoners. Perhaps they were more interested in having them outside of the city limits than keeping them in further incarceration.⁴⁷⁴¹ However that may be, they sent the “officers” to instruct the jailer to release them. These officers were the lictors (*rhabdouchoi*), the “rod-bearers,” who had earlier given Paul and Silas the flogging (v. 23). The jailer was all too glad to inform the two that they had been released and to send them off with the Christian greeting of “peace.”⁴⁷⁵²

16:37 Paul, however, would not go and insisted that the magistrates come to jail in person and request their departure. He had the upper hand in the matter. He was a Roman citizen; evidently Silas was also (cf. v. 37). The magistrates had had them publicly flogged and thrown in prison, and all that without a trial. It was strictly an illegal procedure. Evidently local magistrates did have the right to mete out minor punishments like flogging of noncitizens, even without a hearing. They seem in Paul’s day to have had this authority even for offending Roman citizens—but not without a trial.⁴⁷⁶³ They had scourged and imprisoned two Roman citizens with no formal condemnation, and that was beyond their authority. In this case the magistrates were unaware that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens.⁴⁷⁷⁴ Evidently in the hubbub of the original “hearing,” the slave owners did all the talking and the crowd all the shouting; and the two missionaries were unable to communicate the fact.

⁷³ John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 320–356.

⁷⁴⁴¹ The Western text provides an answer, greatly expanding on verse 35f., in which the magistrates are said to have changed their minds for fear after the earthquake.

⁷⁵⁴² It is the customary Jewish greeting (*shalom*). Cf. Judg 18:6; Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48; Acts 15:33; Jas 2:16.

⁷⁶⁴³ See Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, 71–76.

⁷⁷⁴⁴ How did one prove citizenship? We don’t know. Public records were kept, usually on small wooden diptychs which were small enough to be carried on one’s person. Evidence indicates that this was not usually done, but rather they were deposited with one’s valuables. Except for the military and merchants, society was not all that mobile; and transients like Paul and Silas were somewhat rare. One probably did not normally lie about citizenship; it was an offense punishable by death. See H. J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (New York: Harper, 1955), 68–78; Sherwin-White, *Roman Law and Roman Society*, 151–52.

16:38 The “alarm” of the magistrates was understandable (v. 38). Abuse of the rights of a Roman citizen was a serious offense. Magistrates could be removed from office for such; a municipality could have its rights reduced. For instance, the emperor could deprive Philippi of all the privileges of its colony status for such an offense.

16:39–40 The situation was ironic. Paul and Silas had been treated as criminals but were innocent. The magistrates who condemned them now found themselves genuine lawbreakers. They lost no time in getting to the jail and requesting the departure of the citizens.⁴⁷⁸⁵ Evidently they were still concerned about all the commotion Paul and Silas had stirred up among the citizenry and requested that they leave town also. The two missionaries complied, but they were in no rush—nor did they really have to be. The magistrates would give them no trouble now. So before departing they once again visited the Christians of the city. The church had grown; Lydia, not surprisingly, made her home available as a house church (v. 40). Satisfied that all was in good order, the two missionaries left for the next city.

Paul may have seemed a bit huffy in his demand for a formal apology from the magistrates, but that is not the point. It was essential that the young Christian community have a good reputation among the authorities if its witness was to flourish. Christians broke none of the Roman laws. Luke was at pains to show this. It would continue to be a major emphasis in Acts. In this instance Paul and Silas were totally innocent of any wrongdoing. It was important that the magistrates acknowledge their innocence and set the record straight. This was why Paul made such a major point of it.

5. Establishing Churches in Thessalonica and Berea (17:1–15)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy proceeded from Philippi to the major seaport city of Thessalonica some 100 miles distant (vv. 1–4). Thessalonica was then (as now) the second largest city in Greece, with a population estimated at 200,000.⁴⁷⁹⁶ It was founded in 315 b.c. by Cassander on the site of ancient Therme and named for his wife, who was a step-sister of Alexander the Great. When the Romans first took over Macedonia in 167 b.c., it was made capital of one of the four divisions. It became the seat of government for all of Macedonia in 148 b.c. when that region was reorganized into a single province. As a reward for siding with Antony and Octavian in the battle of Philippi, Thessalonica was given the status of a free city in 42 b.c., which meant that it had local autonomy. Its government consequently followed more the Greek than the Roman pattern of administration, as is reflected in the text of Acts. At Thessalonica Paul was perhaps intending to follow the pattern of establishing himself in and working out of the major population centers, a pattern clearly pursued in Corinth and Ephesus later. In this instance his mission was cut short by strong opposition (vv. 5–9).

From Thessalonica the three missionaries went to Berea (vv. 10–15). Their reception was more favorable, but Paul was again forced to leave because of opposition aroused by Jews who had come from Thessalonica. Overall, in the description of Paul’s ministry in these two cities, a familiar pattern of initial acceptance and rising opposition repeats itself. At Thessalonica the

⁷⁸⁴⁵ The Western text is again quite expansive at v. 39. It has the magistrates request the two to leave in order that *they* might not again make such a horrible mistake and condemn citizens unjustly.

⁷⁹⁴⁶ Since the ancient city lies beneath modern buildings, it remains largely unexcavated. See McDonald, “Archaeology and St. Paul’s Journeys,” 21–24.

Jews initiated the resistance to Paul's witness, as was the case at Pisidian Antioch (13:50) and Iconium (14:2) on his first missionary journey. At Berea the opposition was instigated by Jews coming from Thessalonica, just as previously Jews from Antioch and Iconium initiated his difficulties at Lystra (14:19). There is also a reminiscence of the experience at Philippi, as the case against Paul was presented before the city magistrates (17:6; cf. 16:20). This would happen again at Corinth (18:12), and perhaps the appearance before the Areopagus is to be seen in this light (17:19), although almost certainly in this instance not as a formal trial. In these appearances before the local officials, the Lord's words at the time of Paul's conversion were very much fulfilled: he was Christ's witness before the Gentiles and their rulers (9:15). In the consistent opposition Paul's ministry encountered, the remainder of the Lord's words were also fulfilled: Paul suffered for the sake of the name of Jesus (9:16).

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica is told with the utmost economy. The basic pattern of initial witness in the synagogue is set forth (vv. 1–4). The pattern continues with the picture of the opposition to Paul (17:5–9), this time filled out by the significant role played by Jason. The summary of the work in Berea is even briefer (17:10–15). From a literary perspective, Luke assumed the preceding Thessalonian narrative and did not repeat. For instance, he did not repeat the *method* of Paul's witness in the synagogue (17:2–4). He could assume the reader would know that the same basic procedure was followed at Berea. What was different at Berea was the response of the Jews there, and this was what he elaborated (17:11).

(1) Acceptance and Rejection in Thessalonica (17:1–9)

¹When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. ⁴Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

⁵But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." ⁸When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

17:1–3 The journey from Philippi to Thessalonica followed the Via Egnatia through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia. Each of these cities was about a day's journey apart when traveling by horseback. Luke gave no time frame; and if the company traveled by foot, one would have to assume the 100-mile journey took more than three days and that there were other stopping places than the two major towns Luke designated on their itinerary.

Amphipolis was some thirty miles southwest of Philippi. Formerly capital of the first division of Macedonia and a "free city," it was important for its strategic position, controlling access to the

Hellespont and the Black Sea.⁴⁸⁰⁷ It would have been a significant place for witness, but Luke did not indicate that Paul carried on any mission there or anywhere else along the route to Thessalonica. He simply indicated these as stopping places, Appollonia being the next mentioned, some thirty miles from Amphipolis and thirty-eight miles from the final destination of Thessalonica.

Once arrived in Thessalonica, Paul followed his usual pattern of beginning his witness in the synagogue. This continued on three successive Sabbaths (v. 2).⁴⁸¹⁸ This is the only time reference in the Thessalonian narrative, but one would assume from Paul's Thessalonian correspondence that his initial ministry in Thessalonica was of somewhat longer duration.⁴⁸²⁹ The pattern of Paul's synagogue preaching as indicated in vv. 2–3 is very much that of the preaching to Jews in the earlier portions of Acts. It consisted primarily of scriptural pointers to Christ from the Old Testament. Luke described this as reasoning with them from the Scriptures.⁵⁸³⁰ This is further elaborated as “explaining” and “proving” that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead.⁵⁸⁴¹

17:4 “A large number” of the Thessalonian Jews were persuaded by Paul's Old Testament expositions (v. 4), some also of the “God-fearing” Greeks who attended the synagogue. Among the latter group were a number of prominent women. That Luke singled out the influential female converts in the Macedonian congregations (cf. 16:14 and 17:12) is very much in keeping with inscriptional evidence that in Macedonia women had considerable social and civic influence.⁵⁸⁵² One should also note the prominence of Silas in this section, particularly in

⁸⁰⁴⁷ For a full treatment of Amphipolis, see R. Riesner, “Amphipolis,” *BK* 44 (1989): 79–81. For a description of all Paul's Macedonian mission points, see O. F. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Greece* (Athens: Athens Publishing Center, 1972).

⁸¹⁴⁸ The plural form *sabbata* regularly occurs in the NT for a single Sabbath day. This is the only occurrence in the NT where it is unambiguously used of more than one Sabbath. See *Beginnings* 4:202–3.

⁸²⁴⁹ It was long enough for a church to be established and leadership appointed (1 Thess 5:12). It was of sufficient duration that Paul received financial support from Philippi “time and again” while in Thessalonica (Phil 4:16). Evidently he took up his trade and supported himself as well during this period (1 Thess 2:9). Most of Paul's converts in Thessalonica seem to have come out of paganism, judging from 1 Thess 1:9, which would indicate a more extensive Gentile witness than one might gather from Luke's highly compressed account.

⁸³⁵⁰ Luke used the terminology of formal rhetoric, the art of persuasion. Paul appealed to the reason of the Jews and persuaded them with scriptural demonstrations. See D. W. Kemmler, *Faith and Human Reason: A Study of Paul's Method of Preaching as Illustrated by 1–2 Thessalonians and Acts 17, 2–4* (Leiden: Brill, 1975).

⁸⁴⁵¹ That the Scriptures point to the suffering of Christ is a common theme in Luke-Acts: Luke 24:26, 46; Acts 3:18; 26:22f. Cf. 1 Cor 15:3f.; 1 Pet 1:11. The servant psalms of Isaiah would have comprised a major part of these OT proofs of the passion of Christ.

⁸⁵⁵² See E. Harrison, *The Interpretation of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 280. The Western text habitually makes the women “wives” of prominent men (here and in v.

connection with the synagogue witness (vv. 4, 10). He is usually in the background, with the focus being on Paul. It could be that in mentioning him in these synagogue contexts, Luke wanted to remind us of his connection with the Jerusalem church and the Jewish-Christian endorsement of Paul's mission.⁵⁸⁶³

17:5 Verses 5–9 depict the opposition to Paul's ministry in Thessalonica initiated by the Jews. They are described as being "jealous," perhaps at the number of God-fearing Gentiles whom Paul was attracting away from the synagogue and into the Christian community. The Gentiles' presence in the synagogue probably gave the Jewish community a degree of acceptance in the predominantly Gentile city and probably also some financial support. One should not, however, get the impression that it was always the Jews who opposed Paul. In chaps. 16–19 there is an equal balance between opposition initiated by Jews and that begun by Gentiles.⁵⁸⁷⁴ Even in this instance, it was ultimately the Gentile populace who opposed Paul. Beginning with the gang of ruffians who hung around the marketplace,⁵⁸⁸⁵ the Jews succeeded in rousing the Gentiles into mob action against Paul and Silas.⁵⁸⁹⁶

At this point Jason entered the picture. We know nothing more about him than his role in this scene. Evidently Paul and Silas had been lodging with him. Consequently he probably was a convert and may have been a Jew since Jason was a name often taken by Diaspora Jews.⁵⁹⁰⁷ It is also possible that he shared Paul's trade. Later in Corinth Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, who were of the same trade as he (18:3). In any event, the crowd did not find the missionaries at Jason's. Possibly they had learned of the riot and had fled elsewhere.

17:6–7 So Jason served as Paul's proxy and was dragged before the city officials (v. 6). Luke's description is very accurate, using the term "politarchs" for the officials, which is the precise term that occurs for the local magistrates in inscriptions uncovered in Macedonia.⁵⁹¹⁸ Three charges were leveled against the Christians. The first was directed against Paul and Silas: they "caused trouble all over the world." This was a rather nebulous charge—"troublemakers."⁵⁹²⁹ The second was directed against Jason: he was harboring these troublemakers. The third was

12) rather than those with significant status in their own right. See B. Witherington, "The Anti-Feminist Tendencies of the 'Western' Text in Acts," *JBL* 103 (1984): 82–84.

⁸⁶⁵³ See B. N. Kaye, "Acts' Portrait of Silas," *NovT* 21 (1980): 13–26.

⁸⁷⁵⁴ Twice by Jews (17:5–7; 18:12–13), twice by Gentiles (16:19–21; 19:24–27) in formal accusations before the authorities. See R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 2:209.

⁸⁸⁵⁵ Greek ἀγοραῖος, the ill-bred, coarse class; loafers who frequent the marketplace.

⁸⁹⁵⁶ First Thessalonians 2:14–16 carries this dual picture of the combined Jewish ("who drove us out") and Gentile ("your own countrymen") opposition in Thessalonica.

⁹⁰⁵⁷ As the equivalent of Ἰησοῦς (Jesus/Joshua).

⁹¹⁵⁸ See F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, NIC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 314. There seem to have been five locally elected magistrates in Thessalonica in Paul's day. They were responsible for law enforcement. Legislature was in the hands of the local citizens, referred to as the *dēmos*. This term occurs in v. 5, but there it seems to be virtually equivalent to "crowd" and is so translated by the NIV.

⁹²⁵⁹ The verb for "causing trouble," ἀναστατώω, can mean *to stir up sedition, be a political agitator*. In light of the third charge, that may be the implication here.

directed against Paul and Silas and, by implication, Jason as their host. They were said to be “defying Caesar’s decrees.” This was a dangerous charge. To defy Caesar would be pure sedition. But what decrees were they defying? Probably the final clause in v. 7 is to be seen as an explanation of the charge. They were claiming that there was another king than Caesar—Jesus. This was virtually the same charge leveled at Jesus (cf. Luke 23:2–4; John 19:12, 15). Jesus claimed a kingdom not of this world, and Paul and Silas spoke of the same. But to a Roman, the charge sounded very much like a breach of the oath of loyalty that every person in the empire was required to render to Caesar.⁶⁹³⁰ The magistrates had to take note of this charge.

17:8–9 The magistrates showed a great deal of discretion in handling the charges. They evidently did not take the charge of sedition too seriously, but they were quite aware of the commotion and were responsible for maintaining order. They evidently decided, much like the Philippian magistrates, to preserve law and order by banning the troublemakers from the city. Jason was required to post bond, depositing a sum of money that would be forfeited should there be any sequel to the civil disturbance. That meant the absence of Paul and Silas. Paul may have been referring to this ban in 1 Thess 2:18 when he spoke of “Satan’s hindrance” to his returning to the city.

(2) Witness in Berea (17:10–15)

¹⁰As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹²Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. ¹⁴The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

When the three missionaries left Thessalonica, they also left the Egnatian Way, the route they had been following since they first landed in Macedonia at Neapolis (16:11). This main east-west highway went northwest of Thessalonica to Dyrrachium on the Adriatic. It was the main land route to Rome. At Dyrrachium travelers would take a boat across the Adriatic Sea to Brundisium in southern Italy and from there north to Rome. It has been suggested that Paul might have entertained the idea of taking this route to Rome even as early as this point in his missionary career.⁶⁹⁴¹ In his Letter to the Romans (15:22) he spoke of his having “often” been hindered in coming to them. The hindrance at this time may well have been the news that the emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome (18:2). Whatever the case, Paul headed in another direction at this time, going southwest to Berea and well off any main thoroughfare. 17:10 About fifty miles from Thessalonica, Berea lay on the eastern slopes of Mt. Vermion in the Olympian mountain range. In a somewhat remote region, Berea was the most significant city of the area, having been capital of one of the four divisions of Macedonia from 167–148 b.c. It

⁹³⁶⁰ See E. A. Judge, “The Decrees of Caesar at Thessalonica,” *RTR* 30 (1971): 1–7.

⁹⁴⁶¹ Bruce, “St. Paul in Macedonia,” 351f.

evidently had a sizable population in Paul's day. The journey from Thessalonica began in the nighttime because of the hasty departure. By foot it would have taken about three days. 17:11–12 On arriving in the town, the witness began, as it had in Thessalonica, in the synagogue. The Jews of Berea, however, were of a different breed. Luke described them as being "more noble" than the Thessalonians. He used a word (*eugenesteros*) that originally meant *high born* but came to have a more general connotation of being open, tolerant, generous, having the qualities that go with "good breeding."⁶⁹⁵² Nowhere was this more evident than in their willingness to take Paul's scriptural exposition seriously. They did not accept his word uncritically but did their own examination of the Scriptures to see if they really did point to the death and resurrection of the Messiah as Paul claimed (cf. 17:3). This was no cursory investigation either, no weekly Sabbath service, as at Thessalonica. They met daily to search the Scriptures. No wonder so many contemporary Bible study groups name themselves "Bereans." The Berean Jews were a "noble" example.⁶⁹⁶³ And many of them found out for themselves that Paul's claims were true and so believed (v. 12). Many Greeks also believed, not just men but prominent Macedonian women as well, just as in Thessalonica (cf. v. 4). Some of these may have been worshipers of God attached to the synagogue. Some may not have been. One would assume that Paul would not neglect his witness to Gentiles of pagan background even in a situation like Berea, where the synagogue was so unusually open to his message.

17:13–14 This ideal situation did not last forever. It was soon broken by Jews from Thessalonica who heard of Paul's successes in Berea. They stirred up "the crowds" in the city against Paul, evidently not the Jews of the city but the general Gentile populace, just as they had done at Thessalonica. Evidently this time the main attack was on Paul, the primary preacher of the word (v. 13), since Silas and Timothy did not have to leave town with him (v. 14).

That Paul had to flee Berea and finally wound up in Athens is clear. How he got there is another question. If one follows the Western text of Acts, he traveled to Athens by sea.⁶⁹⁷⁴ The generally most reliable manuscripts, however, have Paul going "as far as the sea." This is followed by the NIV, which translates "to the coast." A third group of manuscripts (the Byzantine text) reads that Paul was sent "as to the sea." This latter text has been followed by a number of commentators who argue that Paul was using a "diversionary tactic," making *as if* to go by sea but then hurrying down to Athens by the coastal road. Even the "as far as" text could also allow for his not taking a boat but rather following the coastal road to Athens. It is obviously not a serious matter in any event.

17:15 Of more significance is the question of when Timothy and Silas joined Paul in Athens. First Thessalonians 3:1f. indicates that Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica from Athens. This leads many scholars to argue that Luke must have been in error in seeing Paul as traveling to Athens alone; Timothy was with him and was then sent from Athens back to Thessalonica. Obviously both Luke and Paul may have been right, each giving only part of the picture. Paul may have traveled to Athens alone, summoning Timothy and Silas to join him there as soon as possible

⁹⁵⁶² See F. W. Danker, "Menander and the New Testament," *NTS* 10 (1963–64): 368.

⁹⁶⁶³ See J. Kremer, "Einführung in die Problematik heutiger Acta-Forschung anhand von Apg. 17, 10–13," *Les Actes*, 11–20.

⁹⁷⁶⁴ E. Delebecque, "Paul à Thessalonique et à Béreé selon le Texte occidental des Actes (xvii, 4–15)," *RevThom* 82 (1982): 605–15.

(Acts 17:15). They did so, and then Paul dispatched both from Athens, Timothy to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1) and Silas to parts unknown. One can never be dogmatic about any such harmonization for which the text itself gives no specific warrant, but the possibility of some such simple solution guards against overhasty conclusions about the unreliability of a text. In any event, Timothy and Silas did finally join Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5).

6. Witnessing to the Athenian Intellectuals (17:16–34)

Paul's brief visit to Athens is a centerpiece for the entire book of Acts. The scene revolves around Paul's famous address before the Areopagus (vv. 22–31). This is preceded by an introductory narrative that portrays the "Athenian scene" in vivid local color (vv. 16–21). This narrative is very much keyed to the content of the speech and provides the framework for its major themes. The same is true for the conclusion of the Athenian narrative (vv. 32–34), which is primarily a conclusion to the speech. As a whole, one can scarcely speak of an Athenian "mission." Although there were several converts and a fellowship may well have grown out of Paul's ministry there, Luke did not dwell on this or mention the establishment of a church in Athens. It would be a mistake, however, to see Paul's Athenian experience as a "maverick" episode. The opposite is true. The central item, the speech on the Areopagus, is the prime example in Acts of Paul's preaching to Gentiles. The only other example is the brief sermon at Lystra (14:15–17), which is itself almost a precis of this one. In the following narrative Paul works among Gentiles for eighteen months in Corinth and for nearly three years in Ephesus, but no example of his preaching is given. The reason quite simply is that it has already been given—in Athens, in the very center of Gentile culture and intellect.

(1) The Athenians' Curiosity (17:16–21)

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) In Paul's day Athens was but a shadow of its former glory in its "golden age" in the fourth and fifth centuries b.c. Corinth was now the leading city of Greece commercially and politically. Even Athens' native population had dwindled, estimated at some 5,000 voting citizens. But this was considerably augmented by the nonnative population, particularly the artists, the students, and the tourists. And there were the buildings and the works of art, mute testimony to its former grandeur. This is not to say that Athens was no longer an important city. It was still considered the cultural and intellectual center of the Roman Empire, and it is in this perspective that Luke portrayed it.

17:16 Athens was known the world over for its magnificent art and architecture. The art, however, characteristically portrayed the exploits of the various gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon, and most of the impressive buildings were temples to the pagan gods. For Paul, Jew that he was with his strong monotheism and distaste for graven images, the scene was

most unappealing. The NIV is too gentle in saying that he was “greatly distressed” (v. 16). The Greek word Luke used is much stronger (*paroxynō*). We get our word “paroxysm” from it. Paul was “infuriated” at the sight. Ancient descriptions testify that the marketplace was virtually lined with idols, particularly the “herms,” the monuments to Hermes with the head of the god on top.⁶⁹⁸⁵ For Paul a thing of beauty was decidedly not a joy forever, particularly when it embodied so distorted a view of divinity.

17:17 Paul evidently stuck to his usual pattern of missionary preaching. On the Sabbath he reasoned with the Jews, evidently following the same method of scriptural proof that Christ was Messiah as he used at Thessalonica (v. 17). But during the week, on a daily basis, he bore his witness in the agora, the famous marketplace and hub of Athenian life. There he got his most pronounced response, especially from some of the philosophers. The Epicureans and Stoics were among the leading schools of the day,⁶⁹⁹⁶ and they serve as representatives of the confusion caused by Paul’s preaching.

17:18 Epicureans were thoroughgoing materialists, believing that everything came from atoms or particles of matter. There was no life beyond this; all that was human returned to matter at death. Though the Epicureans did not deny the existence of gods, they saw them as totally indifferent to humanity. They did not believe in providence of any sort; and if one truly learned from the gods, that person would try to live the same sort of detached and tranquil life as they, as free from pain and passion and superstitious fears as they.

The Stoics had a more lively view of the gods than the Epicureans, believing very much in the divine providence. They were pantheists, believing that the ultimate divine principle was to be found in all of nature, including human beings. This spark of divinity, which they referred to as the *logos*, was the cohesive rational principle that bound the entire cosmic order together. Humans thus realized their fullest potential when they lived by reason. By reason, i.e., the divine principle within them which linked them with the gods and nature, they could discover ultimate truth for themselves. The Stoics generally had a rather high ethic and put great stock on self-sufficiency. Since they viewed all humans as bound together by common possession of the divine *logos*, they also had a strong sense of universal brotherhood. The mention of these schools is not incidental. Paul would take up some of their thought in his Areopagus speech, particularly that of the Stoics, and thoroughly redirect it in line with the Creator God of the Old Testament.

It was not particularly complimentary when the philosophers dubbed Paul a “babbling.” They used a colorful word (*spermologos*), “seed-speaker,” which evoked images of a bird pecking indiscriminately at seeds in a barnyard. It referred to a dilettante, someone who picked up scraps of ideas here and there and passed them off as profundity with no depth of

⁹⁸⁶⁵ For very thorough descriptions of the Athenian idols and temples, see O. Broneer, “Athens ‘City of Idol Worship,’” *BA* 21 (1958): 2–28 and G. T. Montague, “Paul and Athens,” *TBT* 49 (1970): 14–23.

⁹⁹⁶⁶ Together with the Cynics, Stoics and Epicureans represented the most popular philosophies of the day. Epicureans received their name from their founder Epicurus, who lived from 341–270 B.C. Stoicism was founded by the Cypriot Zeno (ca. 335–263 B.C.) and was named for the stoa or colonnade in the agora where Zeno had taught.

understanding whatever.⁶¹⁰⁰⁷ They could not understand Paul's concept of resurrection at all. Epicureans did not believe in any existence after death, and Stoics believed that only the soul, the divine spark, survived death.⁶¹⁰¹⁸ So what was this idea of a bodily resurrection (*anastasis*)? "He must be speaking of a new goddess named resurrection ("Anastasia") along with this new god Jesus he keeps talking about" (author's paraphrase).⁶¹⁰²⁹ How ironical that they were making Paul into a polytheist like themselves. Before the Areopagus he would eliminate such thinking with his clear monotheistic exposition of God the Creator.

17:19–20 Verse 19 has provoked one of the most lively discussions surrounding Paul's Areopagus address. Was Paul tried before a formal Athenian court named Areopagus, or did he deliver a public address from a hill known as the Areopagus? The NIV has already solved the problem by translating "a meeting of the Areopagus," which is a clear opting for the first possibility. The Greek is not so unambiguous, merely stating that the Athenians took hold of Paul and led him "to the Areopagus." The Areopagus was both a court *and* a hill, due to the fact that the court traditionally met on that hill. The term Areopagus means *hill of Ares*. Ares was the Greek god of war. The Roman equivalent god was Mars, hence the KJV "Mars' hill" (17:22). This hill was located beneath the acropolis and above the agora. From ancient times a court met there that decided on civil and criminal cases and seems to have had some jurisdiction in matters of religion. Since it traditionally met on the Areopagus, it came eventually to be known by the name of the hill, just as for us Wall Street would designate either the street or the stock exchange. So the name will not help in deciding whether Paul gave a public lecture on the hill or made a formal appearance before the court. Although many scholars advocate the public lecture view,⁷¹⁰³⁰ several factors tip the scale toward the possibility that Paul appeared before the Athenian court. First, there is quite possibly a conscious parallel between Paul's experience and the trial of Socrates. According to Plato (*Apologia* 24B), Socrates was accused of "introducing [*epispherōn*] other new gods." Paul likewise was described as "introducing" (*eisphereis*, v. 20) "strange ideas," which in v. 18 are described as "foreign gods." If Luke intended the parallel, he likely saw Paul also as appearing before the court.⁷¹⁰⁴¹ Second, that one of Paul's converts was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus (v. 34), is all the more likely if Paul appeared before that body. Finally, one should note that throughout Acts Paul appeared before the leading magisterial bodies—the magistrates of Philippi, the proconsul at Corinth, the Roman governors at Caesarea, the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Jewish King Agrippa, and finally, at least in

¹⁰⁰⁶⁷ Robinson fails to convince in his argument that "seed" and "word" are to be derived from Paul's preaching the parable of the sower in the agora (M. A. Robinson, "SPERMO-LOGOS: Did Paul Preach from Jesus' Parables?" *Bib* 56 [1975]: 231–40).

¹⁰¹⁶⁸ G. D. Kilpatrick, "The Acts of the Apostles, xvii.18," *TZ* 42 (1986): 431f.

¹⁰²⁶⁹ P. H. Menoud, "Jésus et Anastasie (Actes xvii, 18)," *RTP* 32 (1944): 141–45.

¹⁰³⁷⁰ A. Ehrhardt, *The Acts of the Apostles: Ten Lectures* (Manchester: University Press, 1969), 97f.; Haenchen (*Acts*, 519, n. 1), who likens the hill to "Hyde Park"; W. G. Morrice, "Where did Paul speak in Athens—on Mars' Hill or before the Court of the Areopagus? (Acts 17:19)," *ExpTim* 83 (1972): 377f.

¹⁰⁴⁷¹ Socrates, however, did not appear before the Areopagus but rather the court of the "King Archon," a special jury. See *Beginnings* 4:212.

anticipation, the Roman emperor. It would fit the pattern well if he appeared here before the venerable Athenian court.

It is probably erroneous to see it as a trial in any formal sense. Paul was not formally charged. Once finished he made an easy exit—there were no deliberations. Perhaps it was nothing but a more-or-less public hearing of the new teacher to satisfy the curiosity of the philosophers who led him there.⁷¹⁰⁵² It probably was not even on the hill of Ares where Paul spoke. The evidence is that in his day the Areopagus met in the *Stoa Basileios* or Royal Portico in the northwest corner of the agora.⁷¹⁰⁶³ This would be all the more natural since the portico frequented by the philosophers, whom Paul had just encountered, was adjacent to the Royal Portico.

17:21 Luke ended his narrative introduction to Paul's speech in an "aside," which refers to the insatiable curiosity of the Athenians (v. 21). Their love for novel ideas was proverbial. Perhaps the most telling quip was that of Demosthenes, who remarked how the Athenians were going about the city asking for the latest news at the very moment when the armies of Philip of Macedon were knocking at their door.⁷¹⁰⁷⁴ Luke's remark is quite ironical. The Athenians had accused Paul of being the dilettante (v. 18), an accusation much more pertinent to themselves. Their curiosity had a beneficial side, however. It set the stage for Paul's witness.

(2) Paul's Testimony Before the Areopagus (17:22–31)

²²Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

²⁹"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. ³⁰In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

¹⁰⁵⁷² Ramsay sees the council acting in its role as regulator of public lecturers (*St. Paul the Traveller*, 245–48). B. Gärtner sees Paul as being taken before the "education commission" of the court (*The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* [Uppsala: Gleerup, 1955], 52–65).

¹⁰⁶⁷³ C. J. Hemer, "Paul at Athens: A Topographical Note," *NTS* 20 (1974): 341–50. For the view that the court still met on the hill in Paul's day, see T. D. Barnes, "An Apostle on Trial," *JTS*, n.s. 20 (1969): 407–19.

¹⁰⁷⁷⁴ Cited by Bruce (*Acts*: NIC, 352) with other similar contemporary allusions to the Athenian inquisitiveness.

No text in Acts has received more scholarly attention than the ten verses of Paul's speech before the Areopagus. Debate has particularly raged over whether the core thought of the speech is that of the Old Testament or of Greek philosophy.⁷¹⁰⁸⁵ How one answers that question will very much determine how one views the total argument of the speech. For instance, those who maintain the basically philosophical background to the speech often see its main thrust as being the knowledge of God as perceived through nature. The concluding references to the resurrection and judgment are seen as a sort of afterthought that does not coordinate well with the main speech. The gist of the speech is, however, thoroughly rooted in Old Testament thought throughout. The main theme is God as Creator and the proper worship of this Creator God. The language often has the ring of Greek philosophy, for Paul was attempting to build what bridges he could to reach the Athenian intellectuals. The underlying thought remains thoroughly biblical.

The sermon can be divided into five couplets that follow a more-or-less chiasmic structure (an A-B-C-B-A pattern). Verses 22–23 introduce the main theme—the ignorance of the pagan worship. Verses 24–25 present the true object of worship, the Creator God, and the folly of idolatrous worship with temples and sacrifices. Verses 26–27 deal with the true relationship of human beings to their Creator, the central theme of the chiasm. Verse 28 provides a transition, capping off the argument of the relationship of persons to God and providing the basis for a renewed attack on idolatry in verse 29. The final two verses return to the original theme. The time of ignorance was now over. With revelation came a call to repent in light of the coming judgment and the resurrection of Christ.

The “Unknown God” (17:22–23)

17:22 Paul's opening remark that he had observed the Athenians in every respect to be “very religious” has often been described as a *capitatio benevolentiae*, an effort to win the favor of his

¹⁰⁸⁷⁵ The work by E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1923) argued for a thoroughly philosophical background to the speech. This approach has been subsequently modified and developed by such scholars as M. Dibelius, “Paul on the Areopagus,” *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM, 1956); H. Conzelmann, “The Address of Paul on the Areopagus,” *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 217–30; M. Pohlenz, who argued for a Stoic background (“Paulus und die Stoa,” *ZNW* 42 [1949]: 69–104); H. Hommel, who defined the Stoic background more narrowly as the thought of Poseidonius (“Neue Forschungen zur Areopagrede Acts 17,” *ZNW* 46 [1955]: 145–79); and Hommel, “Platonisches bei Lukas: Zu Act 17:28a (Leben-Bewegen-Sein),” *ZNW* 48 (1957): 193–200. B. Gärtner's *Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* argues that the background to the speech is thoroughly that of the OT. W. Nauck sees the background in the Hellenistic Jewish missionary preaching (“Die Tradition und Komposition der Areopagrede,” *ZTK* 53 [1956]: 11–51). F. G. Downing notes the similarities between Acts and Josephus in addressing paganism (“Common Ground with Paganism in Luke and in Josephus,” *NTS* 28 [1982]: 546–59). Like Gärtner, A. M. Dubarle argues a thoroughly OT background (“*Le Discours à l'Aréopage [Acts 17:22–31] et son Arrière-plan Biblique*,” *RSPT* 57 [1973]: 576–610).

hearers and thus secure their attention.⁷¹⁰⁹⁶ Such introductions were a standard device in Greek rhetoric, and Paul probably did have some such intention. He surely did not wish to alienate his audience at the very outset. The term he used for “religious” (*deisidaimonesteros*), however, had a definite ambiguity in current usage. It could be used in a positive sense for one who was very devoted to religious matters. It was also used with a negative connotation for those who were overly scrupulous, even superstitious, in their religious observance. The context in which the word is used determines which connotation it has.⁷¹¹⁰⁷ Perhaps Paul deliberately chose the ambiguous word. For the Athenians his remark would be taken as commending their piety. For Paul, who was already fuming at their idolatry (v. 16), the negative connotation would be uppermost in his mind. By the end of the speech, the Athenians themselves would have little doubt about Paul’s real opinion of their religiosity.

17:23a As so often in the speeches of Acts, Paul began his discourse with a point of contact with his audience. In this case it was the altars Paul had already observed in the city (v. 16). One in particular caught his attention. It was dedicated “to an unknown god.” This gave him the perfect launching pad for his presentation of monotheism to the polytheistic and pantheistic Athenians. Piety had no doubt led the Athenians to erect such an altar for fear they might offend some deity of whom they were unaware and had failed to give the proper worship. Paul would now proclaim a God who was unknown to them. In fact, this God, totally unknown to them, was the only true divinity that exists.

It has often been discussed whether Paul took a certain degree of “homiletical license” in his reference to the inscription “to an unknown god.” Jerome thought so, arguing in his *Commentary on Titus* (1:12) that there were altars in Athens dedicated to “unknown gods” and that Paul had adapted the plural “gods” to the singular “god” in light of his monotheistic sermon.⁷¹¹¹⁸ Pagan writers also attested to the presence of altars “to unknown gods” but always in the plural. For instance, the Traveler Pausanias, writing in the middle of the second century a.d., described the presence of altars to gods of unknown names on the road from Phalerum to Athens and an altar “to unknown gods” at Olympia.⁷¹¹²⁹ Written in the third century, Philostratus’s *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* also refers to these Athenian altars “to unknown gods.”⁸¹¹³⁰ There is thus ample literary evidence that Paul did not fabricate his allusion, that

¹⁰⁹⁷⁶ The piety of the Athenians was often noted by contemporary writers. Cf. Sophocles (*Oedipus Tyranus* 260), “Athens is held of states the most devout,” and Pausanias 1.17.1, “The Athenians venerate the gods more than others.” See Conzelmann, *Acts*, 140.

¹¹⁰⁷⁷ H. A. Moellering, “Deisidaimonia, a Footnote to Acts 17:22,” *CTM* 34 (1963): 466–71.

¹¹¹⁷⁸ For a thorough treatment of the evidence for altars to the unknown gods, see *Beginnings* 5:240–46.

¹¹²⁷⁹ Pausanias 1.1.4 and 5.14.8.

¹¹³⁸⁰ *Life of Apollonius* 6.3.5. By putting this reference to the altars together with another reference from a far-removed context in *Life of Apollonius*, which referred to the philosopher’s having preached against idolatry in Athens, Norden argued that the Apollonius tradition provided the base for the Areopagus sermon (*Agnostos Theos*,

there were in fact such altars in Athens. Whether they were invariably inscribed in the plural or whether there was one dedicated to a single “unknown god” remains an open question. Even should Paul have made an adaption, as Jerome alleged, it would have been a small matter. The Athenians would have understood his allusion, and Paul scarcely wanted to expound on gods in the plural. This was precisely what he wanted to deny, as he introduced the Athenians to the one true Creator God.⁸¹¹⁴¹

17:23b Verse 23b sets the tone for the remainder of the speech. There is a play on the concept of ignorance. To worship an unknown (*agnōstō*) god is to admit one’s ignorance. If he is unknown to you, you are then in total ignorance of his true nature. Thus Paul said, “What you worship in ignorance [*agnoountes*], this I proclaim to you” (author’s translation). Two things should be noted. First, Paul referred to “what” they worshiped, not “who” they worshiped. Their worship was totally wrongheaded. They did not know God; they didn’t worship *him* at all. Their worship object was a thing, a “what,” and not a personal God at all. Second, there is a strong emphasis on ignorance, on not knowing. For Greeks, as for Stoics, ignorance was a cardinal sin. The greatest virtue was to discover truth through pursuing the divine reason within oneself. Not to live in accordance with reason, to live in ignorance, was the greatest folly imaginable. Paul accused them of precisely this ignorance, this sin.⁸¹¹⁵² He would return to this theme in v. 30 with his call to repentance. The time had arrived when such ignorance of God was wholly without excuse.

The Creator God (17:24–25)

17:24–25 Paul began with the basic premise that runs throughout his speech: God is Creator. He referred to God as the maker of the “world” (*kosmos*), a term that would be familiar to every Greek. The concept of God as absolute Creator, however, would not be so easy for them to grasp. For them divinity was to be found *in* the heavens, *in* nature, *in* humanity. The idea of a single supreme being who stood *over* the world, who created all that exists, was totally foreign to them.⁸¹¹⁶³ This was indeed an “unknown god.”

Once granted the premise that God is Creator, two things follow. First, God “does not live in temples built by hands.” This is a thoroughly biblical thought. Compare Solomon’s similar remark at the dedication of his temple (1 Kgs 8:27) and Stephen’s critique of the Jerusalem temple (Acts 7:48–50). The more philosophically minded Athenians would have had no problem

35–56). This view has been almost universally rejected by scholars. See P. Corsen, “Der Altar des unbekanntes Gottes,” *ZNW* 14 (1913): 309–23.

¹¹⁴⁸¹ Norden’s view that the “UNKNOWN GOD” should be seen as the unknowable, inscrutable high god of the Gnostics (*Agnostos Theos*, 56–83) has also been generally rejected. E. des Places argues similarly (though rejecting the Gnostic thesis) that Paul intended his phrase to refer to the “unknowable” God, which would have appealed to Greek piety (“‘Au Dieu Inconnu’ [Act 17, 23],” *Bib* 43 [1962]: 388–95). Paul, however, was arguing the opposite—God *could* be known, had *made* himself known through *revelation*, not through human reason.

¹¹⁵⁸² H. Kulling, “Zur Bedeutung des Agnostos Theos: Eine Exegese zu Apostelgeschichte 17, 22–23,” *TZ* 36 (1980): 65–83.

¹¹⁶⁸³ See H. P. Owen, “The Scope of Natural Revelation in Rom. I and Acts XVII,” *NTS* 5 (1958–59): 133–43.

with this, however. Plato advocated a religion based on worship of the heavenly bodies as being superior to that observed in earthly temples, and Zeno and Seneca both scorned temples.⁸¹¹⁷⁴ The philosophers also would have had no problem with Paul's second critique of human worship, "He is not served by human hands" (v. 25). Paul's qualifier, "as if he needed anything," would particularly have resonated with them. It was a commonplace of Greek philosophy to view divinity as complete within itself, totally self-sufficient, totally without need.⁸¹¹⁸⁵ And they would have agreed with Paul also that the divinity is the giver of "life and breath and everything else."⁸¹¹⁹⁶ But there was a world of difference between the philosopher's pantheism and Paul's strict monotheism.

Every statement Paul made was rooted in Old Testament thought. The idea of God's being the granter of life and breath, as indeed the entire point of vv. 24–25, can be found in passages like Isa 42:5 and Ps 50:7–15.⁸¹²⁰⁷ It is not the philosophical concept of a divine immanent principle that pervades all nature and humankind. It is the biblical concept of a sovereign Creator God who stands above his creation and to whom humanity as creature is ultimately responsible. Such a God could not be enshrined in human temples or manipulated by human cult. Much of the conceptuality may have struck a responsive chord with the Athenians. Paul probably was struggling to communicate the gospel in terms understandable to them. But on the basic premise there was no compromise. There is but one sovereign God, Creator of all. To know him they must abandon all their other gods. Otherwise he would remain to them the "unknown god."

The Providential God (17:26–27)

These verses form the center of the speech. As such, they should be central to Paul's argument, and they are. They contain two emphases: (1) God's providence over humanity and (2) human responsibility to God. The two verses comprise a single sentence in the Greek text. The sentence consists of a main clause ("From one man he made every nation of men") and two subordinate purpose clauses. The thought thus runs: God made humanity for two purposes: (1) to inhabit the earth (v. 26) and (2) to seek him (v. 27). The dominating thought is thus still that of God as Creator.

17:26a God "made" every human nation. There is the added nuance, however, that he made every nation "from one man." The reference is most likely to Adam, and the emphasis is on the universality of humankind's relationship to God. Although there are many nations, though they are scattered over the face of the earth, they are one in their common ancestry and in their relationship to their Creator. One can see the significance of this in an address before Gentiles.

¹¹⁷⁸⁴ For a thorough treatment of the philosophers' critique of temples, see E. des Places, " 'Des temples fait de main d'homme' (Actes des Apôtres 17, 24)," *Bib* 40 (1959): 793–99.

¹¹⁸⁸⁵ See R. Bultmann, "Anknüpfung und Widerspruch," *TZ* 2 (1946): 410–11. Cf. Euripides, *Hercules* 1345f.: "God, if he be truly God, has need of nothing."

¹¹⁹⁸⁶ Cf. Seneca, *Epistles* 95.47: "God seeks no servants ... he himself serves mankind." For other parallels from the philosophers, see E. des Places, "Actes 17, 25," *Bib* 46 (1965): 219–22.

¹²⁰⁸⁷ For the view that vv. 24–25 are based on Isa 42:5, see E. Fudge, "Paul's Apostolic Self-Consciousness at Athens," *JETS* 14 (1971): 193–98.

The God whom Paul proclaimed was no local Jewish cult God. He was the one sovereign Lord of all humankind.

17:26b The precise meaning of verse 26b is somewhat problematic. To what do the “times” (*kairoi*) refer? They could either refer to the seasons or to historical epochs. The same ambiguity exists in the term “exact places where they should live.” Does this refer to the habitable areas of the planet or to the boundaries between nations? If Paul was talking of seasons and habitable zones, he was pointing to God’s providence in nature.⁸¹²¹⁸ If the reference is to historical epochs and national boundaries, the emphasis is on God’s lordship over history.⁸¹²²⁹ In either instance Paul’s point would be the same—the care and providence of God in his creation. These statements do seem to contain an underlying thought of “natural revelation.” Much as Paul argued in Rom 1:18–20 and in the speech at Lystra (14:17), God made himself known in some sense by the works of his creation.⁹¹²³⁰ All people, Gentiles included, have experienced this and to that extent are responsible before God. This led to the climactic statement about seeking God in v. 27.

17:27 Verse 27 gives the second purpose of humankind in God’s creation—“that men would seek him.” The idea of seeking God is common in the Old Testament,⁹¹²⁴¹ but that does not seem to be the background here. For the Old Testament writers, the call to “seek God” was always made to those within the covenant community, to Israel to whom God had already made himself known. In the present context it is a call for Gentiles for whom the true God is “unknown.” The connection is with the preceding verse and its emphasis on God’s providence in his creation. God’s purpose in all this is stated as his desire that people might seek him and find him. The Stoics would have been in complete agreement. They would have argued that the divine principle was to be found in all of nature and that one should strive to grasp it as fully as possible through cultivating reason, that part of divinity that dwelt in one’s own human nature. They firmly believed that through the proper discipline of reason one could come to a knowledge of divinity. Paul would not have agreed. Even a knowledge of God from nature would still not be a human attainment but a *revelation* of God in his works. But Paul was not confident in the human ability to grasp such a natural revelation. Perhaps that is why he used the optative mood in v. 27, a mode of Greek grammar that here expresses strong doubt. God created humans, Paul said, so they might seek him and just possibly grope after him and find him. He had his doubts. People likely would not discover God in this fashion, even “though he is not far” from them. There is no question about God’s providence; there *is* about humanity’s ability to make the proper response. There is also no question about God’s purposes. God *did* create

¹²¹⁸⁸ This is the position of Dibelius, “Paul on the Areopagus,” 30–32. A similar position is taken by W. Eltester with the difference that he sees the “boundaries” not as habitable zones but as the boundaries of the creation account, the “firmament” or boundary between the earth and the watery chaos (“Schöpfungsoffenbarung und natürliche Theologie im frühen Christentum,” *NTS* 3 [1957]: 93–114).

¹²²⁸⁹ See Gärtner, *Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, 146–51.

¹²³⁹⁰ For a discussion of the relationship between Rom 1 and Acts 17, see the commentary on 14:14–18.

¹²⁴⁹¹ Cf. Isa 55:6; 65:1; Ps 14:2; Prov 8:17; Jer 29:13.

humans “to seek him.” This is the proper response of the creature. The responsibility of humanity is the worship of God.⁹¹²⁵²

The Worship of God (17:28–29)

17:28 Verse 28 is transitional, linking up with the theme of God’s proximity in v. 27b and providing the basis for the critique of idolatrous worship in v. 29. It also serves the rather unique function of providing the “scriptural base” for the speech. In this instance it isn’t a matter of Scripture at all but rather a quote from a pagan philosopher.⁹¹²⁶³ Scripture would have been meaningless to the Athenians. Paul still continued to address them as much as possible in their own terms. Some argue that two quotes from Greek poets are in v. 28, but more likely the verse contains only one. The phrase “in him we live and move and have our being” seems to have been a more or less traditional Greek triadic formula.⁹¹²⁷⁴ Paul surely did not understand this in the Greek sense, which would emphasize the pantheistic view of the divinity residing in human nature. His view was that of v. 25: God is the giver of life and breath and all that is. Through God the Creator people live and move and have existence. The second statement is introduced as the quote from the Greek poets. It is generally agreed that the quote is found in the Stoic poet Aratus of Soli, who lived in the first half of the third century b.c. Aratus may himself have been quoting a hymn to Zeus from the poet Cleanthes, which would perhaps explain Paul’s plural reference to “some of your poets.” For Aratus “we are his offspring” referred to Zeus and to humanity’s sharing in the divine nature. In the context of Paul’s speech, it referred to God and to humanity’s being his creation.

17:29 In v. 29 Paul returned to his earlier critique of artificial worship with which the speech began (vv. 24–25). Earlier he had critiqued temple and cult. Now he attacked idolatry. The attack was based on the previous statement that humans are God’s offspring. The idea is that of people being made in God’s image. If humankind is the true image of God, the work of God’s hands, it follows that no image made by human hands can render proper homage to God. If humanity is like God, then God is not like gold or silver or any such material representation. Only the creature can express the true worship of the Creator, not the creation of the creature, not something made by human design and skill.

¹²⁵⁹² R. F. O’Toole, “Paul at Athens and Luke’s Notion of Worship,” *RB* 89 (1982): 185–97.

¹²⁶⁹³ J. Calloud notes that the Greeks often viewed their poets as inspired (“Paul devant l’Aréopage d’Athenes: Actes 17, 16–34,” *RSR* 69 [1981]: 209–48).

¹²⁷⁹⁴ Those who argue that it is a quotation attribute it to Epimenides of Crete, basing this on a reference in the ninth-century Syriac commentary of Ishodad of Merv, who may have been dependent on Theodore of Mopsuestia. The poem of Epimenides consists of a hymn of Minos to his father Zeus. Minos attacks his fellow Cretans as being liars for building a tomb for Zeus, but Zeus is very much alive, and Minos praises him with the words “in thee we live and move and have our being.” It is interesting that the tradition of Cretans being liars in Titus 1:12 seems to come from this same poem of Epimenides. Pohlenz (“*Paulus und die Stoa*,” 101–4) gives a rather strong case for questioning the Ishodad tradition. For the argument that the statement is based on Euripides, *Bacchae*, see P. Colaclides, “Acts 17:28A and *Bacchae* 506,” *VC* 27 (1973): 161–64.

Here Paul spoke very much in the line of the Old Testament critique of idolatry.⁹¹²⁸⁵ The Stoics would have agreed. They too saw idolatry as the folly of popular religion. But if they truly understood Paul's teaching of the one true Creator God, they would have realized that they too were idolaters. In their attempt to reach the divine through their own striving, in their view that the divine indwelt their own human nature, they had transgressed the relationship of creature to Creator. If they had genuinely accepted Paul's major premise that God is Creator, they would have had to acknowledge their own self-idolatry, their own need for repentance.

The Judgment of God (17:30–31)

17:30–31 Paul now directed his attention to the Athenians, returning to the theme of ignorance with which he began. They were guilty of ignorance. All their acts of piety were in vain, for they did not know or worship the one true God. In his forbearance God formerly "overlooked" such ignorance (cf. 14:16; Rom 3:25). The times of forbearance had now ended because their ignorance had now ended. Now they knew the one true God through Paul's proclamation. He was no longer an "unknown God"; and should they continue in their false worship and fail to acknowledge his sole lordship of heaven and earth, their sin would no longer be a sin of ignorance but a high-handed sin.

Only one course was open—repentance, a complete turnabout from their false worship and a turning to God.⁹¹²⁹⁶ The concept of repentance must have sounded strange to the Athenians. Even stranger was Paul's warning of God's coming day of judgment (v. 31).⁹¹³⁰⁷ Strangest of all was his reference to the resurrection of Christ. Paul's train of thought was clear enough. God is the one true God and should be acknowledged by his creatures. All people must ultimately stand before God and give an account for their relationship to him. God appointed "the man" who would carry out this judgment. (The "man" was Christ, "the Son of Man," in his role as judge; cf. Dan 7:13f.) God clearly demonstrated this truth by the miracle of raising him from the dead. Just as Peter had pointed to the resurrection as proof to the Jews that Jesus is Messiah, so to the Gentiles Paul pointed to the resurrection as proof that he is the coming judge of all humanity. Paul had reached the climax of his testimony and made his appeal. He may have had more to say, but he had said enough to convict at least one Areopagite (v. 34). In any event, with the mention of resurrection the jeering started, and Paul's speech ended (v. 32).

Commentators often have said that the Paul of the epistles would never have preached the Areopagus sermon because its thought would have been alien to him. Such is not the case. The appeal to a "natural revelation" is certainly present in Rom 1:18–32 even though the application differs. More significant are passages like 1 Thess 1:9–10, where Paul summarized his preaching to the Gentiles at Thessalonica. There the elements are strikingly the same as in the Areopagus speech: turning from idols to a living God, the return of the Son from heaven, the resurrection, the wrath to come. This is almost a summary of the appeal in Acts 17:29–31.

¹²⁸⁹⁵ Cf. Deut 4:28; Ps 115:4–8; Isa 40:18–20; 44:9–20; Song of Songs 3:10–4:2; 5:7–16.

¹²⁹⁹⁶ E. des Places, "Actes 17, 30–31," *Bib 52* (1971): 526–34; J. Dupont, "Le discours à l'Aréopage," *Nouvelles Etudes*, 410–23.

¹³⁰⁹⁷ A. J. Mattill, Jr., argues that the occurrence of μέλλω in v. 31 implies an imminent judgment ("Näherwartung, Fernerwartung, and the Purpose of Luke-Acts: Weymouth Reconsidered," *CBQ* 34 [1972]: 281–83).

What of course is unique in the Areopagus speech is its appeal to Greek philosophical thought. Paul was attempting to build bridges with the intellectuals in Athens in the hope of winning some (cf. 1 Cor 9:19). He used their language, quoted their poets, and sought to reach them in terms they would understand. As such his speech in Athens became a model for the Christian apologists who later attempted to present the faith to the pagan intellectuals of a later day.⁹¹³¹⁸ It should be noted that Paul never compromised the basic Christian principles of God as Creator and Judge and the resurrection of Christ. In the end these were the most difficult concepts for the Athenians to grasp, but there could be no accommodation on these. Bridge building is essential in Christian witness, particularly when addressing different cultures, as missionaries must often do. Paul's Areopagus address provides both a precedent and a pattern for this essential task.⁹¹³²⁹

(3) *The Mixed Response (17:32–34)*

³²When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

17:32–33 Epicureans believed in no human existence after death. Stoics believed that only the immaterial spirit survived death. To Greeks the idea of a body surviving death did not make any sense—even a transformed body. So many in the Areopagus simply scoffed at Paul's reference to the resurrection. As so often with the preaching of the gospel in Acts, however, the response was mixed. Others wanted to "hear [him] again." There is no reason to see this response as anything but genuine. They were not convinced by Paul, but they were still willing to give him further hearing. At this point the scoffers must have had the majority, for Paul did not tarry before the Areopagus but left the assembly (v. 33).

17:34 There was a third response to Paul's witness in Athens, however. A few people responded in faith.¹⁰¹³³⁰ At least one of these, Dionysius the Areopagite, seems to have been converted by Paul's address before the council. Another convert is mentioned by name—Damaris. It is significant that of the two believers designated by name, one is male and the other female. One cannot fail to observe the prominence of women in Paul's Greek congregations of Macedonia and Achaia. We have no further reliable tradition on either Dionysius or Damaris. Some later writings under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite exist, but these are the product of a fifth-century Christian monk writing pseudonymously under the name of the New Testament character. Later traditions that Dionysius became the first bishop of Athens have no reliable

¹³¹⁹⁸ H. Gebhardt shows how the second- and third-century Christian apologists developed the same basic arguments as in the Areopagus speech ("Die an die Heiden gerichtete Missionsrede der Apostel und das Johannesevangelium," *ZNW* 6 [1905]: 236–49).

¹³²⁹⁹ See K. O. Gangel, "Paul's Areopagus Speech," *BibSac* 127 (1970): 308–12.

¹³³¹⁰⁰ Verse 34 is rather clear evidence that ἄνδρες is not gender specific in Acts because Damaris is included in the relative clause dependent upon it. The sentence runs literally: "Some *people* joined him and believed, among whom were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris" (the NIV "men" should be translated "people").

basis.¹⁰¹³⁴¹ Neither do we know anything more of Damaris. Chrysostom saw her as Dionysius's wife, but this is probably purely conjectural on his part.¹⁰¹³⁵² The "others" who are mentioned as converts in v. 34 may have resulted from Paul's larger witness in the synagogue and agora of Athens rather than from his address before the Areopagus. The same may have been true of Damaris.

The well-worn sermon idea that Paul totally abandoned his efforts to preach to intellectuals after his experience in Athens is a misreading of both Acts and 1 Corinthians. Luke did not present Paul's Areopagus sermon as a failure. The Areopagus council consisted of about thirty members according to the best evidence. If Dionysius were the only convert from the address, one out of thirty is scarcely negligible, particularly when addressing skeptical intellectuals!¹⁰¹³⁶³ And the first chapter of 1 Corinthians is not an anti-intellectual manifesto. It is a rather profound exposition of revelation and reason and still challenges the best minds. Paul's determination to preach the crucified Christ was only confirmed by his Areopagus experience. He never did otherwise than major on the center of the gospel, the death and resurrection of Christ. The climax of the Areopagus speech was the resurrection, and it received the predictable response—to the Greeks, folly (cf. v. 32; 1 Cor 1:23).

7. Establishing a Church in Corinth (18:1–17)

That Luke did not intend to present a full-scale history of the Pauline mission is well illustrated by his treatment of Corinth. During the time of the church's founding, Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth, as Luke attests (18:11). And yet the coverage is briefer than that of Paul's work in Philippi, which lasted no longer than several months. It is several verses shorter than the Athenian section, which probably represents only a matter of weeks. We know from Paul's two Epistles to the Corinthians, both of which were written during his third missionary period, that this was a time of severe problems for the church and a stormy relationship between it and Paul. For this period, Luke only mentioned Paul's final three-month visit there, and that in but one sentence (20:2b–3). Luke's method was selective—to depict the establishment of work in the various areas where Paul worked and to relate individual episodes that were typical of Paul's experiences and edifying for his Christian readers. In the present section vv. 1–11 furnish the

¹³⁴¹⁰¹ For these traditions see Eusebius, *Church History* 3.4.11 and 4.23.3.

¹³⁵¹⁰² The name Damaris is otherwise not found in first-century Greek literature. Some old Latin manuscripts read Damalis at v. 34, which was a common name and meant *heifer*. Some commentators want to see Damaris as a courtesan or dancing girl. Evidently this conjecture is based on the assumption that she was converted as a result of Paul's Areopagus address and that no respectable Greek woman would have been present in the agora or in any public gathering unaccompanied. This fails to recognize that v. 34 is a summary of Paul's total ministry in Athens—not just the Areopagus speech. For the interesting suggestion that Damaris may have had an Egyptian background (from Egyptian T'-mr, "beloved one"), see J. G. Griffiths, "Was Damaris an Egyptian? (Acts 17:34)," *BZ* 8 (1964): 293–95.

¹³⁶¹⁰³ See J. H. MacLean, "St. Paul at Athens," *ExpTim* 44 (1932–33): 550–53.

history of the church's foundation, and vv. 12–17 furnish the episode—the appearance before the proconsul Gallio.¹³⁷

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(1) The Mission to Corinth (18:1–11)

¹After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

¹³⁷ John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 356–380.

⁷Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. ⁸Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

⁹One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." ¹¹So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

Corinth in Paul's day was the largest, most cosmopolitan city of Greece.¹⁰¹³⁸⁴ Located at the southern end of the isthmus that connects the Peloponnesus with the Greek mainland, it was a major center for commerce. It had two ports, Lechaemum on the west, which gave access to the Adriatic Sea, and Cenchrea on the east, opening into the Aegean Sea. The isthmus is only three and a half miles wide at its narrowest point. Nero began a canal there, but this was not completed. The canal presently there was dug in the nineteenth century. In Paul's day ships were often unloaded at one of the ports and the load carried overland the short distance and reloaded on another ship at the other port. Small boats were placed on carts called *diolkoi* and transferred from one port to the other by means of a roadway specially designed for that purpose. Either method was generally preferable to hazarding the treacherous waters around the Peloponnesus. All of this made Corinth *the* Greek center for east-west trade. With it came some of the undesirable elements that often plague a maritime center. Among the Greeks the word translated "to live like a Corinthian" (*korinthiazesthai*) meant *to live immorally*.

In Paul's day Corinth was a new city. No major building was more than 100 years old. It was also the most Roman city of Greece, with its extensive group of resettled *coloni* as the core of its citizenry. As in Athens, the religion of the Corinthians seems to have been primarily that of the traditional Greek gods. The temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, commanded the city from its perch on the Acrocorinth, the 1,900-foot hill that dominated the city from its perimeter.¹⁰¹³⁹⁵ Inside the city walls, close to the agora, stood the temple of the sun god Apollo, the patron god of the city. Just inside the city wall excavations have uncovered a temple to Asklepius, the Greek god of healing. Elaborate canals and reservoirs connected with the temple provided water for the various healing rites. A number of clay replicas of human body parts have been found on

¹³⁸¹⁰⁴ Excavations at Corinth have uncovered settlements on the site that date back to the early Bronze Age (3000 B.C.). During the age of the Greek city-states, Corinth was a major power, being known for its pottery and shipbuilding industries. When Persia attempted to conquer Greece, Corinth was head of the league of city-states that halted its advance (338 B.C.). Later it headed the Achaean league in its attempt to stop Rome. This leadership proved fatal to Corinth. The league was defeated, and Roman vengeance was vented on the city. In 146 B.C. it was razed. Such a strategic site could not remain unutilized for long; and in 44 B.C. Julius Caesar established a Roman colony there, primarily for the purpose of providing territory for the Roman proletariat. The new city was renamed *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*. In A.D. 27, when Achaia was organized as a separate senatorial province, it became the capital city and seat of the Roman proconsul.

¹³⁹¹⁰⁵ Conzelmann, however, questions whether there was actually temple prostitution at the temple of Aphrodite, as Strabo maintained (*Acts*, 151). That there was widespread prostitution in Corinth is beyond dispute (cf. 1 Cor 6:12–20).

the site. Evidently these were brought as offerings to the god and as petitions for healing, representing the part of the body in which the suppliant was afflicted.

Worship of God, however, was present in the city before Paul's time. There was a Jewish settlement in Corinth, and it was with them that Paul began his mission (18:4). A large stone lintel from a doorway was excavated at the base of the steps that led into the agora and was inscribed as the synagogue of the Jews. Although it dates from the second century, it may mark the site of an earlier synagogue where Paul debated with the Jews of Corinth.¹⁰¹⁴⁰⁶

Luke's brief account of Paul's establishment of the work in Corinth provides an invaluable supplement to Paul's letter to that congregation. The two Corinthian letters date from a later period—that of Paul's third mission. The Acts account deals with Paul's foundation of the church during his second missionary period. Though they thus deal with different epochs in Paul's relationship with the Corinthians, there are a number of remarkable agreements in detail between Luke's account and the apostle's two epistles as well as between all three and the archaeological evidence. These will be noted as they appear in the text. The following exposition is divided into three parts: (1) vv. 1–4: Paul's arrival in Corinth; (2) vv. 5–8: the witness in the city; and (3) vv. 9–11: the assuring vision of Jesus.

Paul's Arrival in Corinth (18:1–4)

18:1–2 Corinth was approximately fifty miles from Athens and almost due west. When Paul arrived in the city, he quickly met a Jewish couple by the name of Aquila and Priscilla. The couple is also mentioned in Paul's letters (Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19). Paul *and* Luke always mentioned them together, never separately. Paul referred to the wife as Prisca, which was her formal name. Luke's "Priscilla" was a diminutive, less formal designation, the form that would be used among acquaintances. Luke often used the more "familiar" form of a name. Compare his "Silas" with Silvanus. "Aquila" is a Latin name and derives from the word for "eagle."

Some have surmised from Luke's giving the detail that he came from Pontus, the Roman province along the Black Sea, that he may have been a Roman citizen; but that is not sufficient evidence. Others have wanted to see Priscilla as the Roman citizen, basing this on the fact that there was a Roman patrician family by the name of Prisca *and* on the fact that Priscilla is generally named first (cf. 18:18, 24; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19). That she is usually mentioned before her husband is indeed remarkable for first-century usage but probably is less due to her social status than to her prominence in Christian circles. Not to detract from Aquila's ministry, but Priscilla seems to have been one of those women like Lydia whose service in the Christian community stood out.¹⁰¹⁴¹⁷

Luke only mentioned as an incidental detail that the couple had recently come from Rome because the emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from the city. The detail is very important for Pauline chronology. Luke probably referred to the same incident the Roman historian Suetonius mentioned in his *Life of Claudius* (25.4). According to Suetonius, Claudius expelled all

¹⁴⁰¹⁰⁶ Excavation in Corinth was carried out by the American School of Classical Studies. See W. A. McDonald, "Archaeology and St. Paul's Journeys in Greek Lands: Part III—Corinth," *BA* 5 (1942): 36–48.

¹⁴¹¹⁰⁷ One perhaps would not want to go so far as Harnack, who saw Priscilla and Aquila as coauthors of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

the Jews because of a tumult instigated by “Chrestus.” The later church historian Orosius dated this event during the ninth year of Claudius, i.e., between Jan. 25, 49 and Jan. 24, 50. If Orosius’s date can be trusted, this sets a certain date for Paul’s arrival in Corinth.¹⁰¹⁴²⁸ Since Aquila and Priscilla preceded him there, it is not likely Paul would have arrived in Corinth before the middle of a.d. 49.

The reference in Suetonius is significant for other reasons as well. Likely, his attributing the tumult among the Jews to “Chrestus” resulted from his confusion over the name “Christus,” the Latin for Christ. This is evidence that Christianity had already reached Rome by a.d. 50. How would it have done so? Here is the perfect example before us—by Christians like Priscilla and Aquila traveling the routes of trade and commerce and carrying their faith wherever they went. Priscilla and Aquila likely were Christians already when they left Rome. The Jewish Christians would have been seen as ringleaders in the Jewish unrest over “Chrestus” and would have received the brunt of Claudius’s edict.¹⁰¹⁴³⁹ Luke said nothing about Paul’s witnessing to the couple, and one would assume Paul readily took up with them because they were not only fellow Jews and fellow tentmakers but, most important of all, fellow Christians.

18:3 Paul mentioned working to support himself in his letters (1 Cor 4:12; 1 Thess 2:9; cf. 2 Cor 11:7). In Acts 20:34 he reminded the Ephesian elders that while in Ephesus he had supported himself and his coworkers with the labor of his own hands. Only in Acts 18:3 are we told the trade by which he supported himself—that of “tentmaker.” Exactly what this involved is often discussed. A number of the early church fathers rendered the term used here by a more general word, “leather worker.” This is quite plausible. Tents were often made of leather, and tentmakers probably used their skills on other types of leather products as well. Some interpreters have suggested, however, that Paul may not have worked in leather at all but rather in *cilicium*, a cloth of woven goat’s hair that was often used as a material for tents. Since *cilicium* originated in and was named for Paul’s native province of Cilicia, he may well have learned the trade there. The later rabbinic writings required students of the law to adopt a trade in order to keep the mind from becoming idle and so as to never depend on profit from the teaching of the Torah.¹¹¹⁴⁴⁰ Paul may well have been influenced by this ideal. First Corinthians 9 (cf. v. 12) particularly reveals such an attitude, where Paul spoke of foregoing any support from the Corinthians in order to avoid any obstacle to the gospel.¹¹¹⁴⁵¹

¹⁴²¹⁰⁸ Dio Cassius referred to an edict of Claudius in which the emperor did not expel the Jews but only limited their right of assembly. He dated this around A.D. 41. Some scholars see this as the same as Suetonius’s reference and opt for the earlier date. They seem, however, to be two separate edicts. See *Beginnings* 5:459–60; F. F. Bruce, “Christianity under Claudius,” *BJRL* 44 (1962): 315–18.

¹⁴³¹⁰⁹ Because there were perhaps 50,000 Jews in Rome, Claudius may have had difficulty enforcing his edict; and it may have been confined to the leaders. In any event, there was a Jewish community in Rome eight years or so later when Paul arrived there (Acts 28:17–28).

¹⁴⁴¹¹⁰ See *m.Abod* 2.2 and 4.7.

¹⁴⁵¹¹¹ R. Hock notes that Paul’s references to his work by such terms as “enslaved” (see 1 Cor 9:19) and “demeaning myself” (see 2 Cor 11:7) and being “a spectacle to the world” (see 1 Cor 4:9, 12) reflect a decidedly upper-class attitude toward work and may,

The obstacle in the case of the Corinthians may well have been the distrust they had for those who went about making profit from their message. The originator of the Cynic school of philosophy, Diogenes, was a Corinthian native. By Paul's day the Cynic movement was widespread. Cynic philosophers were peripatetic, traveling from town to town, often preaching to crowds on street corners and in marketplaces. Their ideal was a lifestyle free from want, totally nonmaterialistic. They depended on contributions for their basic needs. In actual fact, some seem to have fallen somewhat short of the ideal and had a reputation for fleecing the gullible crowds. Paul may have been particularly careful in places like Corinth to avoid any associations with these street preachers. In fact, Paul may have actually used his work as an opportunity for witness. According to available evidence, a number of Greek philosophers, beginning with Socrates, followed a pattern of witness in the shops and the workplace; and Paul may well have utilized such an opportunity in exercising his own trade.¹¹¹⁴⁶²

18:4 Whether he did so while at work during the week or on the Sabbath, Paul followed his customary pattern in Corinth. He went to the synagogue and sought to persuade both the Jews and God-fearers there that Christ is the Messiah (v. 4; cf. 17:2–4).

The Witness in the City (18:5–8)

18:5–6 One gets the impression that when Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth from Macedonia they brought a contribution for Paul's ministry. Second Corinthians 11:8f. speaks of the support of other churches while Paul ministered in Corinth, and Phil 4:15f. speaks of the generous support of that congregation in his continuing mission endeavor. Now Paul was freed to witness more continually, not just on Sabbaths.

The seemingly inevitable results followed, however, and Jewish opposition arose. Paul turned from the synagogue and turned to the Gentiles (v. 6). The pattern was the same as in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (13:44–47), and it would be repeated again, right up to the end of Acts (28:23–28; cf. 19:8–9). Why did Paul keep returning to the Jews after he seemingly had turned decisively to the Gentiles, and especially when he knew the almost certain resistance that would arise? Perhaps he gave us a clue in his statement that the Corinthian Jews' blood would be on their own heads, not on his hands. We find the same language in Ezekiel's picture of the prophet as a watchman over Israel (33:1–7; cf. 3:18).¹¹¹⁴⁷³ So Paul always fulfilled his role of witness to his fellow Jews. When it was no longer possible to bear that witness, he moved to the Gentiles. But in the next city he would be back to the synagogue, blowing his warning trumpet.

18:7–8 When Paul left the synagogue, he moved his place of witness to the house of a Gentile God-fearer named Titius Justus, who probably was one of those mentioned in v. 4 as present in

along with his Roman citizenship, indicate his coming from a higher social level ("Paul's Tentmaking and the Problem of his Social Class," *JBL* 97 [1978]: 555–64).

¹⁴⁶¹¹² See Hock, "The Workshop as a Social Setting for Paul's Missionary Preaching," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 438–50.

¹⁴⁷¹¹³ If the watchman blew the warning trumpet, anyone who failed to heed would be responsible for the consequences that came. If the watchman didn't blow the trumpet, then the watchman would be responsible. Paul was a watchman to Israel, proclaiming the coming of the Messiah and the coming judgment. When he had borne his witness, he had fulfilled his responsibility.

the Corinthian synagogue. He probably continued to live with Aquila and Priscilla. Going just next door might appear as somewhat noningratiating toward the Jews, but it could also be indicative that he had not completely given up on them. Indeed, the ruler of the synagogue became a believer. He likely was the same Crispus mentioned in 1 Cor 1:14 as one of the few in Corinth upon whom Paul himself administered baptism.

Some have wanted to see Titius Justus as the Gaius who is also mentioned as having been baptized by Paul in 1 Cor 1:14. Their reasoning is that Titius and Justus would constitute the last two of the customary three Roman names and that Gaius could well have been his praenomen, or first name. This same Gaius is mentioned as Paul's Corinthian host in Rom 16:23, and these interpreters would see v. 7 as referring to Paul's changing his place of lodging from Aquila and Priscilla's to Titius's.¹¹⁴⁸⁴ This view is attractive but unfortunately too conjectural. In any event, the witness among the Gentiles was a success; many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized.

We know from Paul's Corinthian correspondence that the church there was sizable, sufficiently so to develop church factions (cf. 1 Cor 1:10–17). Seemingly the majority were ordinary working people, not the "first families" of Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 1:26). Still, some were from the upper social classes. Social cleavage seems to have been the major problem at their gathering for the agape feast in connection with the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17–22). Particularly of note in Paul's Letter to the Romans (cf. 16:23), which was written in Corinth, is the mention of Erastus, the "director of public works" in Corinth.

An inscription has been excavated in a plaza adjacent to the theater at Corinth. It mentions Erastus as the treasurer (*aedile*) of the city who provided the funds for the plaza. This quite possibly is the same Erastus associated with the Corinthian congregation in Rom 16:23.

The Assuring Vision of Jesus (18:9–11)

18:9–11 Verses 9–11 are a sort of interlude in the narrative. They seem to interrupt the account of the increasing Jewish opposition to Paul, which became full-blown when he was brought before Gallio (vv. 12–17). They are, however, an essential part of the story and are closely related to the trial scene. Their form is that of a divine commissioning narrative in which God or his angel appears to a human agent, gives a task to be performed, and gives an assurance of his presence.¹¹⁴⁹⁵ The form already is familiar from previous incidents in Acts (5:17–21; 9:10–18; 16:6–10), and Paul would have similar visions on subsequent occasions (23:11; 27:23–24). All of these have elements familiar from the Old Testament texts that treat the call of the prophets—Moses (Exod 3:2–12), Joshua (Josh 1:1–9), Jeremiah (Jer 1:5–10), and the servant of the Lord (Isa 41:10–14). Even the same wording binds all these together: "Fear not; do not be silent; I am with you; no one will harm you" (author's translation).

In the present instance Paul's vision fortified him for the extensive witness in Corinth. Corinth was the first city where Paul settled for an *extensive* period of missionary activity. The pattern

¹⁴⁸¹¹⁴ See E. J. Goodspeed, "Gaius Titius Justus," *JBL* 69 (1950): 382f. Neither is Titius to be confused with Titus as in some of the manuscripts (κ) and church fathers. Titus was present with Paul at the Jerusalem Conference (Gal 2:1–3), which almost surely took place before Paul's visit to Corinth.

¹⁴⁹¹¹⁵ For a full discussion of this commissioning form, see B. J. Hubbard, "The Role of Commissioning Accounts in Acts," *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, 187–98.

heretofore had been for such strong opposition to arise against Paul and his companions in cities where they witnessed as to force their departure. He had no reason to expect otherwise in Corinth. In 1 Cor 2:3 he even stated the fear and misgivings he had on first coming to the city. How would these Greeks and Roman colonials receive him? Already the familiar pattern of strong Jewish opposition was rearing its head. How long could his Corinthian ministry continue? The vision from the Lord provided an answer. Paul was to remain in Corinth and continue his witness there. The Lord was with him. No harm would befall him, no opposition withstand him. This assurance fortified Paul for the eighteen-month ministry in Corinth (v. 11). The successful outcome of his appearance before Gallio further assured him the Lord had indeed kept his promise.

(2) *The Accusation Before Gallio (18:12–17)*

¹²While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. ¹³“This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”

¹⁴Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. ¹⁵But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.” ¹⁶So he had them ejected from the court. ¹⁷Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.

The appearance of Paul before Gallio is of particular importance in two respects. First, it established a precedent for the manner in which the Roman leaders should consider charges against Christians brought before them. Second, the mention of Gallio is an important reference point for determining the date of Paul’s work in Corinth and for establishing the entire Pauline chronology.

18:12 To begin with the second, a great deal is known of Gallio both from literary sources (Seneca and Tacitus) and from inscriptions.¹¹¹⁵⁰⁶ His service in Corinth occurred during the proconsular period of his career.¹¹¹⁵¹⁷ Achaia at this time was a province of second rank, and these were administered by proconsuls. Generally in this region proconsuls served a one-year term, two at the most; and tenure seems to have begun in the early summer. An inscription discovered at Delphi, which relates to the dedication of an aqueduct, mentions Gallio as being proconsul of Achaia and dates this during the period of Claudius’s twenty-sixth acclamation as emperor. Such “acclamations” were made by the Roman senate at irregular intervals as affirmations of an emperor’s rule. On the basis of other inscriptions, Claudius’s twenty-sixth

¹⁵⁰¹¹⁶ Born in Spain, he was taken to Rome by his father during the reign of Tiberius and educated for a diplomat’s career. He was the elder brother of Seneca, the famous philosopher-statesman, who described him as being of an unusually amiable disposition. Gallio’s career took him through the usual steps of serving as a praetor, then a proconsul, and finally rising to the rank of consul.

¹⁵¹¹¹⁷ Shortly after his Corinthian tenure, Gallio seems to have contracted a rather serious illness that plagued him for the rest of his life. He was executed in the latter half of the 60s, a victim of Nero’s paranoia. For further treatment of his life, see R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Teilband 2: *ApG. 13–28* (Zurich: Benziger, 1986), 150.

acclamation can be dated as covering the first seven months or so of a.d. 52. On this basis he is assumed as having begun his office in the summer of either a.d. 51 or a.d. 52.¹¹¹⁵²⁸ If one assumes that Gallio served the maximum two-year term, his tenure would have ended in summer of a.d. 54 at the latest. Putting this together with the date of Claudius's edict,¹¹¹⁵³⁹ Paul's eighteen months in Corinth would have occurred sometime between winter of a.d. 49/50 and summer of a.d. 54. Most interpreters are inclined to see Gallio as having the more usual one-year tenure and Paul as having appeared before him during the early days of his term of office. This would place Paul's Corinthian ministry roughly between early 50 and late 52.¹²¹⁵⁴⁰ 18:13–16 Returning to the first point, the Gallio episode is almost paradigmatic for Paul's appearances before Roman officials in Acts. None of them found him guilty of having broken any Roman law. This becomes very explicit with Gallio's judgment regarding the Jewish charge against Paul. Their charge was that Paul was "persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law." The charge as it stands is ambiguous. What law? Roman law or Jewish law? There were Roman laws against proselytizing of Roman citizens by foreign cults,¹²¹⁵⁵¹ but Gallio obviously did not take the charge in this sense. He saw it for what it was—an internal dispute within the Jewish community—their interpretations of "words" (the Scriptures?), of "names" (Jesus as Messiah?), of "law" (the Torah).¹²¹⁵⁶² In v. 15 Gallio seems to have used a technical term for taking up a case (*anechomai*) when he refused to judge ("listen to," NIV) the Jews' complaint against Paul. It was within his right as a proconsul to make such a refusal. In instances where it was not a clear-cut case of infraction of an established Roman law, it was left to the discretion of the judge whether or not to formally hear the case.¹²¹⁵⁷³ In this instance Gallio did not see the charges as deserving his time. He didn't even give Paul a chance to make a defense

¹⁵²¹¹⁸ For full discussions of the chronology of Gallio's tenure and the relevant inscriptional evidence, see *Beginnings* 5:460–61 and A. Deissmann, *Paul* (New York: Doran, 1926), 261–86.

¹⁵³¹¹⁹ See commentary on 18:2.

¹⁵⁴¹²⁰ Luke's arrangement of material could be construed that the Gallio incident took place toward the end of Paul's Corinthian ministry, but this is not certain; nor can one assume that Paul appeared before him in the early days of his tenure. Verse 12 is quite indefinite ("while Gallio was proconsul") as is v. 18 ("Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time"). The only definite chronological statement in Acts 18 is the eighteen months that constituted the entire period of his Corinthian ministry (v. 11). See K. Haacker, "Die Gallio-Episode und die paulinische Chronologie," *BZ* 16 (1972): 252–55.

¹⁵⁵¹²¹ See the discussion in Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, 101–4.

¹⁵⁶¹²² Appeal to the concept of *religio licita* is somewhat precarious, the view that the Romans kept a list of accepted foreign religions and that the Jews were attempting to divorce themselves from Christians, thus making the latter an officially unrecognized religion. No first-century evidence exists that the Romans kept such a list (see Conzelmann, *Acts*, 153). The Jews were given privileges by Claudius assuring them of freedom of worship and protection from official harassment. Because of their identity with Judaism, the early Christians would have perhaps enjoyed some benefit from this.

¹⁵⁷¹²³ The technical term for such cases was *cognitio extra ordinem*. See Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, 99–100.

(v. 14). The Jews could settle the matter themselves. He drove them all from the court (v. 16). One should not see Gallio as taking Paul's side, however. Paul would have been ejected along with the Jews. Gallio saw the entire matter as an internal Jewish affair and would have nothing to do with it.

18:17 The incident must have taken place in the open, as would be indicated by the mob scene that occurred in the presence of the proconsul (v. 17). This has been verified by the excavations at Corinth. A raised platform of blue marble has been uncovered on the south side of the agora that served as the *bēma* (v. 12), or judgment seat of the Roman officials. The unruly beating of Sosthenes is anything but clear. Who are "all" who beat him in front of the proconsul—the Jews or the Gentiles who had come from elsewhere in the agora to see the goings-on before the *bēma*? The question is complicated by the fact that Paul mentioned a Sosthenes in 1 Cor 1:1 as a close Christian companion who joined him in writing the Corinthians. Sosthenes is not an uncommon name, and the two may be different persons. If they are the same, then clearly the ruler of the synagogue subsequently became a Christian, just like his predecessor Titius Justus. In this instance the Jews may have beat Sosthenes, who may already have been indicating his Christian sympathies. On the other hand, the Gentiles may have been the culprits. Gallio's ejection of the Jews may have unleashed their latent anti-Semitic tendencies. This would have rendered a sort of "poetic justice." The one who as synagogue ruler probably was the chief speaker against Paul now received himself the punishment he had wished on the apostle. Such an interpretation does not rule out the possibility that this is the same Sosthenes as 1 Cor 1:1, in which instance his conversion would be subsequent to this event.

Through it all Gallio remained wholly indifferent. He turned a blind eye on the whole incident (v. 17). This was not so much callousness on his part as his firm refusal to have anything to do with the matter. It was wholly an internal Jewish affair. The incident set an important precedent. Proconsular decisions over such unusual cases were often followed by Roman officials in other provinces. Had Gallio decided against Paul, it would have been a dangerous precedent that not only would have ended his effectiveness in Achaia but hindered his witness elsewhere.

8. Returning to Antioch (18:18–22)

¹⁸Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. ²²When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

Acts 18:18–22 provides a transition between Paul's second and third missions. On the one hand, it concludes the second, with Paul returning to Antioch where his journey began (15:35–41). On the other hand, Paul's brief visit to Ephesus looks toward the third missionary period, which would be spent primarily in that city.

18:18 The note that Paul remained "for some time" in Corinth after the appearance before Gallio confirms the importance of the latter's refusal to hear the case. Paul was able to stay in Corinth afterwards and continue his witness without hindrance. Just why Paul decided to end

his initial ministry in Corinth and sail to “Syria” is not specified.¹²¹⁵⁸⁴ It may have had something to do with his vow. At Cenchrea, their port of departure and the Aegean harbor of Corinth, Paul is said to have shaved his hair in connection with a vow he had made. This seems to have been a Nazirite vow, the type of vow discussed in Num 6:1–21.¹²¹⁵⁹⁵ Just why Paul had made a vow is not clear. It was perhaps in connection with his vision (Acts 18:9–10), a means of expressing thanksgiving and seeking the continued blessing of the Lord in his Corinthian mission. The reference to his having cut his hair at this point presents some difficulty. Generally one cut the hair at the end of the vow and made a sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem, throwing the shorn hair into the burnt offering as a part of the sacrifice. Some interpreters suggest that at Cenchrea Paul was beginning a vow that he would later complete in Jerusalem, but the past tense of the Greek verb indicates Paul had already taken the vow. There also is no evidence for cutting the hair at the initiation of a vow—only at its completion. A passage in Josephus seems to indicate the practice of cutting the hair elsewhere before going to Jerusalem to make the sacrifices.¹²¹⁶⁰⁶ Perhaps this is what Paul was doing. In any event, the significance of the vow is that it shows Paul to have been a loyal, practicing Jew. In his mission to the Gentiles, he did not abandon his own Jewishness. He was still a “Jew to the Jews” and still continued his witness in the synagogues. Interestingly, on Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem, when James wanted him to demonstrate his Jewish loyalty before the more legally zealous Jewish Christians, participation in a similar vow was chosen as the means to accomplish this (21:20–24).

18:19–22 Aquila and Priscilla accompanied Paul to Ephesus. They remained there and undoubtedly continued the Christian witness in the city after Paul’s departure (cf. 18:26). At this point Paul made an appearance in the Ephesian synagogue (18:19). It was nothing more. Ephesus was not a major point on his itinerary for the second journey.¹²¹⁶¹⁷ It was often a port of call for ships traveling from Corinth to the Syrian coast, and that probably was the case in this instance. Paul was in a hurry to catch his boat to Syria and refused the invitation of the Ephesian Jews to stay with them longer (v. 20). He promised to return, “If it is God’s will.”¹²¹⁶²⁸ The stage was set for Paul’s third mission (cf. 19:1–21:16). In the meantime Aquila and Priscilla would carry on the witness in Ephesus until his return. Paul caught his ship. Why the rush to get to

¹⁵⁸¹²⁴ Syria may be intended in the provincial sense of all Syro-Cilicia, which included Palestine, since Caesarea is the actual final port of disembarkation (v. 22). On the other hand, Syria may indicate Antioch as Paul’s final destination and end of his journey.

¹⁵⁹¹²⁵ Samson and John the Baptist are famous exemplars of such a vow. For them it was a lifelong vow, but there were provisions for vows of shorter term, thirty days seeming to be the minimum period. During the course of a Nazirite vow, one was forbidden to cut one’s hair, to consume wine or strong drink, and to come into contact with a corpse. Vows could be taken for various reasons—to seek divine blessing in an undertaking, to express thanksgiving, or to seek deliverance from an illness.

¹⁶⁰¹²⁶ Josephus, *War* 2.313. The Greek text could be construed as having Aquila cut his hair, but such a detail would be meaningless and would serve no point in the narrative.

¹⁶¹¹²⁷ For a description of Ephesus, see the introduction to Chap. VII.

¹⁶²¹²⁸ The expression “God willing” was a Greek expression that was taken over by Hellenistic Judaism. Cf. Epictetus, *Dissertations* 1.1.17; Josephus, *Antiquities* 7.373; Heb 6:3; Jas 4:15.

Palestine? The Western text provides an answer, adding to v. 21 the note that Paul was hurrying to Jerusalem for the upcoming festival.¹²¹⁶³⁹ Although that is almost surely not the original text, it may be an accurate conjecture. Possibly Paul was hurrying to Jerusalem to complete his vow. Whatever his purposes, his ship landed at Caesarea, the port for Jerusalem. He then “went up” and greeted “the church,” then “down” to Antioch (v. 22). “The church” referred to is almost certainly Jerusalem. It was traditional language to speak of going “up” to the holy city, which sat high on Mt. Zion. Paul’s second mission finally ended with his return to the congregation that had sent him forth (15:35–41), the great missionary church of Antioch.¹³¹⁶⁴⁰

VII. Paul’s Witness Overcomes Opposition in Ephesus (18:23–21:16)

Acts 18:23–21:16 covers the third and culminating period of Paul’s mission in the east. The narrative revolves primarily around the city of Ephesus, beginning with Priscilla and Aquilla’s ministry to Apollos there (18:24–28). All of chap. 19 is devoted to Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus, and the major portion of chap. 20 treats his farewell address to the leaders of the Ephesian church.

As was the case with Paul’s first two missionary periods, the narrative begins and ends with a travel motif. This is extremely brief for the beginning of the third mission, covering but two verses (18:23; 19:1). The conclusion of the Ephesian period, however, is marked by extensive travel and constitutes a major journey-to-Jerusalem emphasis. This begins with Paul’s decision while still in Ephesus to visit Jerusalem and to go from there to Rome (19:21). The determination to visit Rome marks a major turning point in the story of Paul’s witness. From then on, Rome becomes the major focal point in the narrative. The road to Rome, however, leads Paul first by way of Jerusalem; and his journey to Jerusalem is a major theme of 20:1–21:16. Much as Jesus’ own journey to Jerusalem was marked by his awareness that he would suffer in that city, Paul’s journey was marked by his premonition of trials that awaited him there (20:22f.) and constant warnings from fellow Christians about the danger of his going to the holy city (21:4, 11–14).

Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus followed the pattern already established at Corinth of setting up his mission in the major metropolitan center of a region and working outward from there. In Paul’s day Ephesus was the most populous city of Asia Minor and the commercial and political hub of the entire province. An ancient city, there was a settlement on the site well back into the second millennium before Christ. From these earliest times the area seems to have been a cult center for the worship of the Anatolian mother goddess. In 1044 b.c. the region was conquered by the Ionian Greeks, who took over the ancient cult and renamed it for the corresponding Greek goddess Artemis. In subsequent centuries the city came under the dominion of various foreign powers—under Croesus of Lydia (560 b.c.), the Persians (546 b.c.), the Macedonians under Alexander (334 b.c.), and the Seleucid kings (281 b.c.). Roman influence was first felt in 190 b.c. under the client-kings of Pergamum, and in 133 b.c. the last king of

¹⁶³¹²⁹ Probably the Western editor had Passover in mind.

¹⁶⁴¹³⁰ One should note the recurrent pattern of Paul’s three missionary journeys. Each began in Antioch. Each ended in Jerusalem. Each had a major speech: in Pisidian Antioch (first journey) Paul preached to Jews; in Athens (second journey) he preached to Gentiles; at Miletus (third journey) he preached to Christian elders.

Pergamum ceded the city to Rome in his will. In Paul's day the city was the seat of the Roman proconsul.

Through all these political changes the ancient shrine to the mother goddess persisted, and Ephesus was renowned throughout the Roman Empire as the temple keeper of Artemis. Excavations were first begun on the site of ancient Ephesus in 1813. Among the most famous of the findings were the ruins of this temple to Artemis, considered one of the seven architectural wonders of the ancient world. Also unearthed was a stadium rebuilt by Nero in Paul's day and the theater, which had a capacity of 24,000. Particularly spectacular must have been the major street that led from the theater to the city harbor. It was thirty-five feet wide and had on both sides colonnades that ran fifteen feet deep with shops behind them.

Located on the main highway connecting the Aegean with the rich trade routes in the east, Ephesus was the main commercial center of Asia. It had a natural harbor with access to the Aegean by way of the Cayster River. According to Pliny, the original city was built on the sea; but because of silting from the Cayster, the city lay several miles inland up the river in the first century. The ruins of the city are some five miles inland today. To the north of Ephesus lay the city of Smyrna at the mouth of the Hermus River, and to the south was Miletus at the mouth of the Maeander River. The coastal plain connected Ephesus with both these cities and the commerce that traveled through them.¹⁶⁵¹ In fact, no better site could have been picked for the evangelization of all of Asia Minor than Ephesus. The seven churches of Rev 2–3 may well have owed their origin to Paul's Ephesian ministry.

1. Apollos in Ephesus (18:23–28)

²³After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

²⁴Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

²⁷When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.

²⁸For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

18:23 Paul's third missionary period led him first from Syrian Antioch to "the region of Galatia and Phrygia," where he was "strengthening the disciples" (v. 23; cf. 14:22; 15:41). His route most likely led through the Cilician gates to the cities where he had established churches on his first journey—Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. The reference to the Galatian region and Phrygia might indicate the area further north and be evidence that Paul established churches in the northern portion of the Roman province of Galatia on his second missionary

¹⁶⁵¹ For a further treatment of ancient Ephesus, see M. M. Parvis, "Archaeology and St. Paul's Journeys in Greek Lands, Part IV: Ephesus," *BA* 8 (1945): 62–73; F. V. Filson, "Ephesus and the New Testament," *BA* 8 (1945): 73–80.

journey.¹⁶⁶² In any event, Paul's final destination was Ephesus (cf. 19:1). He had been prevented from working there on an earlier occasion (16:6). He had had to cut his first visit there short (18:20) and was eager to begin his mission in the city. Still, his desire for the new ministry did not lead him to neglect the old. He returned to his former fields and further ministered to the churches there. A journey to Ephesus by sea would have been much easier. The foot journey from Antioch to Ephesus was well in excess of 1,000 miles. Paul set a notable example of the importance of continued nurture of new converts.

18:24 While Paul was en route, revisiting his former mission fields, Apollos arrived in Ephesus (18:24). Luke described him as a Jew and an Alexandrian native. Apollos was indeed a common name in Egypt, being a shortened form of Apollonius.¹⁶⁷³ He is further described as "learned" (*logios*) and "powerful [*dynatos*] in the Scriptures," which the NIV accurately interprets as his having a thorough knowledge of them.¹⁶⁸⁴

18:25 At v. 25 the description of Apollos becomes more ambiguous. He is pictured as having been instructed in "the way of the Lord." Does this mean he was thoroughly acquainted with the gospel, the way of those who belong to the Lord? Or does it refer to the teaching of the earthly Jesus, the way that *he* taught? And what does the next phrase mean? The Greek reads literally "fervent in the spirit" (*zeōn tō pneumati*). The presence of the article before *spirit* would most naturally seem to indicate the Holy Spirit, and Paul used exactly the same phrase to refer to being "aglow with the Spirit" (Rom 12:11).¹⁶⁹⁵ Still, many translators and interpreters see this as a reference to Apollos's own spirit, to his having a zealous temperament. (Compare NIV, "He spoke with great fervor.") Their reticence to see this as a reference to the Holy Spirit is the last phrase used to describe Apollos, "He knew only the baptism of John." In the Gospels and Acts, it is precisely the Holy Spirit who distinguishes the baptism of John from that of Jesus (cf. Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5). How one could have known only the baptism of John and yet have received the Holy Spirit is hard to understand. Equally confusing is the reference to Apollos's teaching about Jesus *accurately*. Obviously the teaching was not complete, or he would have known Christian baptism as well. Still, Luke depicted Apollos as a Christian. Apollos knew the way of the Lord, taught accurately about Jesus, and *may* have experienced the Spirit. Still he was deficient. He knew only John's baptism, and he had to be further instructed by Aquilla and Priscilla.

What exactly was the deficiency? Scholars have had a field day trying to define it more precisely. Apollos has been depicted as a disciple of John the Baptist,¹⁷⁰⁶ a heterodox Alexandrian

¹⁶⁶² Cf. Acts 16:6 and see the comments on that text.

¹⁶⁷³ λ , a few minuscules, and several ancient versions have "Apelles" instead of Apollos; and G. D. Kilpatrick argues for Apelles as the original reading ("Apollos-Apelles," *JBL* 89 [1970]: 77).

¹⁶⁸⁴ Alexandria was the home of the allegorical-scriptural method associated with Philo and later with Christian scholars such as Clement and Origen. It is tempting to see Apollos as being steeped in such methods, but this is not explicit in Luke's description.

¹⁶⁹⁵ For a persuasive argument that Apollos should be seen as fervent in the Holy Spirit, see J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 88f.

¹⁷⁰⁶ J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 183.

Christian,¹⁷¹⁷ a charismatic Christian,¹⁷²⁸ even a Jewish missionary and not a Christian at all.¹⁷³⁹ The trouble with all such views is that they concentrate on only one part of Luke's description and do not sufficiently account for his total picture. Perhaps it is best to leave the matter with Luke's description and not try to go beyond it. The one matter of deficiency given is that Apollos knew only the baptism of John. His understanding of Christian baptism was inadequate.¹⁷⁴⁰ Evidently it was not such that he needed further baptism. Luke did not relate his being rebaptized as were the disciples of John (19:5), only of his being further instructed by Priscilla and Aquilla.

18:26 Priscilla and Aquilla had remained in Ephesus to carry on the work there until Paul's return (18:18f.). Evidently the ministry in Ephesus had not yet extended beyond the synagogue; and when Apollos began his Christian witness there, his deficiency quickly caught the couple's attention. They took him aside, probably in the privacy of their home (so NIV), and expounded the way of Christ more fully to him (v. 26). The further instruction may well have included Paul's teaching concerning the Gentile mission. It is noteworthy that Priscilla took an equal role with her husband in further instructing Apollos.

18:27a Apollos then decided to go "to Achaia," i.e., to Corinth, where Paul had already established work. Apollos's work in that city is well documented by 1 Cor 1:12; 3:4–6, 22; 4:6. Why he decided to go there is not specified. The Western text provides an explanation, greatly expanding v. 27 by saying that some Corinthian Christians who were sojourning in Ephesus invited him to minister in their native town. Aquilla and Priscilla more likely aroused his interest in Corinth, however, for they surely shared with him their ministry with Paul in that city. The mention of the Ephesian brothers who provided a letter of recommendation for Apollos is significant because it is the first clear evidence that a church had by now been established in Ephesus. Such letters of recommendation were a common practice in the early church. Paul provided one for Phoebe of Cenchrea (Rom 16:1). He realized, however, that such commendatory documents could assume undue importance and could not take precedence over personal acquaintance (2 Cor 3:1–3).

18:27b–28 Apollos was well received in Corinth and was himself a great help to the congregation. Luke's description of the Corinthians as "those who by grace had believed" is particularly appropriate. As a Pauline congregation the gospel they responded to was surely his appeal to salvation solely by God's grace through faith.

Apollos's power in scriptural interpretation (cf. v. 24) suited him for debate with the Jews of Corinth. Much like Peter with the Jews of Jerusalem, he would have used the Old Testament to demonstrate that the Messiah must suffer and rise and that consequently Jesus was the

¹⁷¹⁷ E. Käsemann, "The Disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964), 136–48.

¹⁷²⁸ M. Walter, "Apollos und die ephesinischen Johannesjünger (Act 18, 24–19, 7)," *ZNW* 78 (1987): 49–73; H. Preisker, "Apollos und die Johannesjünger in Act 18, 24–19, 6," *ZNW* 30 (1931): 301–4.

¹⁷³⁹ E. Schweizer, "Die Bekehrung des Apollos, Apg. 18. 24–26," *EvT* 6 (1955): 247–54.

¹⁷⁴⁰ B. T. D. Smith, "Apollos and the Twelve Disciples at Ephesus," *JTS* 76 (1915): 241–46; J. H. E. Hull, *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: World, 1968), 180–84.

promised Messiah. Evidently Apollos returned to Ephesus. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, probably in the latter part of his Ephesian ministry, Apollos was with him in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:12).¹¹⁷⁵¹

2. Paul's Witness to the Disciples of John (19:1–7)

¹While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ²and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

³So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

⁴Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷There were about twelve men in all.

19:1 Verse 1 completes the travel narrative begun in 18:23. From Phrygia the most natural route to Ephesus would have led Paul through the Lycus Valley. Here Pauline churches were later established at Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. At this point Paul did not seem to have stopped for any witness. Judging from Col 1:7, the churches were established by Paul's coworker Epaphras, probably during the course of Paul's Ephesian ministry. When Paul arrived at Ephesus, he encountered "some disciples." We learn from v. 7 that there were "about twelve" of them. Evidently they were not at this point strictly Christian disciples but rather disciples of John the Baptist. Elsewhere Luke used the term "disciples" for followers of John the Baptist (cf. Luke 5:33; 7:18f.).¹¹⁷⁶² He might have found a fine distinction between Baptist and Christian disciples strained. For him a true disciple of John, a *completed* disciple of John, *was* a Christian. That is the whole point of the present narrative.

19:2 Paul's interrogation of the disciples revealed that at no point had they advanced beyond John the Baptist's initial preaching of repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah. The NIV translation of their reply to Paul's question "Did you receive the Holy Spirit?" (v. 2) is literal, "We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." John's disciples would surely have been acquainted with the Spirit and especially with his teaching that with the coming of the Messiah the Spirit would be poured out (cf. Luke 3:16). What they would not be aware of, if they had not heard of Jesus' death and resurrection and of the event at Pentecost, was that this proclamation

¹⁷⁵¹¹ Apollos is an intriguing figure. He has often been seen as a ring leader in Paul's opposition at Corinth, but Paul doesn't seem to have depicted him as such. The Corinthians were guilty of pitting the two ministers against each other, but Paul did not indicate any personal antagonism between them. Apollos's Alexandrian associations have made him a prime candidate for the authorship of Hebrews, a suggestion first made by Luther; but that remains wholly speculative. Titus 3:13 would indicate that Apollos remained associated with Paul as a coworker in his later ministry.

¹⁷⁶¹² Dunn (*Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 83–88) notes that this is the only time in Acts that the word "disciples" occurs without a definite article and argues that this is Luke's way of distinguishing them from Christians.

of John had been fulfilled in Christ. Evidently that was the case with this group.¹¹⁷⁷³ They had not heard that the Spirit had been poured out. They were unaware of Pentecost.

19:3 Their reply to Paul's second question only confirms the impression that their understanding had not progressed beyond John's ministry. The only baptism they were aware of was John's baptism. They knew nothing of baptism in the name of Jesus.

19:4 Paul's statement in v. 4 is the critical point. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, preparatory to the coming of the Messiah. John's entire role as forerunner was to prepare the people for the Messiah's coming. The Messiah had indeed come, and he is Jesus. Thus, to be a true disciple of John was to confess Jesus, for he is the one whom John had heralded. The real deficiency of these twelve or so was not their baptism. It was much more serious. They failed to recognize Jesus as the one whom John had proclaimed, as the promised Messiah.¹¹⁷⁸⁴

19:5–6 Unlike Apollos, who had already been instructed in "the way" and who accurately taught about Jesus, this group was totally unacquainted with the gospel. They knew only John's preparatory message. But John had prepared them well, and they immediately responded to Paul's good news that Christ the Messiah had come; they were baptized in his name (v. 5). Paul then laid his hands on them, and they received the Spirit.

Some argue on the basis of this text that the gesture of hand-laying accompanied early Christian baptism. This, however, is the only instance in Acts where hand-laying directly follows baptism; and there is no evidence it was associated with baptism as a regular practice before a.d.

200.¹¹⁷⁹⁵ In this instance the gesture is closely associated with the disciples' receiving the Spirit, much as with the case of the Samaritan disciples in 8:15–17. In both instances the reality of their experience was demonstrated in an ecstatic manifestation, with this group speaking in tongues and prophesying. As throughout Acts, there is no set pattern. The Spirit came at various times and in various ways. What is consistent is that the Spirit is always a vital part of one's initial commitment to Christ and a mark of every believer.

19:7 Luke ended the narrative with the note that there were "about twelve" of these disciples (v. 7). One could be tempted to see a symbolism here, such as that they were the apostolic nucleus of the Ephesian church. It is unlikely that any special sense should be attached to their number. Luke certainly made nothing of it.

3. Paul's Preaching in Ephesus (19:8–12)

⁸Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

¹⁷⁷¹³ There is evidence for groups well into the fourth century who claimed John the Baptist as their founder. See C. H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 187–202; H. Lichtenberger, "Taufergemeinden und frühchristliche Taufpolemik im letzten Drittel des I. Jahrhunderts," *ZTK* 84 (1987): 36–57.

¹⁷⁸¹⁴ J. K. Parratt, "The Rebaptism of the Ephesian Disciples," *ExpTim* 79 (1967–68): 182f.

¹⁷⁹¹⁵ See R. P. C. Hanson, *The Acts*, NCB (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 190f.

¹¹God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. This section gives a brief summary of Paul's long period of ministry in Ephesus, covering both his testimony to Christ (vv. 8–10) and the miracles accomplished through him (vv. 11–12).

19:8 According to his customary pattern, his witness began in the synagogue. He had already made a preliminary appearance in the Ephesian synagogue and had been asked to stay (cf. 18:19f.). Now he fulfilled the invitation, returning for a longer presentation of Christ, speaking "boldly" there as Apollos had before him (cf. 18:26). The Ephesian Jews seem to have been open to his witness because he was able to debate with them about the kingdom of God for a period of three months before opposition arose.

19:9 Not all the Jews resisted Paul but only a group within the synagogue who became hardened in their disbelief, maligning the message of Jesus the Messiah as the true "Way" for God's people. Some of the Jews had become Christian believers, and Paul took them with him and moved to another location for presenting his testimony. The new site was the lecture hall of Tyrannus. We know nothing of Tyrannus, whether he was the owner of the building or a teacher who taught there. If the latter, one wonders if his students saw him as living up to his name, "the Tyrant." The Western text adds to v. 9 that Paul taught there between the fifth and the tenth hour, i.e., between eleven a.m. and four p.m. This is altogether plausible since these hours would constitute the heat of the day when most Asians took an extensive siesta. The hall would likely have been vacant at such a time, and Paul would have taken a break from his own trade during this period (cf. 20:34).

19:10 Since it was a public setting, the new site offered the opportunity to reach Greeks as well as Jews, thus affording all the inhabitants of Asia the chance to hear the gospel. Luke said that the witness in the hall of Tyrannus continued for a period of two years. When this is added to the initial three months in the synagogue plus the "little longer" of v. 22, one arrives at the three years or so Paul later gave as the length of his Ephesian ministry (20:31).

That Paul made no definitive statement to the Ephesian synagogue about turning exclusively to the Gentiles is noteworthy. A number of the Ephesian Jews did become disciples, and Paul seems to have continued his witness to the Jews there after moving from the synagogue (v. 10; cf. 20:21). The Jews of Ephesus were evidently seriously divided over Christ. On the one hand, there were those who became believers. On the other, there were those who strongly opposed Paul. It would indeed be some of these "Asian Jews" who would provoke mob action against Paul in Jerusalem (cf. 21:27f.).¹⁸⁰⁶

19:11–12 The other aspect of Paul's ministry in Ephesus involved the miracles God worked through him. Luke described these as being "extraordinary," which is something of an understatement. The people would take cloths Paul had touched and carry them to the sick for healing. The words used for the cloths are both Latin loan-words, and their meaning is not absolutely clear. One is *soudaria*, which could refer either to handkerchiefs (as the NIV) or to "sweat bands" tied around the head. The other, *simikinthia*, are variously seen as aprons tied around the waist or towels used for wiping off perspiration. Whichever translation is followed,

¹⁸⁰⁶ See R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 2:234f.

the basic idea is the same. The people believed that even the cloths that had touched the apostle's body had healing efficacy, and Luke indicated that such was indeed the case. This practice often strikes the modern mind as too close to the relic worship that plagued the medieval church. It is, however, present in other New Testament miracle traditions—the healing hem of Jesus' garment (Mark 5:27–34; 6:56) and the healing shadow of Peter (Acts 5:15). Perhaps it is to be viewed as God's accommodation to the mind-set of the people of that age. In any event, the miracles wrought by the apostles are never presented as ends in themselves but always as opportunities, assistance to faith and commitment. That is true in the present instance. The power of God manifest in Paul's miracles ultimately led to the Ephesians' overcoming their magic and superstition (cf. 19:17–20).

There was a final aspect to Paul's Ephesian ministry which Luke did not elaborate but which can be gleaned from Paul's letters. It was a period of extensive interaction with his churches elsewhere. This is particularly true of Corinth. First Corinthians was written from Ephesus, and during this period Paul seems to have made a brief, unpleasant visit to Corinth to deal with the troubles in that congregation (2 Cor 2:1). A number of scholars would date Paul's Prison Epistles from his Ephesian ministry, but this is predicated upon Paul's having been imprisoned in Ephesus, a matter that is open to serious question.¹⁸¹⁷ Many scholars would see Galatians as being written during the course of Paul's Ephesian ministry. This was also the period during which Paul began to organize his collection for Jerusalem (cf. 1 Cor 16:1–4).¹⁸²⁸ In all it was a period of extensive activity, not just in the city of Ephesus itself but throughout Paul's mission in the Greek world.

4. Paul's Encounter with False Religion in Ephesus (19:13–20)

The example of Paul's genuine miracle-working is followed by two episodes that involve false attempts to accomplish the miraculous. The first relates the unsuccessful attempt of a group of Jewish exorcists to use the name of Jesus in their practice (vv. 13–16). The second shows the triumph of the gospel over magic and the occult (vv. 17–20).

(1) Jewish Exorcists (19:13–16)

¹³Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." ¹⁴Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵[One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

¹⁸¹⁷ See G. S. Duncan, "Were Paul's Imprisonment Epistles Written from Ephesus?" *ExpTim* 67 (1955–56): 163–66. Certain references in Paul's letters indicate the possibility of an Ephesian imprisonment: the "wild beasts" he fought with in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32), the "deadly peril" he faced in Ephesus (2 Cor 1:8–10), and the "far more imprisonments" (RSV) of 2 Cor 11:23. T. W. Manson does not agree with the hypothesis of an Ephesian imprisonment but sees Philippians as written in the course of Paul's Ephesian ministry. He argues that Philippians was not written from prison ("St. Paul in Ephesus: The Date of the Epistle to the Philippians," *BJRL* 23 [1939]: 182–200).

¹⁸²⁸ See comments on 20:3–4 for a discussion of Paul's collection and Luke's strange silence on the matter.

19:13 Paul's miracles had an impact on the wrong element as well as those genuinely seeking his help. Much as Simon Magus had been enamored with Philip's miracle-working, a group of itinerant Jewish exorcists had observed how Paul drove out evil spirits by invoking the name of Jesus and undertook to do the same themselves. In the Greco-Roman world, Jewish exorcists were held in high esteem for the venerability of their religion and the strangeness of their Hebrew incantations. Magicians and charlatans were omnipresent in the culture, offering various cures and blessings by their spells and incantations, all for a financial consideration. The more exotic the incantation, the more effective it was deemed to be.

A number of magical papyri from the ancient world have been discovered. These consist of various spells that often invoke the names of foreign gods and employ various kinds of gibberish. In the Paris collection of magical papyri, various Old Testament terms are found, such as Iao (for Yahweh), Abraham, and Sabaoth, terms which would have sounded exotic to Greeks and Romans. One spell reads, "I abjure thee by Jesus, the God of the Hebrews." Another from the same papyrus reads, "Hail, God of Abraham, hail, God of Isaac, hail, God of Jacob, Jesus Chrestus, Holy Spirit, Son of the Father."¹⁸³⁹ Ancient magicians were syncretists and would borrow terms from any religion that sounded sufficiently strange to be deemed effective. These Jewish exorcists of Ephesus were only plying their trade. Paul's "spell" in Jesus' name seemed effective for him, so they gave it a try.

19:14 The attempt backfired. The group that made it were seven in number and are described as the sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva (v. 14). The reference to Sceva's high priesthood creates a problem. Josephus lists all the names of the Jewish high priests up to the fall of the temple, and none is named Sceva. Evidently the scribes of the Western text were the first to note this, for they altered the text to simply read "priest," not "high priest."²¹⁸⁴⁰ More recent scholars have taken other routes to solve the problem, such as arguing that Sceva was not a Jewish but a pagan high priest.²¹⁸⁵¹ Now it is true that the same term, "high priest" (*archiereus*), was often used in pagan cults, indeed in the imperial cult at Ephesus; but Luke plainly described *this* high priest as *Jewish*. Perhaps the key is that Sceva belonged to one of the priestly families from whom the high priests were drawn, i.e., he belonged to the high priestly "circle."²¹⁸⁶² Perhaps Sceva or those who claimed to be his sons made a false claim to a high priestly lineage in order to enhance their reputation. As high priest, the only one who could enter the holy of holies, he would have been deemed to have extraordinary powers among those who practiced the magical arts.

19:15–16 Whoever these would-be exorcists were, their attempt to invoke Jesus' name failed. It is interesting that the targeted demon, not Paul, was responsible for their undoing. Luke must

¹⁸³¹⁹ Both from the Paris papyrus 574, cited in K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Part 1: *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 4: *English Translation and Commentary* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 241.

¹⁸⁴²⁰ See E. Delebecque, "La Mésaventure des fils de Scévas selon ses deux Versions (Actes 19, 13–20)," *RSPT* 66 (1982): 225–32. W. A. Strange even argues for the Western text as having the original reading at this point ("The Sons of Sceva and the Text of Acts 19:14," *JTS* 38 [1987]: 97–106).

¹⁸⁵²¹ See B. E. Taylor, "Acts xix.14," *ExpTim* 57 (1945–46): 222.

¹⁸⁶²² See B. A. Mastin, "Scaeva the Chief Priest," *JTS* 27 (1976): 405–12.

have enjoyed writing this episode. It is filled with humor. Upon their abjuration, the demon responded: “Jesus I *know* [*ginōskō*], and Paul I *respect* [*epistamai*], but who are you?” (author’s translation). As so often with the exorcisms performed by Jesus, the demon *confessed* Jesus and even acknowledged that the power of Jesus worked through Paul. He was, however, not about to yield any turf to these seven. They had no power over him whatever. He turned on them with a vengeance, overpowered them, and sent them running naked from the house.²¹⁸⁷³ With the extreme sense of modesty characteristic of Judaism, the nakedness of the Jewish exorcists was almost symbolic of their total humiliation in the incident.

Two lessons emerge from the story. For one, Christianity has nothing to do with magic. The name of Jesus is no magical incantation. The power of Jesus drives out the demonic, and his Spirit only works through those who, like Paul, confess him and are committed to him. Second, the demon did confess the power of Jesus over him, “Jesus I know.” Compare Jas 2:19, “Even the demons believe and shudder.” The people of Ephesus recognized this and extolled the powerful name of Jesus as a result (v. 17). What was true for them is still true. In the name of Jesus is all the power needed to drive out the demonic forces in every age.

(2) *Overcoming Magic (19:17–20)*

¹⁷When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. ¹⁸Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. ¹⁹A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. ²⁰In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

19:17–18 The demon’s acknowledgment of Jesus and the reversal of power on the unauthorized exorcists had its effect on the Ephesians. Obviously the name of Jesus was powerful and not to be toyed with. A reverent fear seized them, and they magnified the name of the Lord Jesus. For some it taught an even more profound lesson. These were Christians who had delved in the magical arts before their conversion who now came and openly confessed their former deeds (v. 18).²¹⁸⁸⁴ On their part this was more than a confession of former ways. It was a commitment to forsake such practices altogether.

¹⁸⁷²³ In v. 16 the Greek text literally has the demon overpowering them “both” (ἀμφοτέρων). This has led to various attempted solutions: that only two sons did the exorcism—G. M. Lee, “The Seven Sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13–16),” *Bib* 51 (1970): 237—or that “both” refers to the names of Jesus and Paul—C. Lattey, “A Suggestion on Acts xix.16,” *ExpTim* 36 (1924–25): 381f. The simplest solution is the observation that in koine Greek, ἀμφοτέρων is often used with the meaning *all*—not just two (H. G. Meechan, “Acts xix.16,” *ExpTim* 36 [1924–25]: 477f.).

¹⁸⁸²⁴ Those concerned in v. 18 were evidently already confessing Christians, as the perfect tense πεπιστευκότων would indicate. That the “evil deeds” (πράξεις) were magical arts is indicated both by the context (cf. v. 19) and by the fact that πράξεις was a technical term for magic spells. Likewise, in v. 19, περίεργα was a technical term for magic arts/sorcery. See A. Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901), 323, n. 5.

Ephesus was reputed as a center for magic. The famous statue of Artemis, the centerpiece of her temple, was noted for the mysterious terms engraved on the crown, girdle, and feet of the image. Referred to as the “Ephesian scripts,” this magical gibberish was considered to have great power.²¹⁸⁹⁵ It was not by accident that Paul’s encounter with magic took place in Ephesus, nor is it a surprise that his converts there had been involved in such practices. Magic was part of Ephesian culture. Nor should one question the integrity of these Ephesian Christians who only now openly forsook such ways. Salvation involves a process of growth, of increasing sanctification. And after all, the Ephesian spells were not that remote from the horoscopes and board games that supposedly communicate telepathic messages with which many Christians dabble in our own day.

19:19 The Ephesian abandonment of magic was not without some personal sacrifice. Their magical books must have been much like the papyrus collections that have been unearthed and are now on display in museums in Paris, Berlin, Rome, and London. All ancient books were expensive, but magical collections brought a considerable premium. Luke estimated the value of those burned in Ephesus at 50,000 pieces of silver. If the piece of silver concerned is the drachma, the most common Greek silver coin, that would come to about \$35,000 in current silver value.²¹⁹⁰⁶ Translated into terms of living standards, however, the sum was greater still, since the drachma was an average day’s wage.

19:20 Verse 20 provides a summary of Paul’s Ephesian ministry, much like the summaries at 6:7 and 12:24, which also refer to the growth of the word.²¹⁹¹⁷ The word bore fruit as more and more people responded in faith to the preaching of Paul and to the witness of the Ephesian Christians through such examples as their personal sacrifice in the public burning of their magical books. As a summary v. 20 provides a closure to Luke’s treatment of Paul’s Ephesian witness. Now, toward the end of his Ephesian period, two matters remain to be related: a major decision regarding Paul’s future (vv. 21–22) and a final tumultuous episode involving the temple of Artemis (vv. 23–41).

5. Paul’s Determination to Go to Jerusalem (19:21–22)

²¹After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also.” ²²He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

19:21 While in Ephesus, toward the end of his ministry there, Paul made a major decision. He determined to conclude his mission in the east and to move farther westward to Rome. The best commentary on this passage is Paul’s own discussion of his plans in Rom 15, which was written from Corinth probably within a year or so of this point in the Ephesian ministry. There Paul spoke of his desire to carry on a mission in Spain and the western portion of the empire,

¹⁸⁹²⁵ See B. M. Metzger, “St. Paul and the Magicians,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 38 (1944): 27–30.

¹⁹⁰²⁶ The Attic drachma contained 67.5 grains of silver, or approximately 14 percent of a troy ounce. With silver at \$5 a troy ounce, the drachma would contain about 70 cents in silver value.

¹⁹¹²⁷ It might also be noted that the recurrence of the phrase “word of the Lord” in vv. 10, 20 form a bracket, with vv. 10–20 exemplifying this two-year portion of his Ephesian ministry.

probably hoping that Rome would sponsor him in the undertaking (Rom 15:24, 28). As in Acts 19:21, he explained that his route must first take him to Jerusalem. Acts is silent about the reason for going first to Jerusalem, but Paul explained to the Romans that a collection for the Jerusalem Christians necessitated his going there before proceeding to Rome (Rom 15:25–31).²¹⁹²⁸ This also explains the reference to his visiting Macedonia and Achaia in Acts 19:21. Paul made it a point to revisit and strengthen his congregations, but in this particular instance his epistles reveal that he was particularly preoccupied with the collection on this final visit to Macedonia and Achaia.

Paul's decision to go to Rome marks a major transition in the story line of Acts. From this point on, the narrative will continually drive toward Rome as Paul's final destination. For the more immediate context of Acts, his determination to go to Jerusalem begins an additional emphasis, his journey to Jerusalem, which occupies Acts 20:1–21:16. In many ways it parallels Jesus, "who resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Throughout Acts 20:1–21:16 is an ominous note concerning what awaited Paul in Jerusalem, just as there was for Jesus in the city that "kills the prophets" (Luke 13:33f.).

19:22 Paul sent two of his coworkers ahead into Macedonia to prepare for his own coming. Timothy was last mentioned in 18:5, where he had joined Paul at Corinth. It is quite possible that he accompanied Paul with Priscilla and Aquilla to Ephesus (18:18) and remained there. Erastus was a Corinthian and is mentioned in Paul's greetings in both Rom 16:23 and 2 Tim 4:20. Whether or not this is the same Erastus referred to on a paving stone excavated at Corinth is open to question.²¹⁹³⁹ The primary mission of these two in Macedonia likely was in connection with Paul's collection for Jerusalem.³¹⁹⁴⁰

6. Opposition to Paul by the Craftsmen of Ephesus (19:23–41)

In direct opposition to the Ephesian Christians, who were willing to make a monetary sacrifice for their faith, were the pagan craftsmen of Ephesus, who found Paul's witness to be damaging their financial interests. They succeeded in provoking a considerable public demonstration against Paul. The remainder of chap. 19 is devoted to this incident, which consists of three scenes: the instigation of the riot by Demetrius (vv. 23–27), the uproar in the theater (vv. 28–34), and the pacification of the crowd by the city clerk (vv. 35–41).³¹⁹⁵¹

(1) *Instigation of a Riot by Demetrius (19:23–27)*

²³About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen.

²⁵He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know

¹⁹²²⁸ The collection is discussed in the commentary on 20:4.

¹⁹³²⁹ See commentary on Acts 18:5–8. See also H. J. Cadbury, "Erastus of Corinth," *JBL* 50 (1931): 42–58; W. Miller, "Who Was Erastus?" *BibSac* 88 (1931): 342–46.

¹⁹⁴³⁰ For the view that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus about this time, see W. Michaelis, "The Trial of St. Paul at Ephesus," *JTS* 29 (1928): 368–75; G. S. Duncan, "Paul's Ministry in Asia—the Last Phase," *NTS* 3 (1957): 211–18.

¹⁹⁵³¹ For a slightly different outline, which sees the phrase "Great is Artemis" as the literary dividing mark, see E. S. Fiorenza, "Miracles, Mission, and Apologetics: An Introduction," in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1976), 16f.

we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. ²⁷There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”

19:23–24 Throughout the Ephesian narrative, Luke referred to Christianity as “the Way.” In 18:26 Priscilla and Aquilla explained “the Way” more fully to the somewhat deficient Christian Apollos (cf. v. 25). In 19:9 some of the Jews in the Ephesian synagogue opposed Paul’s message as being a valid “way” for them. Here in v. 23 a new resistance to the Way arises, this time from the pagan worshipers of Artemis. The whole incident was instigated by one of the silversmiths of Ephesus named Demetrius. His own trade consisted of fabricating silver shrines of Artemis, i.e., silver replicas of the temple of Artemis for which Ephesus was renowned. The manufacture of such shrines was a common practice. Pilgrims would purchase them for use in their own home altars or as a votive offering to be presented to the temple. Replicas of the Ephesian temple of Artemis have been unearthed; they usually were made of terra cotta.³¹⁹⁶² None has yet been found in silver, though silver images of the goddess Artemis have been discovered as well as numerous silver coins bearing an image of the temple.³¹⁹⁷³ That no silver shrines have been located is likely because their considerable metallic value would have made them a prime target for the melting pots of looters through the centuries.

The temple of Artemis was indeed a hub of Ephesian economic life. It was an impressive building, some 165 feet by 345 feet in dimension and built on a platform 240 by 420 feet. The entire edifice was elaborately adorned in brilliant colors and gold leaf. The altar area was 20 feet square and contained a massive image of the goddess with a veiled head, with animals and birds decorating her head and lower body and numerous breasts from her waist to her neck.³¹⁹⁸⁴ The animals and breasts were symbolic of her status as the ancient Asian Mother Goddess, the goddess of nature who was believed to protect and preserve the fecundity of all living things. In Ephesus the worship of the goddess centered around the Artemision, a week in the spring dedicated to the goddess. The highlight of the festivities was a solemn processional in which the image of the goddess was carried through the streets between the theater and the temple. Throughout the week there were numerous events, including ritual plays and dances. In former

¹⁹⁶³² E. C. Hicks argued that Demetrius was not a craftsman but a “vestryman” of the temple, the term νεωποῖός (vestryman) being confused in the tradition for ναοῦς ποιῶν (temple-maker) (“Demetrius the Silversmith: An Ephesian Study,” *The Expositor* 41 [1890]: 401–22).

¹⁹⁷³³ For an example of a bronze image of the mother goddess from the second or first century B.C., see E. D. Reeder, “The Mother of the Gods and a Hellenistic Bronze Matrix,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 91 (1987): 423–40. For the image of the Artemis temple on coins, see L. J. Kreitzer, “A Numismatic Clue to Acts 19:23–41. The Ephesian Cistophori of Claudius and Agrippina,” *JSNT* 30 (1987): 59–70.

¹⁹⁸³⁴ For a full discussion of the archaeology of the temple, see *Beginnings*, vol. 5: *Additional Notes* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 251–56; R. Tonneau, “Ephèse au Temps de Saint Paul,” *RB* 38 (1929): 5–34.

times the primary attendants of the goddess were self-emasculated priests, but there is some question whether the Romans allowed such practices in the cult of Paul's day.³¹⁹⁹⁵ Artemis worship was not confined to Ephesus. There was a sanctuary in Rome also and a similar festival there every April. All told there were at least thirty-three shrines to the mother goddess throughout the Roman Empire, and it was perhaps the most popular cult of all. Ephesus was considered to be *the* center of the cult, and pilgrims flocked from all over the empire to worship at its famous temple, especially during the spring Artemision. Economics and religion were closely bound. The temple received lavish votive offerings from the devotees of the mother goddess. In fact, so wealthy was it that it became the principal financial institution of Asia, receiving deposits and making loans.³²⁰⁰⁶

19:25 It was not by accident then that Demetrius mixed economics and religion in his appeal to his fellow craftsmen. In Ephesus the two were closely linked. Luke left no doubt that Demetrius's real concern was the damage Paul's preaching was doing to his economic interests. Still, as a skilled demagogue Demetrius was quick to bring religion and patriotism into the picture, which were much more prone to get the public attention. Note that he began by assembling all his fellow craftsmen and the workers who assisted them. To them he laid out the real issue: "We receive a good income from this business" (v. 25).³²⁰¹⁷

19:26–27 He then presented the threat. "It is this fellow Paul," probably said with a sneer, "who is causing all the trouble" (author's paraphrase). Paul was said to be leading astray (literally, "seducing") all the people in Ephesus and throughout Asia, denying that idols were real gods. One only needs to refer to Paul's Areopagus speech (cf. 17:29) to realize that this was indeed the case. If the people took Paul's message seriously, Demetrius's sales would plummet. Knowing that this rational appeal probably would not suffice, Demetrius then appealed to their emotions. Paul was said to be endangering religion, discrediting the reputation of Artemis, robbing her of her greatness. In his reference to her cult being spread throughout the whole world there was an implicit appeal to civic pride: "The great temple of Artemis is here in Ephesus. Its reputation through all the world is based on the fame of this temple. To attack Artemis is to attack Ephesus" (author's paraphrase).³²⁰²⁸

In all fairness to Demetrius, his argument was not without solid foundation. Paul did preach forcefully against idolatry and was indeed a threat to anyone who made a living from idols. He was likewise a genuine threat to the Artemis cult. He considered not only her images but the

¹⁹⁹³⁵ For a full discussion of the Artemis cult, see Tonneau, "Ephèse," 321–59.

²⁰⁰³⁶ For the economic dimensions of the Artemis cult see S. E. Johnson, "The Apostle Paul and the Riot in Ephesus," *LThQ* 14 (1979): 79–88.

²⁰¹³⁷ The Western text has Demetrius address the group as "my fellow craftsmen," adding an additional nuance of group mentality (E. Delebecque, "La Revolte des Orfèvres à Ephèse et ses deux Versions [Actes des Apôtres xix, 24–40]," *RevThom* 83 [1983]: 419–29.

²⁰²³⁸ That Ephesus did not take threats to the Artemis cult lightly is evidenced by an inscription found there, dating from several centuries B.C., which pronounces death on forty-five people from Sardis who maltreated an Ephesian embassy from the temple of Artemis. See F. Sokolowski, "A New Testimony on the Cult of Artemis of Ephesus," *HTR* 58 (1965): 427–31.

goddess herself as “no god at all.” But one should not miss the real point of Demetrius’s opposition. It was not his piety that was offended but his pocketbook. For Paul to hold his sessions in the hall of Tyrannus was one thing. People could listen to his teachings all they wanted. But when those teachings began to have ramifications for the town economy, that was quite another matter. It may well have been around the time of the spring Artemision that Paul’s attack on idolatry became most vehement.³²⁰³⁹ If so, the craftsmen’s ire is understandable. It would be equivalent to someone’s standing at the entrance of Churchill Downs in my own hometown during Derby week and preaching against horse racing. The gospel is always at its most controversial when it comes into conflict with economic interests.

(2) Uproar in the Theater (19:28–34)

²⁸When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” ²⁹Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. ³⁰Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

³²The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

19:28–31 Demetrius’s appeal had the desired effect, with all the craftsmen running forth and shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Note that it was his appeal to religious and civic pride that was picked up. They were not shouting “our business is in danger,” even if that was the real issue. A crowd quickly formed and joined in the chant. Two of Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia were seized. One was Aristarchus, from Thessalonica according to Acts 20:4. Gaius, a common name, is likely not the one mentioned in Acts 20:4, who is said to have come from Derbe, which was not in Macedonia.⁴²⁰⁴⁰ The two probably were seized in lieu of Paul, who was not present. Although he would have liked to have addressed the crowd, his fellow Christians realized the extreme danger and held him back. Likewise, the Asiarchs sent Paul an urgent message not to venture into the mob (v. 31). The exact role of the Asiarchs is not entirely clear, but their existence is well documented on numerous inscriptions found throughout Asia. Their primary role seems to have been connected with the maintenance of the imperial cult in Asia.⁴²⁰⁵¹ Significantly, they are described as Paul’s “friends,” indicating that Paul

²⁰³³⁹ This is likely on the basis of the mention of Paul’s sending Timothy in v. 22. If that is the sending referred to in 1 Cor 16:10, then the time is the spring, as Paul’s reference to Pentecost in 1 Cor 16:8 would indicate.

²⁰⁴⁴⁰ The scribes evidently sought to make these the same, some ancient manuscripts having “Macedonia” in 19:29 in the singular, thus making only Aristarchus a Macedonian. Others alter Derbe in 20:4 to Doub(e)rios, a town in Macedonia.

²⁰⁵⁴¹ Asiarchs were evidently elected for one-year terms, there being one for each city where there was an imperial shrine, which would make for three or four in Paul’s day. See *Beginnings* 5:256–62.

was well-respected by his fellow Roman citizens in high places. Their gesture in this instance was entirely friendly because they were concerned for Paul's personal safety.

The mob rushed into the theater, the largest public building in Ephesus (v. 29). It was an open-air amphitheater, 495 feet in diameter, built onto the western slope of Mt. Pion. Its seating capacity has been estimated at 24,500. Town meetings were held there, and since the technical term for town meeting (*dēmos*) occurs in vv. 30, 33, it could be that this was considered a sort of emergency meeting of the popular assembly. The term *dēmos* is often used, however, in the general sense of "the populace"; and since this occasion was so unruly, the NIV probably is correct in translating it "crowd." The same applies to the term *assembly* (*ekklēsia*), which occurs in v. 32.⁴²⁰⁶² Although this is the usual term for a gathering of the populace, a town meeting, the picture here is of an unruly gathering, not a formally constituted assembly.

19:32–34 The scene was one of utter confusion, some shouting one thing, some another. The majority had merely succumbed to mob mentality and did not know what was going on (v. 32). The scene with Alexander the Jew only added to the confusion. What was his role, and why did the Jews push him forward to address the crowd?⁴²⁰⁷³ Very likely it was to disassociate the Jews from the Christians. The Jews wanted the crowd to know that *they* had done nothing to impugn Artemis, that they were no threat to the Ephesian cult. Whatever his purpose in getting before the crowd, Alexander had no opportunity to speak. His voice was drowned out by the din of the incessant chant "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." This went on for two hours. Only the city clerk prevented the rally from developing into a full riot.

(3) *Pacification by the City Clerk (19:35–41)*

³⁵The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? ³⁶Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. ³⁷You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. ³⁸If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. ³⁹If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴⁰As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." ⁴¹After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

²⁰⁶⁴² Ἐκκλησία is the term used throughout the NT for the Christian assembly, the church. Behind the NT usage, however, stands not the Greek town meeting but the LXX rendering of the Hebrew term *qahal* (the "called out" people of God) by the Greek ἔκκλησία.

²⁰⁷⁴³ The Western text has the crowd "pull down" Alexander in place of "prompting" him in v. 33. It is probably best not to attempt an identification of this Alexander with the coppersmith of the Pastorals (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 4:14). Alexander was a common name. For the view that the Demetrius episode has as its purpose to identify with Judaism and its privileges within the Roman rule, see R. F. Stoops, Jr., "The Social Context of Acts 19:23–41," *JBL* 108 (1989): 73–91.

19:35–36 Alexander may not have been able to seize the crowd’s attention. The town clerk, however, had no difficulty quieting the commotion. He was the chief administrative officer of the city. He presided over both the council of city magistrates and the public assembly and was the liaison officer between the city and the Roman provincial administration.⁴²⁰⁸⁴ His main concern was that the disturbance would make an adverse impression on the Roman officials, possibly leading to restrictions on their self-governing privileges. In order to pacify the crowd, he began by assuring them that Artemis was under no real threat (v. 35). “Doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?”⁴²⁰⁹⁵ What earthly power could threaten her? The clerk’s reference to an “image . . . from heaven” probably meant a meteorite. Meteorites were often associated with the worship of the Mother Goddess. The most famous of these was the sacred stone taken from Pessinus to Rome in 204 b.c. A meteorite also seems to have been associated with the cult of the Taurian Artemis.⁴²¹⁰⁶ Although there is no evidence beyond this text for such a sacred stone being connected with the Ephesian cult, it is altogether likely that one existed, given this common association of the mother goddess with a “stone from heaven.”

19:37 Having assured the Ephesians that their cult was in no real danger, the clerk then dealt with the legal ramifications of the riot. He first pointed out that the two Christians whom they had seized were not guilty of any crime. They had not blasphemed the goddess or robbed the temple (v. 37). Probably by the latter was meant that they had not robbed the temple of the respect due it. If there was any illegality involved, it was not on the part of the Christians but rather of the Ephesians. They were running the risk of being charged with unlawful assembly.

19:38–39 The clerk then outlined the two primary legal avenues Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen could follow if they had any grievances against the Christians. There was the provincial court conducted by the Roman proconsul on set days (v. 38). There was also the regular town assembly (*ekklēsia*, v. 39). This mob might represent more than the usual turnout for a regular meeting of the *dēmos* in the theater, but this was not a regular day for the town meeting and was certainly not being conducted in an orderly fashion.⁴²¹¹⁷

19:40–41 The clerk then clinched his argument. The Ephesians were running the danger of being charged with insurrection, since they really had no legally valid basis for their unruly behavior (v. 40). A subtlety occurs in the text at this point. A rather rare word occurs in vv. 27, 40, the verb meaning *to be in danger, to be running a risk (kindyneuō)*. In v. 27 Demetrius

²⁰⁸⁴⁴ See A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 86f.

²⁰⁹⁴⁵ The term “guardian of the temple” (νεωκόρος) was a term often used for a city renowned for its temple. Josephus, for instance, spoke of Israel as God’s temple keeper (*War* 5.378). See F. Filson, “Ephesus and the New Testament,” *BA* 8 (1945): 80. The terminology of θεός/θεά used in Acts 19:27, 37 for Artemis fits the known usage for the Ephesian cult. See S. M. Baugh, “Phraseology and the Reliability of Acts,” *NTS* 36 (1990): 290–94.

²¹⁰⁴⁶ See F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, NIC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 397f.

²¹¹⁴⁷ According to Chrysostom (*Hom.* 42:2), the Ephesian ἐκκλησία met three times a month.

argued that Paul was a danger to Ephesus. In v. 40 the clerk clarified where the real danger lay—not from Paul but from the unruly Ephesians. The clerk’s counsel carried the day. He dismissed the gathering, and the crowd dispersed.

One finds in this episode a theme that will continue to recur in the subsequent narrative of Acts—the innocence of the Christians with respect to the civil law. Paul was never found guilty by any Roman official. On the contrary, even if only implicitly, they pled his case, as with the friendly Asiarchs and the town clerk in this instance.²¹²

²¹² John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 379–414.