

# Scripture Truth



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The throne, the Lamb and the book

An analysis of the Acts of the Apostles

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# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

Editor's e-mail: editor@scripturetruth.org.uk

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**SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications**

31-33 Glover Street, CREWE, Cheshire CW1 3LD

Tel: 01270 252274

# Godly living

*“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed, and purify for Himself a people of His own, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14).*

This robust statement of the Christian life suits all times and all places. It has two sides to it: (i) a practical guide to everyday Christian living; and (ii) what gives power and purpose to that living, namely, the ever-relevant hope of the Lord’s coming. Without (ii), (i) degenerates into doggedness. Without (i), (ii) degenerates into mere mental fancy, whereas the heavenly hope ought to galvanise us to do the works at the beginning of the above quotation. We are a heavenly people (Philippians 3:20); our hopes are centred on Christ in glory and our part with Him there, And to the degree that we are “looking for that blessed hope” our faces should shine as Moses’ face shone as a result of being up the mountain with God (Exodus 34:29). All too little do our faces shine; we should be exercised about this; not about “putting a good face on things”, but about really so looking for the Lord’s coming that it shows in our faces. And the “blessed hope” does not distract us from honourable discharge of our daily duties; rather, it animates our discharge of them.

Both sides are needed. But without the living hope of the Lord’s coming the world will take over our manner of life.

This is the last issue of *Scripture Truth* that, God willing, I will be responsible for. It has been a great privilege to have been entrusted this work, and I could not have done it without the constant encouragement and help of my wife, Julia. I am delighted that Ian Britton has consented to take over the editorship, and ask that your prayers accompany and support him in this mission.

I thank the trustees of Scripture Truth Publications for all their encouragement.

THEO BALDERSTON

# Awake, thou that sleepest!

David Anderson

*Paul's rallying-cry to his readers in Ephesus is to wake up, to get up, to look up (to Christ in glory); and thereby to light up!*

I finished my previous *Scripture Truth* article, "It is time to wake up!"<sup>1</sup> by referring to the apostle Paul's exhortations in Ephesians 5:8-17. In verse 14, he reinforced his exhortations by combining words from Isaiah 60:1-2 and 26:19, "Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'" (ESV). As a young believer I was always puzzled by Paul's addressing any of the Ephesian believers as being "asleep among the dead". I had been taught that the saints at Ephesus were faithful in Christ Jesus (1:1), and that this was why they were the recipients of the most exalted truths concerning the Christ and His church in the eternal purpose of God. Why then did these Ephesians need the reminder of Ephesians 5:14? However, experience of the Christian life has shown me that any believer, including those who claim to "know" Ephesian truth, can very easily fall asleep! That's why Paul continued, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil" (vv.15-16).

Paul's exhortation occurs in the practical section of his letter, a section which begins at the "Therefore" of 4:1, and is re-emphasised at 4:17. Positively, believers should walk [that is, live and act] in ways which become [i.e., are appropriate to] their heavenly calling (4:1). That is, we should walk in love (5:2), walk as children of light (5:8), and walk carefully and wisely (5:15).<sup>2</sup>

Negatively, believers' lifestyles must not resemble the ungodly and immoral lifestyle of unbelievers, as detailed in Ephesians 4:17 & 5:3-5, and described as "unfruitful works of darkness" in 5:11. Such things must never be allowed to occur amongst the saints (5:3-4). We must not indulge in them in any way, shape, or form (5:11). Rather, as children of light, we should expose and manifest society's evil deeds by our Christian lifestyles (1 Thessalonians 5:4-10,13).<sup>3</sup> But the ever-present danger is that we may slowly begin to tolerate or even adopt the evil practices that society allows (and sometimes gives express legal protection to) in our post-Christian western culture. That is, we may drift into

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1 *Scripture Truth*, October, 2021, pp.320-23.

2 See my articles, "Walking with Christ", *Scripture Truth*, October 2007, pp 7-12; and "Walking worthy of the Lord", *Scripture Truth*, January 2008. pp. 13-17.

3 Philippians 2:14-16 outline some components of proper Christian living.

*Eutychus excellently typifies the sleeper who  
has lost sight of Christ in glory*

spiritual sleep and become insensible to God's standards. Therefore "sleep" is an apt metaphor to describe this state in which spiritually inert believers have become totally absorbed into the world and are unconcerned about the things of the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

Hence Paul's rallying cry to wake up, to get up, to look up (to Christ in glory), and thereby to light up! The promise that "Christ will shine on you" means that we will be able to see and assess the current situations in the church and in the world in the light of the Christ, the Man in the glory, at God's right hand. In 1:15-23 Paul prayed that the Ephesians would have this spiritual enlightenment and the resultant power to live for God. This should be a salient feature of our prayers for each other!

Various Scriptures provide insight into aspects of spiritual sleep. Among these, the first chapter of the book of Jonah provides an excellent case study. (Please read it!) Jonah fell into natural sleep during a storm, but this was a result of his being spiritually asleep with respect to the things of the Lord. Jonah had gone west instead of east in blatant disobedience to God's instructions, and in this sense had deliberately "fallen asleep" as regards God's will for him. During the voyage he had deliberately gone down to the inner part of the ship to sleep (1:5), but was rebuked by the ship's captain, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god!" (1:6). Jonah's flagrant disregard of God's will is a stark warning and a wake-up call to the "casual worldly believer", who has fallen into spiritual sleep. "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

**Eutychus** is another "case study." He was asleep with respect to Paul's doctrine, as we can read in Acts 20:7-12 (please read this passage too!). When, late on a Lord's day evening, Paul spoke for a long time to the assembly at Troas, Eutychus was overcome with natural tiredness and drifted off into a deep sleep. He excellently typifies the sleeper addressed in Ephesians 5:14, who has lost sight of Christ in glory. Any spiritual sleeper is a person who has failed to stay awake (Ephesians 6:18) and has drifted off, to the point where his spiritual

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<sup>4</sup> See a comprehensive definition either under 'KOIMAOMAI' or under "Asleep" / sleep, in W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Unabridged Edition*, (London, Oliphants, 1939), many times republished by various publishers.

life becomes less important than earthly living (indeed, almost irrelevant to the latter in some cases!) See also Philippians 3:18-20 and 2 Peter 1:5-11. The superficial “triggers” for such a tragic happening are many and varied, but the root causes all boil down to the insidious opposition that believers encounter from the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:15-17).

Or we can be asleep when we should be doing the Lord’s work. Please read Matthew 13:24-30, which contains the second of the seven “similitudes”, or parables, of the kingdom’ – the parable of the tares. Verse 25 states that it was “while his men were sleeping” [ESV] that the farmer’s enemy came and sowed tares (“fake wheat”) among the wheat (the good seed, vv.24, 38). The good seed is the product of the preaching of the word of God by the Lord himself (vv.24, 37). But the tares, the “fake wheat”, result from the propagation of counterfeit gospels and from the false doctrines that lurk in Christendom. The Lord’s true disciples must stay awake and maintain the preaching of the true gospel and teaching of sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:1-5). Paul charged the Ephesian elders with these responsibilities in his farewell address to them at Miletus (see Acts 20:17-35, especially v.31). It is also necessary for all believers to remember the Lord’s exhortation to have “ears to hear” God’s word (Matthew 13:9, 43); and always to be alert as to “what” they listen to (Mark 4:24) and “how” responsive they are to it (Luke 8:18).

Matthew 25:1-12 recounts the parable of the **ten virgins** who fell asleep when they should have been waiting to greet the bridegroom. Verse 5 states that all ten virgins became drowsy and slept, and this is a general description of the professing Christian church over its two-thousand-year history, during which time the reality of the second coming of Christ has been forgotten by most. When the virgins in the parable heard the midnight cry, “Behold, the bridegroom; go forth to meet him!” (v.6, Darby Tr.), only the five true to Him were prepared for His coming. The Lord himself explained the main lesson of this parable: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man is coming” (v.13). Paul similarly exhort us, “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6) – this in a letter about the Lord’s second coming: He is coming soon! (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20)<sup>5</sup>

Or we can be asleep regarding **the Lord’s sufferings**. Please read Matthew 26:36-46. There is poignancy in the threefold record that each time the Lord returned from prayer, He found Peter, James, and John overcome with sleep. When He asked them why, they did not know what to answer Him (Luke 22:46;

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5 Please refer to my previous *Scripture-Truth* article “It is time to wake up!” – see footnote 1 of this article.

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*Let us have that spiritual desire and discipline  
to “watch with Him for one hour”*

Mark 14:40)! Three times He asked them to watch with Him (Mark 14:38, 40, 41). Three times they failed because, “The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Applying this lesson to ourselves, we know that this kind of spiritual sleep is an ever-present danger when we are in assembly at the Lord’s Supper. That is, we fail truly to discern the symbolic meaning of the emblems (see 1 Corinthians 11:27-31). There are also many sensual distractions as well as fleshly thoughts<sup>6</sup>, which may, from time to time, intrude upon our meditations on the Lord’s death. Let us have that spiritual desire and discipline to heed afresh His invitation to “watch with Him for one hour”; and so to think of all Thy sorrow and thus remember Thee” [G.W. Frazer]

An associated issue for all local assemblies in relation to the Lord’s Supper is the importance given to it in their weekly programme of meetings: is it allocated the first priority? Sadly, there are some believers who never have answered, or who have desisted from answering, to this personal request of the Lord to remember Him in His appointed way.

And, equally, we can be asleep with respect to the Lord’s glory. Please read Luke 9:28-43. Luke is the only Synoptic-Gospel writer to record that the three privileged disciples were heavy with sleep during the Transfiguration (v.32). We are not informed why they fell asleep, but they nearly missed out on seeing His glory. It was only when they became fully awake that they saw His glory, just before Moses and Elijah left the scene (vv.33-34).

In 2 Peter 1:16-18, Peter identified two distinct glories of the Lord Jesus that the three disciples became aware of on the holy mount. Firstly, they saw His majesty,<sup>7</sup> that is, His coming millennial glory (which will be displayed in His manifest kingdom upon earth), something which Peter described as “the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:16f). Currently there is

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6 “Yet, Lord, alas, what weakness within myself I find: / No infant’s changing pleasure is like my wandering mind” (from J.N. Darby’s poem, “Unchanging Love”).

7 “Majesty” is used in English versions to translate a variety of Hebrew and Greek words, but the common feature of most its occurrences is the visible manifestation of the Presence of Jehovah upon earth. See, e.g., Psalm 8:1 (Darby) with 1 Chronicles 29:11, Psalms 45:3 & 93:1, Isaiah 2:10, etc. It is noteworthy that this was seen the next day when Jesus healed the boy with the unclean spirit (Luke 9:43).

much “hype” by men about the dangers facing planet earth and its inhabitants. Let us always remember that its future, and that of mankind, is in the competent hands of our soon-coming Lord! We have confidence in “the sure word of prophecy” (v.19) not in any “cleverly devised fables of men” (v.16)!

Secondly, they heard the Father’s voice from out of the cloud directing them to listen to His unique, beloved Son (v.35). John later confirmed what they witnessed, not only on the holy mountain, but throughout His life:

*“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... And of His fulness we have all received, and grace for grace. ...No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (John 1:14, 16, 18, NKJV).*

This incident brings us back to Ephesians 5:14 - to wake up, to get up, to look up (to Christ in glory), and thereby to light up! The ministry of Paul, “the apostle to the Gentiles”, is characterised by the heavenly vision that he had had of the glorified Christ (Acts 26:13-19). It is important to restate that, for believers, their real life is in that spiritual world with Christ in the heavenlies (2:5-7). Believers who succumb to spiritual sleep are rendered totally insensible to these realities of Christianity.

In conclusion, please read Proverbs 24:30-34, in which wise king Solomon warned his readers against being slothful. A sluggard is a person who has the ability to work, but refuses to. He lacks the attitude, sense of personal responsibility, and, indeed, the common sense to provide for his needs (vv.30-31). The slothful like to sleep when they should be working. The result is inevitable poverty and deprivation of the necessities for life. Solomon exhorts such people, “Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise” (6:6), and challenges them to wake up (v.9). Proverbs 6:9-10 warn of the consequences of not arousing ourselves from laziness, warnings repeated in 24:33-34. Christian believers are expected to work for their living and thereby to honour God with their lives. “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10, cp. 1 Timothy 5:8).

So much for excessive natural sleep. This article has highlighted our proneness to spiritual sleep and emphasised its effects on us. As stated above, the Lord drew attention to these, and exhorted believers to watch, that is, to stay awake.<sup>8</sup> Paul echoed Him.

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<sup>8</sup> A full list of these exhortations is given in footnote 4 of the article cited in footnote 1 of this present article.

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# Joseph's dealings with his brothers

Genesis 42:24 – 45:15

F.B. Hole

*Hole's comments on Genesis have throughout been highly instructive. But this article has in every line a power and beauty that makes me urge every reader to read it.*

Though Joseph entertained such tender feeling towards his brothers that he wept over them (Genesis 42:24), he did not allow it to deflect him from the stern dealing that was necessary, if they were to be brought to a proper spirit of repentance concerning the great wrong they perpetrated against him – and against their father also – many years before. Simeon was held as hostage, but the rest were sent off with full loads of corn and provision for the way, and with each man's money reimbursed and placed in his sack (42:25). One of them discovered this while at the inn, and the effect of the discovery on their minds is recorded in verse 28. They suspected that some plot or pretext lay behind it, and this suspicion filled them with fear. Their consciences were still at work, and they saw in it an act of retribution on the part of God. We too can recognize that truly the hand of God was in it.

Having arrived at home, they related their experiences to Jacob, and their fears were increased by the discovery that not only one, but each man had had his money returned in his sack. Poor Jacob's reaction to it all, recorded in verse 36, is very characteristic of him. When he said, "Me have ye bereaved... Joseph is not..." he spoke more truly than he knew. His bereavement, as regards Joseph, did indeed lie at their door, so this must have been a further stab to their consciences.

Jacob's complaint was, "All these things are against me." And so indeed it appeared. He had yet to learn that "all these things" were a part of God's plan for his ultimate good, so that at the end of his life he might be able to refer to "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil" (48:16). The fact was that all

*Their consciences were at work;  
truly the hand of God was in it.*

## *Joseph was again moved to tears*

these things” were going to “work together for good,” and therefore provide us with an effective illustration of the truth of Romans 8:28.

For the moment Jacob flatly refused to part with Benjamin, but chapter 43 shows us how his stubborn refusal had to give way before the hard logic of facts. There would be no obtaining of the needed food except that Benjamin were permitted to go with his brothers down to Egypt. In the words of Judah, recorded in verses 8 and 9, we find disclosed an attitude towards Benjamin quite the opposite of Judah's attitude towards Joseph years before. A repentant spirit was beginning to disclose its fruits.

In Hebrews 7:22ff we read of Jesus being made a “Surety<sup>1</sup> of a better covenant”, and in verse 9 of our chapter we have an excellent illustration of what “suretyship” involves. If there be any breakdown the blame of it must lie forever on the “Surety”, and all must be required at his hand. Were there any breakdown in the new covenant, the blame of it would rest upon Christ forever. But, No! Its stability and the security of all its blessings are ensured for eternity.

Jacob's scheming propensities come again to light in the delicacies that he arranged for the brothers to take to “the man” in Egypt (Genesis 43:11, 12), but at the same time there was a measure of trust in the mercy of God (v.16). With his permission the brothers at last depart for Egypt, taking Benjamin with them, and arrive in the presence of Joseph. Seeing that they had complied, and brought Benjamin with them, he was prepared to bring them into his house to dine at noon. This kindly attitude only stirred up more alarm in their minds, since they remembered the episode of the money in their sacks and they still had no idea of the identity of the man who had invited them and who was lord of all Egypt. Their ignorance made all Joseph's actions seem the more remarkable, and their uneasiness and suspicions increased. As regards Joseph, we are permitted to see again how true were his affections, particularly for Benjamin. He was again moved to tears, as verse 30 records.

But he was marked by wisdom as well as love. At the dinner the rift between

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1 I.e., “guarantee” or personal “guarantor”. [Ed.]

Hebrew and Egyptian was manifest, but the brothers sat before Joseph, and he placed them in the exact order of their ages, with Benjamin's portion five times as much as any of the others. All this must have seemed to indicate almost super-human discernment on the part of the great man, and increased the uneasy feeling that they had. Their consciences had already been aroused, as we saw when reading chapter 42:21; but the work of repentance needed to be yet deepened.

Hence Joseph's further dealings with them as recorded in chapter 44. The incident is so well known that we need only to point out a few of its salient details. Things were so ordered that Benjamin appeared to have committed the crime of stealing Joseph's cup should fall upon Benjamin. Judah had stood as surety to Jacob for Benjamin's safe return (42:9). This naturally brought Judah forward as the spokesman. He had taken the lead in selling Joseph to the Midianites going to Egypt, speaking with much hardness of heart (Genesis 38:26). Now he has to speak regarding Benjamin, and what a change is manifest! Instead of hardness great tenderness of feeling, particularly for his old father, Jacob (48:18ff)! Then it had mattered not how Jacob would feel: now it mattered everything to him. Here we see the working of a repentance not to be repented of!

Judah presented the whole case as regards his father and Benjamin with very great pathos, such as could only spring from intense and genuine feeling, the reality of which was evidenced by his closing request to be allowed to stand as substitute for Benjamin (44:33f). He was prepared to face life-long slavery for himself rather than see his brother taken and his father's grey hairs brought down with sorrow to the grave. We saw Judah in a very unfavourable light in both chapters 37 and 38; now we see what a complete change is produced when real repentance takes place.

In all this we see typified that national repentance of Israel predicted in Zechariah 12:10-14. In that chapter Jehovah speaks, and He says, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon Me whom they have

*what a complete change is produced when real  
repentance takes place.*

*Joseph recognized that God had been  
behind all that they had done*

pierced, and they shall mourn for Him.” They will discover that “the One whom they had pierced” is Jehovah Himself. In the same way the repentance of the brothers here reaches its climax when they discover that the great lord of Egypt is none other than Joseph whom they had pierced with so many sorrows.

This discovery is recorded in the opening verses of chapter 45. Again we see how very fittingly the history presents us with a type. The discovery was not made as the result of any discernment or sagacity on the part of the brothers, but wholly by the revelation of himself on the part of Joseph. When at His second advent Christ is revealed in His glory, then Israel will recognize Him and cry out, “My God, we know Thee” (Hosea 8: 2). Moreover, Joseph’s revelation was made as the fruit of his love for them: love so real that he could not restrain himself any longer; love that moved him to tears.

In Joseph we see displayed both affection and magnanimity. With the brothers the workings of their consciences reached their climax, producing fear and reducing them to silence. They found themselves wholly at the mercy of the brother whom they had so bitterly wronged, and as yet they could not believe in his magnanimous dealings with them. What must it have been to them to hear his words, “Come near to me, I pray you”? It was as they turned to him that the veil was taken from their eyes, and they knew him. So it will be with Israel in the coming day. At the present time, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it<sup>2</sup> shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:15,16). Then they will discover that Jesus, the Nazarene, whom they sold for thirty pieces of silver and crucified, is the Lord of glory, and at the same time the personification of magnanimity and *love*.

We might have expected that, having bidden his brothers to come near, and having said to them, “I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt”, *they* would have been the first to weep, both at the recognition of the great

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2 I.e., Israel’s heart. The referent of the “it” in 2 Cor. 3:15 is clearly “heart” in v.13. [Ed.].

*If in adversity we see man, we are irritated; if we see God, we are humbled*

wrong they had perpetrated against him, and at the grace that abounded over their evil. But, no, the tears were his (45:2), and not theirs. They had had to bow down before him, but he deserved it, for he towered above them in the things that are really great in the sight of God. A faint foreshadowing of the greatness of Christ.

A further thing characterized Joseph, as we see in 45:5-8. His eye rested upon God and not upon circumstances, however trying they had been. The evil actions of the brothers had faded into insignificance in his mind. He recognized that God had been behind all that they had done, and had worked it in as part of His plan for salvation and deliverance. We are reminded of that prayer of the primitive church when they acknowledged that Herod, Pilate, gentiles and Jews, gathered together against the Lord Jesus, had only managed to do “whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27f). Joseph had been instrumental in bringing to pass “a great deliverance, yet it was very small when compared with the deliverance wrought by the death and resurrection of Christ.

And, further, God had sent Joseph down into Egypt in order to preserve a posterity in the earth for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (45:7). He knew what Joseph can hardly have known; that many centuries after, out of that posterity, and as concerning the flesh, would come the Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Turn where we may in Scripture, Christ is constantly before the mind of God, and at this epoch Joseph was the instrument used by God to preserve that line of descent that finally would lead to Him.

Whatever Joseph may, or may not, have realized as to this, there was a touch of the prophetic about his words; and in the whole matter God was so distinctly before him that he was lifted far above any resentment about the wrong done to him. To his brothers he said, “So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God” (45:8). Happy should we all be, if, in regard to the perverse things of life, wrought by perverse persons, we could always say in truth, “Not *you*, but *God*.” If in adversity we see man, we are irritated; if we see God, we are humbled, subdued. and blessed. Joseph acknowledged that it was God who

had made him “lord of all his [i.e., Pharaoh’s] house,” and “ruler throughout all the land of Egypt” (45:8).

Already we have had “lord” a number of times, but used as a title of respect, much as we might now address someone as “sir.” This is the first time we read of anyone being made “lord” in the sense of “ruler”. So that here we have a “type” of Jesus being made “lord,” as Peter announced in Acts 2: 36. And as lord of all Egypt Joseph had indeed all power vested in him, and that power he wielded to promote what was good. So the Lordship of Jesus involves firstly, His absolute domination, and, secondly, His benevolence.

A very tender and touching note runs through the message that Joseph sent by his brothers to his father. After the long years of separation Jacob was to be near his beloved son, and nourished by him. Tenderness and urgency marked the message that he sent, and, realizing that in old age his father might be slow to move, Joseph added, as an incentive, “Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt.”

We have had the word “glory” once before in Genesis 31:1, used to indicate wealth. This is the first time it is used to indicate honour and splendour, so again we can discern its typical significance. It is when Christ is revealed in His glory that Israel will be gathered to Him, and bow down before Him. Then shall be fulfilled the word, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power” (Psalm 110:3). They were by no means “willing” in the day of His humiliation and poverty.

Having delivered these instructions, Joseph “fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept” (45:14), and Benjamin likewise. Benjamin being Joseph’s full brother, it was not surprising that there was this display after so long a separation. But that Joseph should kiss and weep over the brothers who once had so cruelly wronged him, was a remarkable thing. The kiss and the tears were the sign not only of affection, but also of a full forgiveness. It is significant that the record is, “after that his brothers talked with him” (45:15). The free conversation which flows from communion could only be established on the ground of forgiveness. Thus indeed it is with us today. Until we are assured of Divine forgiveness, and are thus in the enjoyment of peace with God, we cannot be at home in His presence, nor enter into communion with Him. Until then we find it impossible to freely address Him in either thanksgiving or in prayer.

*An edited version of the article in Scripture Truth 37 (1951-2), pp. 8-12*

# The throne, the Lamb, and the book

Revelation 4:2 – 5:14

“Immediately I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne... Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads” (Revelation 4:2-4).

John, in the Spirit, suddenly found himself in heaven. Writers of various pseudo-apocalypses of the time also claimed to have been taken up to heaven. Their claims were just literary facades for carefully crafted human thoughts. But John’s claims were for real, and his fulsome admission at both beginning and end of the book that its contents were not from him is genuine. He opened the book with the words, “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him...”, and the book closes with the asseveration, “I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things...” (22:16). The living God is here carefully distinguishing this true apocalypse from the false apocalypses swirling round at that time.

John truly was, in the Spirit, rapt up into heaven as he records in 4:2, and the first thing he saw was a THRONE. All but very few of the occurrences of the word *thronos* in the Greek Old Testament and the Apocrypha carry overtones of power – governmental and judicial. In modern Britain “throne” is a word much devalued by the powerlessness of the monarch. Not so in the Scripture and as regards the throne of the living God who created all things out of nothing and who (in the person of The Son) “upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). It was the throne of such a GOD of truly absolute power, that John saw when invited up to heaven in the Spirit. The vision in Revelation 4:2 of God on His throne prepares the way for the judgmental character of the book from chapter 6 on.

*the first thing he saw was a THRONE*

Around this throne there were twenty-four other thrones, on which sat twenty-four “elders” (4:,4,5). They are kingly worshippers. Who are these “elders”? Many interpreters regard them as some otherwise unmentioned species of angel. But the uniform usage of the Greek for “elders” in the Septuagint (i.e., Greek Old Testament plus apocrypha) suggests that John’s readers would immediately understand these elders as human. (Nor does the word “elder” as meaning “angel” occur in any of the (translated) pseudepigraphic passages concerning angels cited by Beale on p. 323.<sup>1</sup>) Some surmise that the word “elder” in Isaiah 24:23 refers to angelic beings. But even in this text the mention of Mount Zion and Jerusalem makes earthly elders more probable.

In any case, as regards the identity of the elders, the matter is settled by the proper text of the heavenly song given in 5:9b, 10. The following is based on the NKJV, but amended.

“Worthy you are to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed us [ESV reads “people”] for God from every tribe, and tongue, and people and nation, and you have made them [NKJV reads “us”] kings and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Notice the phrase, “ransomed us”. Beale (p.360), is unambiguous: “external evidence clearly favours the inclusion of *hēmas*” [i.e., “us”]. The living creatures, although they fall down before the Lamb”, are clearly not included in the “us,” for they are not from “every tribe... and nation”. But the elders are “from every tribe... and nation,” and therefore must depict the men and women, boys and girls ransomed by the blood of the Lamb who in that day (see 4:1) will be enthroned before the throne of God. Such is the glory of grace. What a day that will be!

The reason why the ESV and NIV (and other translations) reject the “us” in 9b, and invent words such as “people” and “persons” that are not in the text, is because the text is equally certain that the elders sing, “... made them kings and priests to our God, and they shall reign...” (italics added; cp. Beale, p.360). These translations (and countless commentators) hold that “redeemed us” would clash with the “them” and “they” at the end of the verse, so that either the “they” must give way to the “us”, or *vice versa*. But the two only clash if those who will be kings and priests on the earth

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1 G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation. New International Greek-Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000).

*The elders have knowledge of the mind of God;  
however they are primarily worshippers*

are the same group of people as the enthroned elders who are singing in heaven. If, however, the prospective kings and priests on earth are a different group from the elders; specifically, if they are the “saints” whose prayers the elders bring before the throne (5:8), then the “clash” disappears. Therefore Revelation 5:9 speaks of two groups: (1) the ransomed elders (“us” in 5:9) who sing this song, and (2) the persons (“them”) who shall reign on the earth.

Although the word translated “crown” here (*stephanos*), has a wide range of meaning, the fact that elders sit on thrones indicates that it is here to be understood here as meaning royal crowns. God has made us “kings”, as well as “priests” to Himself (Revelation 1:6; 4:10).

The many occurrences of “elders” in the OT characterise them as men who knew important matters, and who could give sound advice. The idea of “advice” is of course quite out of place here, but the implication of “having knowledge of the governmental purposes of God” is not out of place. God has “made known to us the mystery of His will...” (Ephesians 1:9; cp. 1 Corinthians 2:16). We know (or we ought to know!) His purposes regarding heaven and earth, and where we are located in them. Later one of the “elders” can explain to John what he was seeing (7:13ff). The elders have knowledge of the mind of God; however they are primarily worshippers round the throne. We have much to learn for the present time from what we shall be in that day!

And why twenty-four? The twenty-four are crowned kings, but they are also priestly worshippers (5:8ff). Some think that they comprise the twelve Israelite patriarchs and the twelve apostles, showing that the twenty-four elders comprise both Old and New Testament saints. But in my view Revelation 7:5-8, and 21:10-14 rather speak against this interpretation.<sup>2</sup> The number twenty-four answers to 1 Chronicles 24:7ff and 25:9ff, where,

<sup>2</sup> See T. Balderston, “Heaven on earth: Revelation 21”, *Scripture Truth*, October 2020, pp. 221ff.

respectively, twenty-four courses of priests and twenty-four courses of musicians are listed. Whereas under the Law the “elders of Israel,” as such, never even got inside the tabernacle, in Revelation these elders are priests and musicians (as well as kings) seated before the very throne of God. Why the difference? Because the blood of Christ has been shed (5:9).

Recollecting the “after these things” of Revelation 4:1 (see article in the October, 2022, issue) we realise that what is depicted in 4:2ff does not speak of the heavenly position of believers at this present time in virtue of Christ’s presence there, but rather of the time to come when we will actually be there, having been raised by and made like Christ. The elders do not signify us as we are now; nor do they represent deceased Christians at the present time as enthroned disembodied spirits balancing crowns on their invisible heads! Far from it. Of course we may even now have “boldness for entering the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Hebrews 10:19ff). “But what will it be to be there? The number twenty-four, whatever else it speaks of, speaks of completeness. Whilst we may already worship in the living power of this passage, in itself it speaks of the day, when risen and raptured to heaven, “we shall join in the song of the Lamb.”

The elders are undismayed by the terrifying lightnings, thunderings and voices that constantly issue from the throne of God (4:5). When mentioned at 8:5; 11:19; 16:18 this ensemble of sight and sound seems to proclaim the direct, judgmental prerogative of the throne of God. Presumably it proclaims the same thing here. But the elders’ song in 5:9,10 sets forth the fact that they are beyond the reach of judgment.

Therefore, whereas the priests of Israel cleansed their hands and feet in the water-filled bronze “sea” before ministering to the LORD in the tabernacle or the temple (Exodus 30:17-21), here (Revelation 4:6) the “sea” is crystallised, because everything in heaven will already have been perfectly sanctified by the cross of Christ.

The mysterious, fiery, living creatures before the throne (4:6b; cp. Ezekiel 1:4-14) presumably set forth the “livingness,” awe-fulness, and omniscience of the invisible God. Here they join the elders in proclaiming the holiness of the God whose being is outside of time.

And, as in Isaiah 6:2, the living creatures do this by a statement in the third person (4:8). However when the twenty-four elders magnify and worship the living God they address Him directly (4:11). They have a relationship to

*The worship of God as Creator is the antecedent  
of the worship of God as Redeemer*

Him that living creatures, who publicly set forth the attributes of God, do not have. The elders affirm to the living God His worthiness of all glory, honour, and power, since He, out of eternity (so to speak), created all things, and it is only because of His will that anything exists. This is indeed an awesome thought. It provides a viewpoint from which the whole of Revelation should be read.

Perhaps writer and some readers have a lesson to learn from the elders' worship. We often read 5:8-10 and 12, 13 in relation to our worship. But do we sufficiently read 4:11? Do we worship God by the Spirit on account of His having created all things? The worship of God as Creator is, even for believers with a heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1), the antecedent of the worship of God as Redeemer.

Nothing is directly said in the book of Revelation about how this world, created by God's sovereign will, came to be infiltrated by sin, and thus the object of God's judgment. But the allusion in 22:2ff. to Eden, therefore calling to mind what had caused the way to the tree of Life to be barred, the focus in 2:13; 4; 12:9ff; 13:2; 20:2,7ff on the devil and his defeat, and mention of human complicity in defiance of God (9:20; 12:18), indicate a shared understanding between John and his listeners regarding this matter. Therefore the listeners to John's Revelation would instantly perceive the rightness of 5:1ff. He who sits on the throne has a book, or scroll, in His right hand. It can be concluded that, since the book was fully opened after its seventh seal was snapped (Revelation 8:1), the book's contents are manifested in chapters 6 to 9, and probably later chapters too. Its contents comprise the righteous governmental judgments of God that will herald the appearance of Christ in glory to a world that exists only because of God's will, and yet has defied it.

No-one worthy to open the book was at first found (5:1-4). The living creatures, though no doubt untainted by sin, are not "worthy" it had to be a m(M)an who loosed the seals. Not even the "imputed righteousness"

*Only the One who bore all judgment  
is worthy to execute all judgment*

that had placed the twenty-four elders on heavenly thrones right before the THRONE made them “worthy.” The recipients of unmerited, unlimited grace may one day judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3).. However they themselves are not “worthy” to administer the judgment of Revelation on the earth. The Person alone fit for the task outlined in this book, said prophetically, in Isaiah 63:3, “I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the peoples no-one was with me.”

Who will be worthy, and why? The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, and none other. He has prevailed, and hence was qualified to snap the seals and open the book (4:5). Why so? When John looked to see this Messianic Conqueror, the One whom he saw was, rather, “a Lamb, as though it had been slain” (v. 6). The sacrificial Lamb of Calvary is alone qualified to effectuate God’s righteous dealings with this world. “Only the One who on the cross sinlessly *bore* all judgment to the glory of God is worthy to *execute* all judgment.” Such is God’s holiness; this is the central dynamic of chapters 4 & 5. And, Lamb of Calvary though He be, in that day He will have seven horns (speaking of fulness of power) and seven eyes (speaking of the fulness of the divine moral discernment [cp. Zechariah 3:9]) to both empower and direct His judgments.

Small wonder that thereupon the living creatures and twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb. Though not themselves involved in it, the living creatures have at last seen the absolute moral perfection of the living God in the revelation of the One whom He considers alone worthy to administer His judgment. The elders are awestruck by a realisation beyond what they ever had on earth, not only that their Saviour is the uniquely worthy One to administer God’s judgments in the earth, but also that it is His death for them that finally qualifies Him to do this.

The elders each have, as well as harps, “golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (5:8). So it appears that there will be saints on earth, whose prayers the elders (symbolising the church and already in

heaven) will bring before the throne. From 7:9ff; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24, it appears that these “saints” are a dreadfully persecuted people. But why are the elders needed to present their prayers to the throne? To my knowledge there is no other example in the inspired Scriptures, of either Old- or New-Testament, of human prayer needing such intermediation (contrast Psalm 65:2-4). Hannah’s prayer had needed no intermediation by Eli (1 Samuel 1:9ff). Apocryphal and pseudepigraphical Jewish literature apparently mentions angelic intermediation; but the Bible does not. Penitents can cry directly to God for forgiveness and be heard (Luke 18:13). The idea of deceased, bodiless saints in heaven now assisting the prayers of saints still on earth is a Romanist one, not a Scriptural one – except here. The reason for these earthly saints’ relationship with God being indirect, via the elders, is something we will have wait to find out on that day, I think.

Only one occurrence of “new song” in the Greek Old Testament exactly corresponds to the wording here in 5:9. It occurs in Ps.144:9, a psalm which celebrates the establishment of David’s kingdom and defeat of all his enemies by the mighty, supernatural intervention of God from above. Here the “true David” is Himself the Agent of the almighty judgment of God, and He can so act only because of the mighty sacrifice of Calvary that both saved not only the elders round the throne but also the much-persecuted “saints” on earth.

The correct text for 5:9 is as given earlier in this article. Who, then, are the “them” who “shall reign on the earth”? It is best to search the nearest context for an answer, and, if so, the best candidate seems to be the same “saints” whose prayers are incense in the elders’ golden bowls.

The song then widens into a wording that also admits angels and living creatures – i.e., all created beings in heaven – into an exuberant proclamation of the worthiness of the Lamb to receive a sevenfold endowment of qualities appropriate to true kingship (5:11). The range of singers then widens further to include all creation, heavenly and earthly, now brought into the mighty meaning of Calvary, and so to worship the Lamb as co-equal with Him who sits on the throne.

# An analysis of the Acts of the Apostles

David Anderson

## Introduction

The book of Acts might seem like a rambling meander through incidents in the growth of the early church, but in fact it has a definite method to it. I first became interested in analysing Scripture when I was given *The Outlined Bible*<sup>1</sup> by Robert Lee as a Bible-class prize in 1965. There I learned the author's view that Acts has system and order to it. Lee states that Acts 1:8 is key to the analysis of the book, and consequently divides it into the three areas of witness distinguished in that verse:

1. In Jerusalem, chapters 1 - 7.
2. In all Judea and Samaria, chapters 8 - 9.
3. To the end of the earth, chapters 10 - 28.

Other commentators provide variations on this basic outline. For example, J. Anderson<sup>2</sup> divides Acts into four parts:

1. The ministry of the Risen Christ, 1:1-11.
2. The witness in Jerusalem, 1:12 - 7:60.
3. The witness in Judaea and Samaria, 8:1 - 11:18.
4. The witness to the uttermost part of the Earth, 11:19 - 28:31.

However F. W. Grant<sup>3</sup> recognises four main division that do not exactly follow this principle:

1. The beginning of the church: the call of Israel alone, chapters 1 - 7.
2. Israel rejecting, but the church enlarging, chapters 8 - 12.
3. The proclamation of the mysteries, chapters 13-20.
4. Into the Roman prison, chapters 21 - 28.

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1 Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible* (London, Pickering & Inglis, 1921)..

2 J. Anderson & J.G. Waugh, *What the Bible Teaches: Acts & James* (Ritchie Bible Commentaries Volume 9 Kilmarnock, 2007).

3 *The Numerical Bible*, ed., F.W. Grant, vol.6 Acts-2 Corinthians (New York, Loizeaux Brothers , 7 vols., 2nd edn, 1891)..

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## *The book of Acts has a definite method to it*

And J. N. Darby<sup>4</sup> simply and more generally divides Acts into two parts:

1. The history of the activity of Peter, the apostle to the circumcision.
2. The history of the activity of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

The *Scofield Reference Bible*<sup>5</sup> presents these two parts as:

1. Peter, chs.1-9.
2. Paul, chs.10-28, with chs.11-12 & 15 as transitions to distinguish between law and grace.

However, I recently learned of a literary structural division,<sup>6</sup> which F. F. Bruce in 1977 presented as “brief progress reports”.<sup>7</sup> He regards the verses in question as interruptions to Luke’s narrative which serve to punctuate the history of Acts, but I would call them summary statements of the progress of the gospel:

- “**The word of God** continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many priests became obedient to the faith” (6:7, ESV).
- “So **the church** throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied” (9:31).
- “But **the word of God** increased and multiplied” (12:24).
- “So **the churches** were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily” (16:5).
- “All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. ... So the **word of the Lord** continued to increase and prevail

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<sup>4</sup> J.N. Darby, *Meditations on the Acts of The Apostles. Translated from the Italian* (London, Morrish, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> *The Scofield Reference Bible*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1917).

<sup>6</sup> “Acts: You shall be My Witnesses.” John Lennox seminars, 21 May 2017, Forum of Christian Leaders ([www.foconline.org](http://www.foconline.org)).

<sup>7</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of The Acts*. New London Commentaries, (London, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1977), p.131, note 18.

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*the powerful effect of preaching the gospel is a leading, recurrent theme of the Acts*

mightily” (19:10, 20).

- “[Paul proclaimed] **the kingdom of God** and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance (28:31).

Note the alternating references to the word of God<sup>8</sup> and to the people of God. Bringing these six quotations together in this manner emphasises that the powerful effect of preaching the gospel is a leading, recurrent theme of the Acts. Taken together with other repeated emphases (see below), we obtain a picture of the main themes of this book.

### **Other summary statements in Acts**

It is helpful to remember that Luke does not provide a detailed diary of the spread of the gospel in order to demonstrate the fulfilment of the commission given to the apostles by the Lord. Rather, he gives a précis report of selected preachings during each major campaign or missionary journey. These, too, are followed by “summary statements” of the effects of these proclamations, e.g.:

- “So those who received [Peter’s] word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ... And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (2:41-42...47).
- “Many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand” (4:4).
- “The disciples] were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness. ... And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (4:31 & 33) These verses can be viewed as an overall summary of the first part of Acts.

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<sup>8</sup> On this see too J.S. Blackburn, “The Preaching of the Word”, *Scripture Truth*, Vol.42 (1965-67), pp.97ff, 115ff, 137ff, 145ff.

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- “[I testified] both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Chris.” (20:21), which is Paul’s own review of his preaching, could be similarly seen as a summary of the second part of Acts.

### The content of the gospel messages

These great gospel messages are central to Luke’s account in the book of Acts, and an analysis of them also helps us to spot key themes of the book. Obvious though it may be, we should emphasize that the Lord Jesus is the subject of every preaching, He is presented using His different names and titles, and they would be understood by each audience. Initially, the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea were reminded that He was **Jesus of Nazareth**,<sup>9</sup> whom they had crucified (2:22-23). The **crucified One** became the **Risen One** because God raised Him from the dead<sup>10</sup> and the **Exalted One**, glorified at God’s right hand in heaven (2:33). There God made Him both **Lord and Christ** (2:36): **Lord of all** (10:36) – the One with absolute authority/power.

He is also **Christ** – God’s anointed Man, who is **Head** over everything. Stephen also identified Him as the **Son of Man** (7:56 cp. Matthew 26:64) – the **Administrator** of the world to come (cp. Daniael 7:13-14). Peter and the apostles told the Sanhedrin that God had exalted Jesus as **Leader** and **Saviour**, (5:31); Saviour – in that He rescues us from all (past/present/future) spiritual dangers to which sin has exposed us; **Leader** – in that He is the **Prince/ Author of Life** (3:15) and of faith (Hebrews 12:2) and the **Captain**, or **Founder**, of salvation (Hebrews 2:10).

But the core of the gospel-proclamation of the apostles was that Jesus is the only **Saviour**. “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).<sup>11</sup> When the Jews contradicted Paul’s preaching at Antioch, he turned to the Gentiles, who joyfully received the word of the Lord (13:38-49).

To other Gentiles, Paul first preached about the Creator God, who made

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<sup>9</sup> Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:32; 4:10; 10:40; 13:30 & 37.

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Acts 13:38-39; 15:11; 16:31.

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*Another central theme of Acts  
is the kingdom of God*

the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them (Acts 14:15 & 17:24-28).<sup>12</sup> At Athens this led on to announcing that Jesus is the appointed Judge of the world (17:30-31) – of both the living and the dead (cp.10:42).

### **Proclaiming the kingdom of God**

Another central theme of Acts is the **kingdom of God**, and by studying this theme throughout the book we gain an important insight into it. Luke brackets his entire account with this phrase: opening with the Lord's teaching of it to the disciples, and finishing with Paul's proclamation of it to all who attended his lodging in Rome (1:3 & 28:31).<sup>13</sup> Sometimes Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God to Jewish audiences, telling them how and when the kingdom would be restored to Israel (cp. 1:6 with 3:20-25, 19:8 & 28:23). Other occurrences of "kingdom" concern the rule of God over the lives of believers (Acts 20:25; 28:31). Three other incidents not mentioning the word "kingdom" also come within its range. The first of these is God's instant judgment of Judea's king, Herod Agrippa I, who like his forefathers was an impostor of Israel's true king (12:22ff). The second is the accusation that the apostles "turned the world upside down" by proclaiming that there is a greater king than Caesar, Jesus (17:6-7). Caesar was regarded as a god and the (then) saviour of the world. But the gospel contains the blessed hope of the appearing in glory of our great God and Saviour (Titus 2:13), the world's coming King!<sup>14</sup> And in 17:31, Paul announced that it is Jesus who will "judge the world in righteousness", a feature of Messiah's reign found in the Psalms.<sup>15</sup> (Perhaps this element of the gospel should be resurrected in our preaching to a society which does

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12 Cp. Rev. 14:6-7.

13 The phrase "kingdom of God" occurs in Acts 1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31.

14 Also Revelation 11:15; 12:10; 19:6,15,16.

15 See Pss.9:8; 96:10, 13; 98:9, where "judge" means "to rule or govern the world to come" (cp. Micah 4:2-6).

*Luke often connects acceptance  
of the gospel with baptism*

not know that our planet and its people have a blessed future planned by God!)

### **Responses to the gospel**

Luke also distinguishes a variety of responses to the preaching of the gospel. At Pentecost, people were cut to the heart (i.e., conscience-stricken), and repented (2:37-38). The Sanhedrin were enraged at Stephen's preaching and they ground their teeth at him (7:54). When Paul preached in Athens, some mocked whilst others were interested and wanted to hear more, but some did believe (17:32-34). Tragically Gallio did not concern himself in the least about spiritual matters (18:14-17). Initially Felix's conscience was stirred, but he never came to repentance (24:24-26). Festus reacted by shouting back at Paul (26:24), and king Agrippa became cynical (26:27-30).

### **Results of believing the gospel in Acts**

Luke often connects acceptance of the gospel with baptism. When people believed the gospel, they were baptised and became disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., 6:7, 8:12, 11:21). Their spiritual eyes were opened, and they turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. They received the forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ (26:18). This happened because the unstoppable word of God (or "word of the Lord") spread unhindered and was glorified (6:7; 12:24; 13:48-49; 19:20 cp. 2 Thessalonians 3:1).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Note the emphasis that Luke gives in Acts to the Word: a. The word of the Lord: 8:25; 11:16; 13:44 (ESV, etc.), 48, 49; 15:35,36; 16:32; 19:10, 20. b. The word of God: 4:31; 6:2,7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7, 46; 17:13; 18:11. c. The word: 4:4, 29 (your word); 6:4; 8:4; 10:36, 44; 11:19; 14:25; 16:6; 17:11; 18:5 (ESV, etc.). d. The word of his grace: 14:3; 20:32; and, e, the word of the gospel: 15:7. See also Blackburn as in note 8 above.

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## The early church

Finally, we learn from Luke that all who believed the gospel became members of the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). They met together “in church” (e.g., 2:42; 11:21-26). Throughout every missionary journey of Paul’s many churches were established (16:5). At the end of his first journey, the defeating of the challenge from inside the church to the truth of freedom from Law and of liberty in Christ resulted in the strengthening of Gentile churches (chapter 15). The highlights of Paul’s second journey were his break with the synagogue at Corinth (19:8-10),<sup>17</sup> and the establishment of some of the “epistle-churches”.<sup>18</sup> Luke’s account of Paul’s third journey is dominated by his ministry at Ephesus (chapters.19-20), which brought the spread of the gospel to a suitable climax with the full establishment of Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

In this article I have brought together various suggestions of ways of sectionalising Acts, mainly focussing on identifying various phases in the spread of the gospel. And I have also highlighted certain keywords and topics recurring throughout the book that help us to identify its main themes.

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17 This is developed by his church teaching in 1 Corinthians, specifically: (a) “The church of God...in Corinth...sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1:2). And (b) “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with [Christ’s body]. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” [i.e., both Jews and Gentiles] (12:12-13).

18 Namely, Philippians, Thessalonians, Corinthians. ‘Epistle-churches’ are those which received letters from Paul.

19 See my articles, “The importance of Ephesus in the New Testament. Part 1: Gospel work, Christian doctrine, discipleship”, *Scripture Truth*, October 2012; and “Part 2: Letters to Ephesus from Paul and from the Lord”, *Scripture Truth*, April 2013.

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# Who touched Me?

The Lord had crossed the sea of Galilee, stilling a storm *en route* (Mark 4:37ff), in order to reach a single repulsive man, whom He delivered from his demon-possession. And then He returned to the west bank of the lake (5:1 – 21).

There He was greeted by a prominent citizen, presumably of Capernaum, whose daughter was acutely ill, and was besought by this man to accompany him to his home and lay hands on the little girl for her healing. A great crowd had come together when it was heard that Jesus had returned, and they “thronged Him” (5:24), as He went with the ruler of the synagogue to his house. The streets of Capernaum, or other lakeside town would doubtless be narrow; and both those at the far back would fear losing track of Jesus if He suddenly turned off on to a side street. For this reason, I conjecture they would press closely around Him.

But there was one woman among them who had been ill for twelve years, and no medicine or medical advice of that time had helped her. She was at her wits’ end, for the money she had spent on self-styled healers had eaten up her savings; and none of their remedies had worked. The impression is that she had reached the point of concluding that the only possible help for her was in Jesus.

However it was not trial and error that caused her to seek Jesus’ help. If it had been, she would have made sure that she did things properly. She would have got Jesus on His own, made sure she had His ear, and so on. Instead, having found all else to fail, she had the simple faith that touching Him would suffice. It also had the advantage of sparing her (so she thought) a lot of embarrassment. She could just melt unobtrusively away: non-one else need know.

We should commend her faith that she needed only to touch the edge of His outer clothing. To my knowledge none of the many quack healers of that time demanded so little. We can recollect that the outraged Naaman had said to his henchmen, “Indeed, I said to myself, he [i.e., Elisha the prophet of God] will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place...” (2 Kings 5:11). This woman had more total faith in Jesus: no more than touching His outer garment by the touch of faith was needed!

And indeed that – merely that – healed her (Mark 5:29). If anyone just has the faith that Jesus is their only hope, and forsakes all other hopes, the witness of

this passage is that He will answer our cries for soul-help.

But beware! He will not stop at that, so the lady discovered! Immediately she was healed, Jesus knew that it had happened – that someone needing healing had touched him with the touch of faith. Indeed, He knew who that “someone” was. He did not ask His question in order to find out who had done it. He asked his question simply to force her to own up in front of all the crowd (v.33). The woman could not have the healing she desired remotely, so to speak. She must own up to Him, and before all the crowd, concerning what she had done. Similarly as regards our salvation.

Her reply was, however, not just a simple “I was the one who touched You”. The text says that she told Him “the whole truth”. She told Him, in front of this entire crowd, all about the twelve years’ illness – embarrassing as that would be. But I think that her account must have also involved confession that she was a wrongdoer, a sinner. For she told Him the *whole* truth (5:33).

We can well imagine that Jairus was beside himself with worry as the Lord paused to converse with this lady, and apparently without any regard for the urgency of Jairus’s errand. But God answers prayers in His own time.

And indeed they got to Jairus’s house too late for the girl to be healed. Yet the Lord said to him, “Do not be afraid; only believe.” It is not expressly said, but we surely must conclude, that Jairus received divinely-given faith at that most dreadful of moments. For the young girl was indeed raised from the dead by the Lord’s gentle words, as we too (if we shall have died) will one day be raised from the dead by that very same voice (John 5:28f). A girl was raised from the dead, and her father received saving faith.

Remarkable as the resurrection-miracle was, there was something equally remarkable about that day. Twelve years previously a prominent family in the town had got a baby daughter: what a delight that must have been! However in the same year a woman, whom we might well imagine to have been of much lower social status than Jairus, had developed a nasty, long-term illness (5:25, 42). How sad that must have been! Jairus’s family and the woman had opposite experiences that year. But the paths of the woman and of that family crossed twelve years later, when on the same day Jesus came into both their lives. That surely must have brought them together! So it is with us. How many paths have crossed, that otherwise would never have crossed, because Jesus came into our lives! That’s Christian fellowship!

Soon shall the cup of glory  
Wash down earth's bitterest woes,  
Soon shall the desert brier  
Break into Eden's rose:  
The curse shall change to blessing—  
The name on earth that's bann'd,  
Be graven on the white stone  
In Immanuel's land.

Oh! I am my Beloved's,  
And my Beloved's mine!  
He brings a poor vile sinner  
Into His "house of wine":  
I stand upon His merit,  
I know no other stand,  
Not e'en where glory dwelleth  
In Immanuel's land.

I shall sleep sound in Jesus,  
Fill'd with His likeness rise,  
To live and to adore Him,  
To see Him with these eyes:  
'Tween me and resurrection  
But Paradise doth stand;  
Then—then for glory dwelling  
In Immanuel's land!

# When Angels Sat Down

*When Angels Sat Down* is Gordon Kell's second book of daily devotions. The first book in this series, *Footsteps in the Snow* was well received. Here are some reader reviews:

"Thank you so much for ... your daily posts. What a help and encouragement they have been throughout this challenging year!

"How often the message every morning has been so appropriate to the difficulties which we have been experiencing."

"Thank you for your encouraging and sometimes challenging words... So often, they were just what we needed to hear that day!"

"The ministry the Lord has given you during this past year has drawn us closer to the Lord and to one another."

Some of our customers also bought *Footsteps in the Snow* to give to interested non-Christian friends and contacts.

Like its predecessor, *When Angels Sat Down* is designed to be read day by day over a three-month period. It contains a mixture of self-contained single articles and mini-series on Bible subjects and characters. This makes it an ideal coffee-table publication.

Please pray that *When Angels Sat Down* will prove an encouragement to Christians and in outreach.

It is priced at £8.99 plus postage. To order, please email: [scripturetruth@compuserve.com](mailto:scripturetruth@compuserve.com) or phone (mornings) or write to STP. Details are on the inside of the front cover.

