

BIB204 Early Church NT2

Unit 4 Study Resource

Commentary on Acts of the Apostles

John William McGarvey

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Acts XIII

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XIII: 1. We have already seen that Barnabas and Saul had labored one whole year together in the city of Antioch, and we now learn that at the close of this period there were other inspired teachers associated with them. (1) *“Now there were in the Church in Antioch certain prophets and teachers, Barnabas and Simeon called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”* It will be observed that, in this catalogue of names, that of Barnabas stands first, and that of Saul last. As it was customary at that period to arrange names in the order of their notability at the time contemplated, we may infer that Barnabas still occupied a position of pre-eminence, while Saul was as yet comparatively undistinguished among the inspired teachers. Nothing more is known of Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen than is here stated; but this is enough to show that the future instruction of the congregation might be safely committed to their hands. 157

2, 3. (2) *“As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Separate for me Barnabas and Saul to the work to which I have called them. (3) And when they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away.”* This command of the Holy Spirit is not the *call* of Barnabas and Saul to their peculiar work, but refers to a call which had been previously given. It shows that Barnabas as well as Saul had received a special call to labor among the Gentiles. They had, hitherto, most probably, been associated together mainly through geniality of spirit. This geniality may also have furnished the main reason why they were directed by the Holy Spirit to continued their labors together.

The design of the ceremony of fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands observed on this occasion is variously understood. There are only two interpretations of it which are worthy of notice. *First*, it is assumed that the design was to confer on Barnabas and Saul the power of working miracles. The only proof offered in support of this assumption is the fact that neither of them is said to have wrought miracles previous to this time, while they both exhibited miraculous powers shortly after. But this is to argue from the *silence* of the Scriptures, and is, necessarily, inconclusive. They may have worked miracles before this time, notwithstanding this silence. In the case of Saul, indeed, there is almost positive proof that he did so. The Lord had given him a special commission as an apostle when he first appeared to him on the way to Damascus,²⁶² and Ananias was sent to him that he “might receive his sight, and be *filled* with the *Holy Spirit*.”²⁶³ Immediately after his immersion he began to discharge his apostolic office, and had been thus engaged three years previous to his first return to Jerusalem.²⁶⁴ Another whole year had been spent in the same work in Antioch,²⁶⁵ besides the interval of his residence in Tarsus.²⁶⁶ But an essential mark of the apostolic office was the power to work miracles. This Paul himself assumes, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, among whom his apostleship has been denied. As conclusive proof of his apostleship, he says, “Truly the *signs* of an apostle were wrought among you, in all patience, in *signs* and *wonders* and *mighty deeds*.”²⁶⁷ If these signs are the proof of apostleship, then he must have been able to exhibit them from the time that he began to be an apostle; and this was more than four years previous to the imposition of hands by the prophets and teachers in Antioch. This fact, coupled with the statement of Ananias, that he was sent to him that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit, indicates clearly that his miraculous endowments dated from his immersion. The first supposition, then,

in reference to the design of the ceremony we are considering, proves to be not only unfounded, but inconsistent with the facts of the case.

The *second*, and doubtless the true interpretation, is this: That the imposition of hands, accompanied by fasting and prayer, was, in this case, as in that of the seven deacons, merely their formal separation to the special work to which they had been called. This, indeed, is sufficiently evident from the context. What they did was doubtless 158 what they had been told to do by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit simply said to them, “*Separate me Barnabas and Saul to the work to which I have called them.*” The fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands was, then, merely their *separation* to this work. It was a ceremony deemed by infinite wisdom suitable to such a purpose; and, therefore, whenever a congregation has a similar purpose to accomplish, they have, in this case, the judgments and will of God, which should be their guide.

The solemn simplicity of this apostolic ceremony stands in striking contrast with the pompous mummery which often characterizes “ordination” services in modern Churches. No less striking is the contrast between the humility of Saul and the ambitious spirit of many modern clergyman who are extremely exacting in reference to the punctilios of ecclesiastical rank. Though an apostle by special commission, he was “ordained” by his humble fellow-laborers in Antioch. This fact shows that the idea of superior rank and authority had not then begun the work of ruin which it has since accomplished, in filling the minds of preachers with the same lust of office and power which characterizes the intrigues of political partisans.

4, 5. We now follow Barnabas and Saul to their new field of labor. Their departure from Antioch is thus announced by Luke: (4) “*So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and thence sailed into Cyprus.* (5) *And when they were in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues. And they had John as an assistant.*” Seleucia was the seaport nearest to Antioch, distant some fifteen or eighteen miles, and near the mouth of the river Orontes, on the bank of which Antioch is situated. Embarking upon some trading vessel, they sailed to the port of Salamis, which is at the eastern end of the island of Cyprus.

In choosing this island as the first point in the wide world to which they directed their steps, they were, doubtless, guided not by the natural partiality which Barnabas may have felt for it as his native land,²⁶⁸ but by that fixed principle in the apostolic labors which taught them to cultivate first those fields which promised the most abundant harvest.²⁶⁹ The fact that this was the native island of Barnabas gave him hope of a more ready access to many old associates. Besides, the gospel had already been proclaimed here with some success among the Jews,²⁷⁰ and in the city of Salamis, as we learn from the text just quoted, there was more than one Jewish synagogue.

What duties were performed by John, in his capacity as “an assistant,” can not be specifically determined with certainty. The term *assistant* would indicate that he performed, under their direction, a part of the same labor in which they were themselves engaged. The fact, however, that Saul was not in the habit of immersing his own converts, but imposed this duty on his assistants,²⁷¹ renders it highly probable that this was at least one of the duties performed by John.

6, 7. Luke is entirely silent in reference to the effect of the apostolic preaching in Salamis, leaving us to suppose that it was not great. After stating that they preached in the synagogues of the Jews, he follows them in their 159 further progress through the island. (6) “*And having passed through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, (7) who was with Sergius Paulus the proconsul,*

a prudent man, who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.” Every reader of ancient history has observed that statesmen and generals were in the habit of consulting oracles and auguries, and that they generally kept about them some one supposed to have the power of interpreting the signs of approaching good or evil. In this particular period, the educated Romans had become skeptical in reference to their heathen oracles, but Jewish pretenders still had access to their confidence on the credit of the ancient Jewish prophets. With a knowledge of the true God superior to that of even the greatest philosophers among the Greeks, because derived from the Jewish Scriptures, this Bar-Jesus very naturally gained the confidence of even the prudent Sergius Paulus. When, however, two other Jews appeared in Paphos, claiming to bring *additional* revelations from the God of Israel, the same prudence which had prompted the proconsul to reject the heathen oracles in favor of the Jewish pretender, now prompted him to send for Barnabas and Saul, that he might hear the word of God from them. Such a mind as his could not fail to hear with profit.

8–12. While listening to the gospel, there were some indications that he was inclined to believe it. (8) *“But the magician Elymas, for so is his name translated, withstood them, seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith.* (9) *Then Saul, who is also Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on him, (10) and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?* (11) *And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell upon him a mist, and darkness, and he went about seeking persons to lead him by the hand.* (12) *Then the proconsul, seeing what was done, being astonished by the Lord's teaching.”*

This is the only miracle wrought by an apostle to the injury of any one's person. It is to be accounted for, not by supposed resentment on the part of Saul, nor by a desire to make a special example of Bar-jesus. But the case was such that some display of power over the person of the false prophet was the readiest way to convince the proconsul. When Moses went into Egypt he found it necessary to impose many personal inflictions upon the priests, in order to destroy Pharaoh's confidence in them. The present case was similar to that. The conflict in the mind of Sergius Paulus was between the claim of Bar-jesus to prophetic powers, and that of the apostles. The best way to settle this question was to denounce him in his true character as a son of the devil and an enemy of all righteousness, and then prove the justice of the denunciation, by exerting miraculous control over his person. As he groped about, calling upon one and another of the frightened bystanders to lead him by the hand, the falsity and iniquity of his pretensions stood confessed, and the divine mission of the apostles was demonstrated. The proconsul was fully convinced, and astonished at teaching which was attended by such power. 160

This triumph over Bar-jesus, and the consequent conversion of Sergius Paulus, forms an epoch in the life of the Apostle Paul. Hitherto he has occupied a subordinate position, and his name has come last in the list of himself and his fellow-laborers. But hereafter he is to occupy the foreground of almost every scene in which he acts. Heretofore, Luke has written “Barnabas and Saul;” hereafter he writes, “Paul and Barnabas.” He had been, up to this time, known by no other name than Saul, being so called not only by Luke, but by Jesus and Ananias.²⁷² Luke, though writing long after this name had gone into disuse, remembering the custom which thus far prevailed, thus far retains it in his narrative. But, from this time forward he uses the name *Paul* exclusively; and that this was the universal custom, we infer from the fact that he is so called by all others who mention his name; by the Lord Jesus;²⁷³ by the

mob in Jerusalem;²⁷⁴ by the centurion under Lysias;²⁷⁵ by his own nephew;²⁷⁶ by Lysias the chiliarch;²⁷⁷ by Festus;²⁷⁸ and by Peter.²⁷⁹

There are only two suppositions worthy of notice, by which to account for this change of name. *First*, that he had both the Hebrew name Saul, and the Latin name Paul, before this time, and perhaps from his infancy; but the conversion of the proconsul Paulus led to the exclusive use of his Latin name thereafter. This supposition, however, can not account for the entire absence of the name Paul previous to this event. Moreover, while it is true that many Jews of that day had both a Hebrew and a Latin or Greek name, there is no evidence that such had been the case with Saul.

The other supposition is, that he received this new name by common consent, in commemoration of the conversion of Paulus. This conversion was a signal triumph; it was accomplished by his instrumentality alone, and was the beginning of the pre-eminence which he afterward maintained over Barnabas and all subsequent follow-laborers. So bold and startling an incident, though it might have been regarded as common-place in his subsequent career, attracted attention now, because it was the first of the kind in his history, and because it secured a conversion of which even Barnabas, under the circumstances, might have despaired. Surprised by the event, and observing the extreme similarity between his name and that of his distinguished convert, which differed only in a single letter, and sounded very much alike, his friends very naturally conceived the idea of changing his name, as they did. It was in perfect harmony with a prevalent custom of the time. Its universal reception soon followed as a matter of course.

It argues no vanity in Paul that he adopted this name; for he could scarcely avoid the adoption into his own use of a name by which he had become universally known. There is nothing in the event, therefore, to encourage men in pompously sounding abroad their own achievements, but much to encourage us in honoring a brother whose boldness and success are worthy of praise.

13. Without pausing to give more detailed accounts of the success of the gospel in Cyprus, our historian now hurries us away with the two apostles upon the further prosecution of their tour. (13) “*Now those about Paul set* 161 *sail from Paphos, and went to Perga of Pamphylia. But John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.*” So completely has Paul now become the central figure on the pages of Luke, that here, instead of following his former phraseology, and saying that “Barnabas and Saul” set sail from Paphos, the whole company are described as “those about Paul.”

Why they chose the regions north of Pamphylia, in Asia Minor, as their next field of labor, we are not informed. Luke is equally silent in reference to the reason why John Mark, at this particular juncture, departed from them, and returned to Jerusalem. He informs us, however, at a later period, that Paul censured him for so doing.²⁸⁰ It is very plausibly suggested by Mr. Howson, that he was influenced by fear of the dangers which lay in their way, the mountains before them being commonly infested with robbers.²⁸¹ He remarks that “No population, through the midst of which he ever traveled, abounded more in those 'perils of robbers' of which he himself speaks, than the wild and lawless clans of the Pisidian highlanders.”

14, 15. Luke does not longer to recount the dangers through which the two travelers may have passed in crossing the mountains, but describes their progress in these few words: (14) “*But they, having departed from Perga, arrived in Antioch of Pisidia, and entering into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, they sat down.* (15) *And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, and said, Brethren, if you have any*

word of exhortation for the people, say on.” This is a very life-like description of the order of worship in a Jewish synagogue, and of the readiness with which the apostles gained access to the ears of their Jewish kinsmen upon their first advent in a new field of labor. The direct invitation given them to address the people was doubtless prompted by some vague knowledge of their characters as public speakers, furnished, perhaps, by themselves.

16. To this invitation Paul responded, by immediately arising and addressing the audience. It need not be supposed, in order to account for the leadership which he now assumes, that he had laid formal claim to superiority over Barnabas; for when two men, of generous spirit, are co-operating together under trying circumstances, he who possesses the greater courage and promptness will eventually assume the foremost position, even without a special agreement to that effect. Such was the constant danger and embarrassment of the two missionaries, that the question was, who is willing to go forward, rather than, who has the right to be heard first. Paul's manner, in arising to open the gospel message among these strangers, was bold and commanding. It is thus described by Luke: (16) *“Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand, said, Men of Israel, and ye who fear God, give audience.”* This gesture, described as beckoning with the hand, was characteristic of Paul's manner, as well shall have occasion to observe frequently hereafter, and was well calculated to arrest the attention of an audience. It is the manner of one who knows what he is about to say, and feels confident of its importance. 162

Besides the Jewish audience present, Paul addressed a number of Gentiles,²⁸² such as were in the habit of attending Jewish worship in almost every Gentile city, and many of whom, like Cornelius, had learned to worship the true God. He distinguishes the two classes, by addressing the former as “Men of Israel,” and the latter, as “Ye who fear God.”

17–24. After thus arresting the attention of his hearers, he approaches his main theme, by a rapid glance at some of the most cherished events in Jewish history. (17) *“The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with a high hand led them out of it; (18) and about the time of forty years nourished them in the wilderness. (19) And having destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave their land to them as an inheritance. (20) After these things, he gave them judges about four hundred and fifty years, until the prophet Samuel. (21) Then they desired a king, and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, forty years. (22) And having removed him, he raised up to them David for a king, to whom he also gave testimony and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man according to my own heart, who will do all my will. (23) From this man's offspring God has, according to his promise, raised up to Israel a Savior, Jesus; (24) John having preached, before his coming, the immersion of repentance to all the people of Israel.”*

This glance at the history of history, from their departure out of Egypt to the reign of David, is a very circuitous method of approaching the announcement of Jesus as a Savior; but, instead of being a defect in the speech, it is one of its chief excellencies. Every speech must be judged with reference to the special character of the audience addressed. The Jews had a glorious history, of which they were justly proud; and any happily expressed allusions to its leading facts always awakened in their hearts the most lively emotions. These incidents furnished the inspiration of their songs, the themes of their orators, the foundation of their national pride, and their comfort in persecution. Whoever, of their own people, appeared most deeply touched by their memories, had the readiest access to their sympathies, and he who would treat them with indifference or contempt, incurred their utmost hatred. Before such an audience, if Paul had abruptly introduced the name and the new doctrine of Jesus, he might have appeared an apostate from the Jewish faith, seeking to supplant it by something entirely new, and would therefore have kindled

the resentment of his Jewish hearers at once. But, beginning with a happy reference to the history of the chosen tribes, and the reign of their most glorious king, and catching up the promise made to David, on which their own most cherished hopes were based, he leads them, by almost imperceptible steps, to the favorable consideration of the fulfillment of that promise in the appearance of Jesus as a Savior to Israel. The reference to John, whom all the Jews now accredited as a prophet, served the same purpose, while it designated more specifically the period in which Jesus had first appeared as a Savior. 163

The commentators have all noticed the striking similarity between this introduction of Paul's speech and that of Stephen before the Sanhedrim, of which Paul was probably a hearer. But the attentive reader of our comments upon the two speeches will observe that the similarity is merely in the facts referred to, not in the purpose for which the reference is made; Paul's object being merely to favorably introduce his main theme, while Stephen was gathering up a bundle of misdeeds in the history of the fathers, with which to lash the backs of sons who were so wickedly imitating their resistance to the Holy Spirit.

25. Having alluded to John's preparatory ministry, he next introduces the direct testimony which he bore to the Messiahship of Jesus. (25) *"Now as John was fulfilling his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he, but behold, there is coming after me one whose sandal I am not worthy to loose from his feet."* This was a habitual saying of John, well known to all who heard his preaching, or had heard of it, and brought to bear the whole weight of his testimony in favor of Jesus.

26. Those who have been accustomed to watch the sympathy between a speaker and his audience can readily perceive, in the change of Paul's manner just here, evidence that he discovered some favorable emotions at work in his audience. He interrupts the thread of his argument, by warmly remarking: (26) *"Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you is the word of this salvation sent."* But his impetuosity was not so great as to make him forget, altogether, the deep-seated prejudices to be overcome in his audience, or to waive the convincing and persuasive proofs he had yet to present. He proceeds, therefore, with renewed deliberation, to a fuller statement of the argument.

27–29. After claiming that the Messiahship of Jesus was so well authenticated, it was necessary to give some explanation of the singular fact, that the Jews, who knew him well, had put him to death as an impostor. This he does in a way that not only removes all objection, but furnishes additional evidence in his favor. (27) *"For they who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, not knowing him and the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath-day, fulfilled them in condemning him. (28) And though they found not the least cause of death in him, they requested Pilate that he should be put to death. (29) And when they had completed all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a sepulcher."* Thus, his rejection and death at the hands of Jews, which might have appeared to Paul's hearers an argument against his claims, are made to tell mightily in his favor, by the fact that this was but the fulfillment of what the prophets had written concerning the Messiah.

In this brief statement of the death and burial of Jesus, Paul makes no distinction between those who put him to death and those who "took him down from the tree, and laid him in the sepulcher." But this omission is entirely justifiable; for, although his friends, Joseph and Nicodemus, performed the last two acts, they did it by the express *permission* of Pilate, and it may be regarded as, in a proper sense, the act of his enemies. 164

30–33. The speaker proceeds to the climax of his argument; a proof of the Messiahship still more conclusive, if possible than the testimony of John, or the fulfillment of prophesy. (30) *"But God raised him from the dead; (31) and*

he was seen many days by those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses to the people. (32) And we declare to you glad tidings concerning the promise made to the fathers, (33) that God has fulfilled it to us, their children, by raising up Jesus; as it is written in the second Psalm, Thou art my son; to-day have I begotten thee.” The fact of the resurrection of Jesus, so well attested by competent witnesses, is introduced, not only as the final proof of his Messiahship, but as happy tidings to these Jews, being no less than the fulfillment of the promise to the fathers, and the realization of their most cherished hopes.

The difficulty of applying the words of David, “Thou art my son; to-day I have begotten thee,” to the resurrection of Jesus, has led many commentators to suppose that both it and the expression, “raising up Jesus,” refer to his incarnation. But these words of David, in every other instance of their occurrence in the New Testament, are applied to his resurrection, and not to his natural birth. In [Hebrews v. 5](#), Paul says: “Christ glorified not himself to be made a priest, but he who said to him, Thou art my son; to-day have I begotten thee.” Now, as Christ was not a priest until after he had died as a *victim*, and was prepared to enter heaven with his own blood, it is clear that these words are applied to his resurrection, at the time of which he entered upon his priestly office. So, likewise, in [Hebrews i. 5](#), the question, “To which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son; to-day have I begotten thee?” is adduced as evidence of his superiority to angels, and can not, therefore, refer to the period when he was “made a little lower than the angels.”²⁸³ That the term rendered *begotten* may be properly referred to the resurrection is evident from the fact that he is called the “first begotten from the dead,”²⁸⁴ and the “first born from the dead,”²⁸⁵ in which two expressions the Greek words are the same. He was the “only begotten son of God,”²⁸⁶ by his birth of the Virgin Mary; but he became the “first born from the dead,” or the “first born of the whole creation,”²⁸⁷ when he was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.²⁸⁸ In applying the quotation from the second Psalm, therefore, to the resurrection, and endeavoring to cheer the Jews in Antioch, with the thought that a long-cherished and familiar promise was thereby fulfilled, Paul was giving his real understanding of the passage quoted, and it is one as much more cheering than that which many commentators have gathered from it, as the exaltation of Christ from the grave to his throne in the heavens was a more glorious birth than that which brought him into this sinful world.

34–37. That we have given the true explanation of the clause last quoted is confirmed by the course of the argument in that which follows, in which the speaker continues to quote from David, to prove that, according to his prophecies, the Messiah should rise from the dead. (34) “Now that he did raise him from the dead, no more to 165 return to corruption, he spoke thus: I will give to you the sure mercies of David. (35) Wherefore he also says in another psalm, Thou wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption. (36) For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, and was added to his fathers, and saw corruption; (37) but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.”

The words quoted from the [fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah](#), “I will give you the sure mercies of David,” have given no little trouble to both translators and interpreters. No translator can feel well satisfied with rendering *ta osia David ta pista*, the sure mercies of David; yet the literal translators have generally adopted this as the best that can be done. I think the words mean *the holy things made sure to David*. The purpose of the quotation is to prove that God would raise the Messiah from the dead no more to return to corruption. He assumes, therefore, that the words quoted refer to the Messiah, and that his hearers would not dispute the reference. Whatever, therefore, might otherwise be our

own understanding of the words, we must take this as their true reference. The promise is addressed not to the Messiah, but to the Jews; for the pronoun *you (umin)* is in the plural number. It is a promise, then, to give to the Jews the holy things faithfully promised to David, among which was the promise already referred to, “Thou wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption.” It furnished, therefore, the required proof that the Messiah would rise, and not see corruption.

The only objection which his hearers would be likely to raise against the argument is, that in the words, “Thou wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption,” David spoke of himself. But this objection is anticipated by the remark that David had fallen asleep and seen corruption, whereas he, Jesus, whom God raised up, as was proved by the witnesses who saw him alive, did not see corruption; hence to him the words must refer. According, therefore, to the only possible application of David's words, and to the admitted reference of the words quoted from Isaiah, they were bound to admit that Jesus was the Messiah.

38, 39. Having now established, by brief, but unanswerable arguments, the Messiahship of Jesus, Paul proceeds to offer the audience the benefit of his mediation. (38) “*Be it known to you, therefore, brethren, that through this man is preached to you the remission of sins; (39) and in him every one who believes is justified from all from which you could not be justified in the law of Moses.*” The expression *en touto, in him*, not *by him* as rendered in the common version, indicates that the parties to be justified must be *in Christ*, that is, in subjection to his authority; as the expression *en to uomo, in the law*, applies to those who were under the law, and not to uncircumcised Gentiles who were not under it. The benefits of the Jewish law extended only to those who were born in, or properly initiated into the body of people to whom the law was given; and just so, the remission of sins is preached only to those who shall be *in Christ* by being properly initiated into his body.

By the antithesis here instituted between the law and the gospel, Paul assumes that there was no remission of sins enjoyed by those under the law. For he asserts that there were some things “from which they could not be justified in the law of Moses;” and in the expression “justified from *all* from which you could not be justified in the law,” the true supplement after *all* is *sins*, taken from the preceding clause. He announces that remission of sins is preached through Jesus, and from *these* he assumes that under the law there was no justification. This point, indeed, would need no argument, even if the context did not settle it; for certainly, if there was any thing from which under the law could not be justified, it was *sin*; and, on the other hand, in Christ we are justified from nothing but sin. The assumption is not, that justification can not be procured by *works of law*, for this is equally true under Christ; but that those under the law of Moses did not obtain remission of sins at all. 166

Paul argues this assumption at length, in the ninth and tenth chapters of Hebrews. The only provisions in the law at all connected with remission of sins were its sacrifices; and he asserts of them, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.”²⁸⁹ It can not be rightly assumed that he contemplates these sacrifices as considered apart from their typical meaning; for he makes no such distinction. He takes them just as he finds them, with all that belongs to them when offered in good faith, and makes the assertion that it is not possible for them to take away sins. In the preceding verses of the same chapter he presents a specific argument based upon this broad assertion: “The law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of those things, can *never*, by those sacrifices which they offer year by year continually, *make the comers thereunto perfect.*” He proves this proposition, and shows the particular in which they were still imperfect, by adding, “For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because the worshipers, once cleansed, would have no more *conscience* of sins.”²⁹⁰ If a man

had once obtained remission of particular sins, he would, of course, as is here argued, no longer offer sacrifices for those sins, seeing that his conscience would no longer annoy him in reference to them. But it is a fact, he argues further, that “In those sacrifices there is a remembrance of sins made every year.”²⁹¹ The sins of the year, for which offerings had been made daily, were remembered again on the annual day of atonement, and new sacrifices offered for them declaring to the worshiper that they were still remembered against him. As this continued, annually, throughout the life of the pious Jew, it left him in the same condition at the day of his death, and he was gathered to his fathers with his sins still unforgiven.

The same truth is taught in the very terms of the new covenant. In stating the points of dissimilarity between it and the old covenant made at Mount Sinai, the Lord says, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I *remember no more*,” implying that under the old covenant this blessing was not enjoyed.²⁹²

We can not dismiss this topic without paying some attention to the question which forces itself upon us, What did the saints, under the old covenant, enjoy in reference to forgiveness, and what is the meaning of the 167 promise so often attached to sin offerings, “The priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin, and it shall be *forgiven* him?”²⁹³ If we had nothing but this promise to guide us, we could but conclude that the party was, at the time, really forgiven; but with Paul's comments upon it before us, we are compelled to avoid this conclusion, and seek some other explanation of the words. There can not be less than a *promise* of pardon in the words quoted; and as it can not be a promise fulfilled at the time, it must be a promise reserved to some future period for fulfillment.

That the promise of pardon made to Jews and patriarch was reserved for fulfillment to the death of Christ, Paul affirms in these words: “On this account he is the mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the *first* covenant, they who were called” (that is, the ancient elect) “might *receive* the *promise* of eternal *inheritance*.”²⁹⁴ Here the reception of the “promise of eternal inheritance,” by those who were under the first covenant, is made to depend upon the redemption of their transgressions. This redemption was not effected till the death of Christ; therefore, till his death their transgressions remained unforgiven. Though they had the *promise* of pardon, and rejoiced in the full assurance that it would yet be granted, they were compelled to regard it as blessing of the future and not of the present. Their enjoyment, as compared with that of the saints under the new covenant, was as that of one who has from God a promise of pardon, compared with him who has it already in possession. Their happiness, like ours, depended upon their faith in God's word.

40, 41. This passage in Paul's speech was most unwelcome to his Jewish hearers. It was an express disparagement of the law of Moses such as always fell harshly upon Jewish ears. We consequently see in the next and last paragraph of the speech an indication of a change in the aspect of the audience. It is only an audience in whom a most unfavorable change is discernible, that so watchful a speaker could address in these words: (40) “*Beware, then, lest that which is said in the prophets come upon you; (41) Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I do a work in your days, a work which you will not believe though one should fully declare it to you.*” No doubt some evidence of their incredulity was visible in their countenances, if it was not exhibited by audible murmurings. The force of the quotation was to show, that if they did reject the gospel, they would only be identifying themselves with a class of whom this conduct had been predicted.

The surprise expressed by the prophet, that they would not believe though one should declare it to them, does not assume that they should believe facts so astounding upon the mere assertion of an individual; but the object of surprise is, that they would not believe though one should declare it *fully* to them, that is, with all the incontestable evidences of its reality. Undoubtedly the *work* referred to by the apostle, in his application of the prophet's language, is the work of raising up a savior to Israel in the person of Jesus.

42, 43. When Paul's speech was concluded, the synagogue was dismissed and the apostle had an opportunity to learn what particular effects had been produced. The people, candid and outspoken, let him in no doubt on the subject. (42) "*Now as they were going out, they entreated that these words should be spoken to them the next Sabbath, (43) and, the synagogue being dismissed, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, talking to them, persuaded them to continue in the favor of God.*" Thus, notwithstanding the majority of the Jews in the audience gave such evidence of incredulity as to extort the warning with which Paul closed his speech, some of them were ready to believe; while the Gentile proselytes, less affected by Jewish prejudices, and, therefore, better prepared to do justice to the speaker, were most deeply interested. The picture which Luke gives of their following Paul and Barnabas in a crowd away from the synagogue, and keeping up an earnest conversation, is a striking exhibition of the simple habits of the people, as well as of the interest which they felt in the new and thrilling theme of the discourse. 168

44. So deep an interest kindled in the synagogue, and taking hold of Gentile minds, could not fail to spread widely through the city during the following week, and its progress was doubtless furthered by the most active private exertions of Paul and Barnabas. The result was seen in the next assemblage at the synagogue. (44) "*On the next Sabbath almost the whole city were gathered together to hear the word of God.*"

45. So large an assemblage of the people, to hear a doctrine which appeared disparaging to the law of Moses, and which had, on this account, already offended the mass of the Jews, could but arouse their utmost indignation. They acted according to their uniform policy under such circumstances. (45) "*But the Jews, when they saw the multitudes were filled with zeal, and contradicted the things spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*" This was one of the instances in which Paul could say, "I bear them witness that they have a *zeal* of God, but not according to knowledge."²⁹⁵ It was useless to reason with them further, or to attempt to conciliate them.

46, 47. When men take a stand like this, nothing will satisfy them but an abandonment of the truth; and hence that conciliatory bearing which should mark our address to them up to this point, may, with propriety, be dismissed, and we may proceed without regard to their feelings. So the apostles acted. (46) "*Then Paul and Barnabas, speaking boldly, said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you; but since you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold we turn to the Gentiles. (47) For thus has the Lord commanded us, I have placed thee as a light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be for salvation to the extremity of the earth.*"²⁹⁶

The remark that it was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to them, before turning to the Gentiles, shows that the apostles understood that the gospel was not only to begin in Jerusalem, but that, in every distinct community, it was to *begin with the Jews*. Hence the frequent occurrence, in Paul's style, of the expression, "To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile."²⁹⁷ The reason of this distinction has been discussed in the commentary on [Acts i. 8](#). 169

48. In the next paragraph we have a statement, the meaning of which has excited no little controversy. (48) “*On hearing this the Gentiles rejoiced, and glorified the word of the Lord, and as many as were determined for eternal life believed.*” The controversy turns upon the meaning of the clause *osoi ean tetagmenoi eis zoen aioniou*, rendered, in the common version, “as many as were *ordained* to eternal life.” The Calvinistic writers united in referring it to the eternal election and foreordination taught in their creeds. They contend, therefore, for the rendering “were ordained,” or “were appointed.” If their interpretation were admitted, it would involve the passage in some difficulties which none of them seem to have noticed. If it be true that “as *many* as were *foreordained* to eternal life believed,” then there were some of the foreordained left in that community who did not believe. Hence, all those who did not then believe, whether adults or infants, were among the reprobate, who were predestinated to everlasting punishment. Now it is certainly most singular that so complete a separation of the two parties should take place throughout a whole community at one time; and still more singular that Luke should so far depart from the custom of inspired writers as to state the fact. Again, the same statement implies that all who believed on that occasion were of the elect. For, if the parties who believed were those who had been foreordained to eternal life, then none of the non-elect could have been among the number. Here is another anomalous incident: that on this occasion all who believed were of the number who would finally be saved, and that Luke should be informed of the fact and make it known to his readers. Certainly we should not adopt an interpretation involving conclusions so anomalous, unless we are compelled to do so by the obvious force of the words employed.

It is worthy of more that the efforts of Calvinistic writers to prove that this is the meaning of these words consist chiefly in strong assertions to that effect, and in attempts to answer the feebler class of the objections urged against it. Thus Dr. Hackett asserts: “This is the only translation which the philology of the passage allows.” But he makes no effort to prove that the New Testament usage of the principal word involved allows this translation. The word rendered *ordained* in this passage is *tasso*—a term which is not employed in a single instance in the New Testament in the sense of *foreordained*. Where that idea is to be expressed, other words are uniformly employed.

The word in question is a generic term, having no single word in English to fully represent it. Its generic sense is best represented by our phrase, *set in order*. In its various specific applications, however, we have single terms which accurately represent it. Thus, when Jesus *etaxato set in order* a certain mountain in Galilee as a place to meet his disciples,²⁹⁸ or the Jews in Rome *taxameno set in order* a day to meet Paul,²⁹⁹ we best express the idea by *appointed*.³⁰⁰ But when Paul says of civil rulers that “the existing authorities *tetagmenai eisin were set in order* 170 by God,”³⁰¹ he does not intend to affirm that God had *appointed* those rulers, but merely asserts his general providence in their existence and arrangement. The idea is best expressed in English by using the phrase *set in order*, or by saying they were *arranged* by God. When he asserts of the household of Stephanas, in Corinth, that *etaxan eautous they set themselves in order* for ministering to the saints,³⁰² we would say they *devoted* themselves to ministering to the saints. But when the brethren in Antioch had been puzzled by the disputation between Paul and Barnabas and “certain men who came down from Judea,” in reference to circumcision, and they finally *etaxan, set in order*, to send some of both parties to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for a decision, the common version very correctly renders it, “they *determined* that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go.”³⁰³

In reference to the propriety of this last rendering, Dr. Hackett asserts that this term “*was not used to denote an act of the mind;*”³⁰⁴ the awkward translation of this passage; to which the assertion forces him is evidence conclusive

against it. He renders it, "They *appointed* that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem."³⁰⁵ This is an ungrammatical use of the word *appointed*. When a mission has been determined upon, we *appoint* the individuals who shall be sent, but we do not *appoint* that *they shall go*. Evidently, the state of the case was this: the brethren were at first *undetermined* what to do in reference to the question in dispute, but finally *determined* to send to Jerusalem for an authoritative decision of it. When a man is *undetermined* in reference to a pressing question, his mind is in *confusion*; but when he determines upon his course, it is no longer *confusion*, but is *set in order*. The term in question, therefore, meaning primarily to *set in order*, is most happily adapted to the expression of such a state of mind. Our English word *dispose* has a similar usage. It means *to arrange in a certain order*, and applies primarily to external objects; but when one's *mind* is found arranged in accordance with a certain line of conduct, we say he is *disposed* to pursue it.

We scarcely need observe, after the above remarks, that the specific meaning attached to the generic term in question, in any particular passage, is to be determined by the context. In the passage we are now considering, the context has no allusion to any thing like an *appointment* of one part, and a *rejection* of the other; but the writer draws a line of distinction between the *conduct* of certain Gentiles and that of the *Jews* addressed by Paul in the closing paragraph of his speech. To render the contrast between the two more conspicuous, he throws his words into antithesis with those of Paul. Paul had said to the Jews, "You put the *word* of God *from* you;" Luke says of the Gentiles, "They *glorified* the *word* of the Lord." Paul said, "You *judge* yourselves *unworthy* of everlasting life;" Luke says, many of the Gentiles "*were determined* for everlasting life." It is an act of the mind to which Paul objects on the part of the Jews, and it is as clearly an act of mind in the Gentiles which Luke puts in contrast with it. At some previous time in their history, these Gentiles, like all others, had been *undetermined* in reference to everlasting 171 life, either because they were not convinced that there was such a state, or because they hesitated to seek for it. But now their minds were *set in order* upon the subject, by being *determined* to labor for the eternal life which Paul preached.

It now remains, in order to full elucidation of the passage, that we account for the connection indicated between their being determined for everlasting life, and their believing. The former stands as a cause which led to the latter. Let it be noted that everlasting life is not contemplated as the *object* of their belief, for, if it was, they would have had to *believe* in it, before they could *determine* for it; so that the order of the two mental acts would be reversed. But, in common with the Jews, who had been their religious instructors, they already believed in a future state, and what they now learned to believe by Paul's preaching was the gospel of Christ. Those of them who had, either through previous religious instruction, or through the influence of Paul's preaching, heartily determined for eternal life, were in a better frame of mind to appreciate the evidence in favor of that Christ through whom alone it could be obtained, than the others who were so *undetermined* upon the subject that they appeared to judge themselves unworthy of such a destiny. Such was the difference between the two classes in the audience, and Luke's object is to declare the result of the difference in the fact that the one class *believed*, and the other thrust the word of God from them. To say that the difference had been wrought in them exclusively by divine agency would be to rob them of responsibility. Or to say that the favorably-disposed party had become so exclusively by their own self-determining energy would be to deny the influence of divine truth. Neither of these positions can be true; but, while it was an act of their own minds to determine for eternal life, it was God who had induced them to do so; at the same time, the other party determined against eternal life, in despite of the same divine influence exerted upon them.

49–52. The animosity of the Jews, excited by the success of the apostles, finally resulted in their expulsion from the city. The account is given in brief terms: (49) “*And the word of the Lord was published throughout the whole region.* (50) *But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their borders.* (51) *And they, shaking off the dust of their feet against them, went into Iconium.* (52) *But the disciples were full of joy and the Holy Spirit.*” The means by which this persecution was brought about serves to illustrate the relation which the Jews who were settled in Gentile cities sustained to the surrounding society. They had no political power in their own hands, and dared not lay violent hands upon the apostles. But certain “honorable women,” wives of the “chief men of the city,” had come under their influence by attending the synagogue worship, and through them they gained access to their unbelieving husbands so as to induce them to expel Paul and Barnabas. It is a suggestive fact, that the women who were made instruments of a transaction so discreditable are styled “*devout women.*” It shows that *devotion* in the worship of God, like zeal when not according to knowledge, may be made to do the devil's own work. The more devout one's feelings, 172 while his mind is corrupted by false conceptions of duty, the greater mischief he is likely to do; so far is it from being true, that to make the heart right is to make the whole man right. No man is safe without a proper *understanding* of his duty, derived from the word of God.

Paul and Barnabas were not without indignation when they were thus ignominiously expelled from the city; but the only exhibition which they made of it was that which the Savior had directed; “they shook off the dust of their feet against them.”³⁰⁶ This was not a mere idle or childish mark of resentment, as it would be in an uninspired teacher; but was designed as “a testimony against them,” a solemn warning of the righteous judgment of God, whom they had rejected in rejecting his chosen messengers.³⁰⁷

We would imagine that the young disciples, from whom their religious teachers were thus violently driven away, would have been overwhelmed with grief and fear. But we are told, as quoted above, that they were “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” The full assurance given by the gospel of that everlasting life which they had “determined for,” and the belief that the Spirit of God dwelt in their mortal bodies, supplied them with a joy which was no longer dependent on human agency, and of which human power could not deprive them.

[262](#) Acts xxvi. 16–18.

[263](#) Acts ix. 17.

[264](#) Gal. i. 15–18.

[265](#) Acts xi. 26.

[266](#) Acts ix. 3; xi. 25.

[267](#) 2 Cor. xii. 12.

[268](#) Acts iv. 36.

[269](#) See Com. i. 8.

[270](#) Acts xi. 19, 20.

[271](#) Compare xviii. 8 with 1 Cor. i. 14–17.

[272](#) Acts ix. 4–17.

[273](#) Acts xxiii. 11.

[274](#) Acts xxiii. 14.

[275](#) Acts xxiii. 18.

[276](#) Acts xxiii. 20.

[277](#) Acts xxiii. 24.

[278](#) Acts xxvi. 24.

[279](#) 2 Peter iii. 15.

[280](#) Acts xv. 38.

[281](#) Life and Epistles, vol. i, pp. 162–3.

[282](#) See verse 42, below.

[283](#) Heb. ii. 9.

[284](#) Rev. i. 5.

[285](#) Col. i. 18.

[286](#) John i. 14, 18.

[287](#) Col. i. 15.

[288](#) Rom. i. 4.

[289](#) Heb. x. 4.

[290](#) Heb. x. 1, 2.

[291](#) Heb. x. 3.

[292](#) Heb. viii. 8–12.

[293](#) Lev. chapters iv and v, passim, and xvi. 30–34.

[294](#) Heb. ix. 15.

[295](#) Rom. x. 2.

[296](#) Is. xlix. 6.

[297](#) Rom. ii. 9, 10.

[298](#) Matt. xxviii. 16.

[299](#) Acts xxviii. 23.

[300](#) It expresses the same idea in Luke vii. 8; Acts xxii. 10.

[301](#) Rom. xiii. 1.

[302](#) 1 Cor. xvi. 15.

[303](#) Acts xv. 2.

[304](#) Com. in loco.

[305](#) Com. xv. 2.

[306](#) Mark vi. 11.

[307](#) Luke x. 16.

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