

# Commentary on Luke Part 14

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In this section of the commentary of Luke, Luke deals with the empty tomb, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the road to Emmaus, Jesus' appearance to the eleven, and the Ascension.

SECTION 8 (continued).

## The Agony On The Mount of Olives (22.39-46).

Jesus now went forward with His disciples to 'the place' (Luke does not mention the Garden of Gethsemane) on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Perhaps Luke intended his readers to gather the implication that it was the place of the olivepress where olives were crushed, as Jesus would now be crushed. Or perhaps his thought was that it was the place from which He had declared coming judgment on Jerusalem (Mark 13.3), and therefore the place where God's judgment on the sins of the world would first begin to be exacted on Him. Or Luke's mind might well have gone back to the promise that one day the Lord Himself would act from the Mount of Olives, 'and His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives' (Zechariah 14.4), just as He was about to act now, so that the word of the Lord might go forth. That event too was linked with the judgment on Jerusalem (Zechariah 14.1-2). The Mount of Olives was alive with history.

And there, he tells us, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus pleaded to be spared from a different cup than that which He had given to His disciples in the Upper Room. This time it was the cup of suffering containing the full mixture of the antipathy of God (the wrath of God) against sin. And there He would disdain the use of earthly swords (22.49-51; Matthew 26.52), and even of heavenly ones (Matthew 26.53). For it is made absolutely clear that His only desire was to do His Father's will. If His Father required it He would go forward alone to meet His destiny, even though the whole of His righteous being did draw back in horror at the very thought of what lay before Him.

## Analysis.

- a He came out, and went, as His custom was, to the mount of Olives, and the disciples also followed Him. And when He was at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you enter not into temptation" (39-40).
- b And He was parted from them about a stone's throw, and He kneeled down and prayed (41).
- c Saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from Me, nevertheless not my will, but yours be done" (42).
- d And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him (43).
- c And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down on the ground (44).
- b And when He rose up from His prayer, He came to the disciples, and found them sleeping for sorrow (45).
- a And said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, that you enter not into temptation" (46).

Note that in 'a' He warns them to pray and not enter into temptation and in the parallel He does the same. In 'b' He kneels down to pray, and in the parallel He rises from praying. In 'c' He prays in clear urgency to His Father because of the cost that lies ahead, and in the parallel the full measure of that earnestness and cost is revealed. And centrally, and importantly, in 'd' He is strengthened by an angel from Heaven. Satan is not the only spirit involved in this

cosmic struggle.

(If verses 43-44 are omitted (see below) then 'c' becomes the central thought, which with its emphasis on doing the will of God may be seen as equally appropriate).

**22.39-40 'And he came out, and went, as his custom was, to the mount of Olives, and the disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said to them, "Pray that you enter not into temptation."'**

Luke has learned from his sources that it was Jesus' custom regularly to go to the Mount of Olives (compare also 21.37). This was why Judas was confident that he knew where He would be (compare John 18.2). And yet Jesus, knowing this, and knowing Judas' intention, went there without a moment's hesitation. He was no longer trying to prevent Judas knowing of His whereabouts. He knew that it was His hour.

And 'the disciples also followed Him'. There is a poignancy to this last phrase, for, although they did not realise it at the time, it was the last time that they would be able to walk with Him and follow Him. For in what now lay ahead they would be unable to follow Him. He would have to walk the coming path alone. And after tonight He would no longer be present with them in the flesh. The days of daily fellowship with Him were over.

'The place.' This might indicate their encampment, but we could equally argue that it means 'the place' fixed in all Christian minds, the place of His final testing before the end, the place where His mind and heart were steeled as He went forward to face His destiny. The place is not named by Luke. He does not want to divert attention from what will happen there, and from the fact that this was the Mount of Destiny (Zechariah 14.4-5; Mark 13.3).

"Pray that you enter not into temptation." Once they were at 'the place' Jesus once more warned the disciples against the inevitable temptation and testing that was coming, and exhorted them to pray so that they would not find themselves enmeshed in it. His words should have been a danger signal to them, for He had never addressed them in quite this way previously. His unusual warning should therefore have brought home to them that they must pray as they had never prayed before.

For He was aware, as they should have been had they heeded His earlier warnings, that He and they were now involved on a spiritual battlefield such as they had never previously experienced. He knew that His trials and temptations, in which they had shared (22.28), were not only continuing but expanding. This was why He was exhorting them to pray. And His very exhortation, for He had never spoken in quite this way before, should have warned them that the matter was serious.

However, had all depended on their prayer alone the battle would have been totally lost, for after a while they could not keep awake, and slept. It is salutary to consider the possibility that had Peter not slept instead of praying, he might perhaps not have denied Jesus, and had the disciples not slept perhaps they might not have fled so precipitously. But all did sleep, and therefore they were of no help in what was to come, either to Jesus or to themselves.

Matthew and Mark have Jesus giving a similar exhortation to the three. In fact we can hardly doubt that He urged it on both the twelve and the three. It was that kind of situation.

The inference of His words here is that He too was facing up to severe temptation. And when they saw Him go on ahead and sink to His knees in prayer they could hardly have been in any doubt on the matter. Furthermore what they heard of His prayer would have confirmed it. For it made clear that He was facing the 'temptation', if only another way could be found that could conform with the Father's will, not to walk the road that appeared to have been appointed by His Father. In His humanity what lay ahead appeared so awful that He questioned whether there might be another way. And yet in the face of the awfulness of what lay before Him there was not a moments hesitation about doing His Father's will (see

Hebrews 10.7, 9-10). His only query was as to whether there might be another way.

22.41 'And he was parted from them about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and prayed,' Then He left them, (again exhorting them to prayer as we learn from Mark 14.34 ) and moved a short distance from them and Himself knelt in prayer. As it was customary for Jewish men to pray standing, this attitude of prayer indicated the weight of the burden on Jesus' heart. Elsewhere such praying on the knees takes place at times of great emotion (Acts 7.60; 9.40; 20.36; 21.5). Here then too was evidence of the urgency of the hour and of His willing and dedicated submission.

While some have read into the verb a certain urgency, it can simply refer to being separated from someone. The point is that He wanted to be alone, while at the same time enjoying (He hoped) the support of His disciples.

22.42 'Saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless what I want, but your will be done." '

Jesus then addressed His 'Father'. Writing to Gentiles Luke does not use the Aramaic 'Abba' used by Mark, but only the Greek 'pater'. But note that He begins by subjecting His prayer to the will of the Father. The fact that He is speaking to His Father does not lessen the importance of His Father's will. It rather enhances it. We too are permitted to approach Him as 'Our Father in Heaven. But with us also this does not lessen our responsibility to do His will. It rather underlines it.

'Remove this cup from me.' Here Jesus had in mind the cup of the Lord's 'anger', the cup of the righteous wrath (or antipathy) of God against sin, the cup of which He had to drink to the full. Others had drunk of such a cup before, but in the past such a cup had always been taken out of the hand of His people by God, once He felt that they had drunk enough (Isaiah 51.22). And Jesus clearly hoped that this might also be possible for Him. But while the awfulness of what lay before Him made Him shrink from it, He immediately made His request conditional on the Father's will. For while He shrank from what was in the cup, He would not shrink from the will of God, even if that involved, as it did, the drinking of that cup to the full.

This prayer reminds us again that Jesus had come as one who was truly human, for His words make clear the battle raging within Him. As One Who was holy, and uniquely separated to, and aware of, His Father, and to Whom sin was abhorrent, and to Whom death was a contradiction to all that He was as the Lord of life, He saw before Him the cup of suffering, and forsakenness, and death and His whole being cried out against it. For it not only contained within it for Him an intensity of suffering such as no other man could ever have known, (for they have been involved in sin and death all their lives), but also the personal experience of the antipathy of God (wrath) against sin. This last especially must have torn at the very depths of His righteous and obedient heart.

For these ideas as connected with drinking from a cup see Psalm 11.6; 75.8; Isaiah 51.17; Jeremiah 25.15, 17, 28; Lamentations 4.21; Ezekiel 23.31-34; Habakkuk 2.16 see also Revelation 14.10; 16.19; 18.6. Psalm 75.8 expresses it most vividly, 'For in the hand of YHWH there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture, and He pours out of the same.' It was the mixture of His terrible judgments on sin, 'the wine of the wrath of God poured unmixed into the cup of His anger' (Revelation 14.10) and Jesus would have to drink it to the last drop. A similar cup had been the portion of Jerusalem in the midst of the passages about the coming Servant of the Lord. It was a cup which they would truly drink again around thirty or so years later (Isaiah 51.17).

If we support here the shorter text, and the probability is that we should, while not necessarily doubting that the longer text is based on a valid tradition (or even on a Lucan revision), then this prayer is central in the chiasmus. This is what the agony on the Mount of Olives was all

about. We can compare here the words in Hebrews 5.7, 'Who in the days of His flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him Who was able to save Him out of death, and was heard for His godly fear'. He shrank from the cup of the antipathy of God against sin, but in the end was willing to drink it to the full. No wonder that He would later feel forsaken. But how then was His prayer heard? By the sustenance given to Him in His manhood to carry it through. For in His godly fear He was strengthened and sustained.

'Nevertheless not my will, but yours be done.' Even in His extremity Jesus was concerned more than all else in the will of the Father being done. Jesus was here perfectly exemplifying the prayer that He had taught to His disciples (Matthew 6.10; see also Matthew 26.42). Whatever it involved it was God's will that was to be the final arbiter. And it was through this obedience that He would prove Himself to be a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world (Hebrews 10.5-10). He went, not under the compulsion of another, not even of His Father, but as a willing and voluntary sacrifice. The question had been asked long before, "But where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And the answer had been given, "God will Himself provide the lamb for a burnt offering" (see Genesis 22.7-8). And now here He was as the Father's provision.

22.43-44 'And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him, and being in an agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down on the ground.'

The greatness of Jesus' struggle against the horror that faced Him comes out in these words. On the one hand was the need of an angel to strengthen Him bodily in His humanness (compare Mark 1.13; Matthew 4.11; and see 26.53). On the other was the physical effect caused by His struggle, His 'agony' caused by His awareness of what He was facing, an agony in which He was aware of far more suffering than the cross could ever bring. His prayers became more earnest until He, as it were, sweated blood. What this last indicates it is futile for us to consider in too much detail. Possibly Luke saw in the great drops of sweat the blood that would shortly replace them. Possibly it is highly figurative. Or perhaps, as it can in moments of great stress, blood did mingle with the sweat that flowed from the pores of His skin. But all that we really need to recognise is that the description was intended to bring out the torture of His soul. And it is important that we do recognise that. It would have been so easy to think of Jesus as sailing through all His trials without a problem had it not been for this experience. We would have underestimated it. Here we learn that having been made man, it was as a man that He faced His destiny. He was being tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without sin (Hebrews 4.15). In His inward struggles He did not call on His supernatural powers, for it was as Man that He had to overcome.

These two verses are lacking in a large number of good manuscripts and witnesses (p75; B; corrected Aleph; A; T; W; f13; etc.). The early date and widespread nature of these witnesses indicate that the words were quite possibly not there in the original manuscript, although Epiphanius (4th century AD) among others argues that in fact the verses were omitted for doctrinal reasons early on, and we can certainly see why it might be so. They may well have been seen as too 'human' for the glorified Jesus.

However, the widespread nature of the evidence for omitting them cannot be seen as supporting this argument. Such a large scale decision to omit them would hardly have been feasible once manuscripts were widely spread. Nevertheless evidence for their inclusion is also fairly strong (Aleph; D; L; X; Gamma; Delta; Theta; Psai; f1 etc.), and even more so as the words were known to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tatian and Hippolytus. All this therefore emphasises that the inclusion, if it be such, was very ancient and also widespread, and it suggests therefore that the words were inserted very early on, because of well remembered eyewitness testimony, even possibly having been added later by Luke after the first copies of his manuscript had gone out, on someone who read his Gospel informing him quietly of what

had been omitted. They serve to bring out the cosmic nature of the struggle which was taking place, and its resulting intensity. And this intensity is especially brought out by the need for Him to be strengthened *beforehand* in preparation for it, rather than at the end as in Matthew 4.11; Mark 1.13. Here then there is the reversal of the usual process (a typical Lucan chiasmus?).

22.45 ‘And when he rose up from his prayer, he came to the disciples, and found them sleeping for sorrow,’

On returning to His disciples after His bitter struggle He discovered that they had failed to maintain their watch. Once again He suffered the bitterness of seeing and experiencing the failure of His friends. No wonder that He had some doubts as to whether they were yet ready for the task that lay ahead. But the contrast with their forward going outlook in Acts is deliberate. Without the dynamic and impetus of the Holy Spirit they could but fail when such mighty forces were at work. Fortunately for them, however, they were in the hand of God, and were being prayed for by the Great Intercessor, and so their failure was ameliorated.

‘Sleeping for sorrow.’ Possibly being overcome by having watched His agony and unable to bear it any longer, and because they were bewildered at what was happening, something which was beyond their ability to comprehend. Possibly they had been discussing His words about His coming betrayal among themselves and had become very apprehensive as they recognised that Jesus must have some reason for being here, a reason which they may well have seen as linked with the dark hints that He had been dropping previously, and especially on that very night. And perhaps their thoughts had been too much for them after the strenuous week that they had had (even though it was no more strenuous than His). For the idea of the sorrow that was afflicting the disciples, even in their partial ignorance, see John 16.6, 20-22; Mark 14.19. It had been enough to drive them to exhaustion.

22.46 ‘And said to them, “Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, that you enter not into temptation.” ’

How conscious Jesus was of the problems of the hour, and how unconscious they were of the same, otherwise they would have remained awake as He did. So Jesus now stirred them again to rise and pray in order to fortify them against temptation. He knew how much they were going to need it. For only through prayer would they come through what lay ahead.

While Luke does not previously give us the full detail of the disciples’ failure, (he wanted our concentration to be on Jesus’ submission to the will of God), these very words bring out that their failure has been deeper than at first appears here. For this last injunction would otherwise have had little point now that their time to pray seemed to have passed, (although they would certainly shortly need much prayer). The words rather look back to what they should have been doing while He prayed. And they are no doubt also intended by Luke to be seen as His words to us, and to all men. We too must not sleep, but must rise and pray, for testing lies ahead for us all.

#### The Approach Of Judas. Physical Swords Are Not Enough (22.47-53).

Having finally satisfied Himself that the way ahead was in accordance with His Father’s will Jesus awaited His fate with equanimity. The battle having been fought and won in His mind and heart from this time on He goes forward without a moment’s hesitation. And in all His suffering we are made aware that He was in control. This passage deals very briefly with what happened in the Garden on the Mount of Olives. He was not taken by surprise to see Judas leading a party of Temple police towards Him, accompanied to the rear by a Roman cohort, who had presumably been warned of how dangerous this man was, with His band of bloodthirsty insurrectionists, whom they were coming to seize. The Roman cohort was therefore no doubt surprised when Judas stepped forward and kissed Him. It would not quite tie in with what they had almost certainly been told about this fearsome desperado.

But the disciples must have watched, unbelievably. They could understand the arrival of Judas, but why with this great crowd of people? And then the kiss and what followed betrayed all. It especially emphasised Judas' hardness of heart. How many men could have carried such a thing through, or even have considered arranging it? And most significantly it revealed to all who saw it that Jesus really was no threat, and that Judas knew that Jesus would not respond violently.

But it was different with ever impulsive Peter, and when he woke up to what was happening, he drew his sword ready to defend his Master with his life. It was a foolhardy act, for even though he was probably not yet aware of the composition of the approaching crowd, they only had two swords between them. And what were they against so many? But Peter, ever precipitate, did not consider the consequences, and striking out wildly, took off the ear of a servant of the High Priest, who no doubt saw the blow coming and dodged, but not quickly enough. Peter was no doubt still feeling rankled about Jesus' warning that he would deny Him. But Jesus immediately told him to put his sword away, and restored to the man his ear. He did not want the disciples arrested as well. Nor did He want His own case to be marred by accusations of violence, and 'resisting arrest'.

Then He rebuked His opponents for their hypocrisy, and for this great show which He knew was only in order to impress the Romans and convince them that He really was a political danger. For all knew what He was. They had seen Him daily preaching in the Temple.

- a While He yet spoke, behold, a large group, and He who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and he drew near to Jesus to kiss Him (47).
- b But Jesus said to him, "Judas, do you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" (48).
- c And when those who were about Him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" (49).
- d And a certain one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his right ear (50).
- c But Jesus answered and said, "Allow them to go thus far." And He touched his ear, and healed him (51).
- b And Jesus said to the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and elders, who were come against him, "Are you come out, as against a robber, with swords and staves?" (52).
- a "When I was daily with you in the temple, you did not stretch forth your hands against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (53).

Note that in 'a' treachery is revealed against Him, and in the parallel there is similar treachery. In 'b' the treacherous one is questioned, and in the parallel the other treacherous ones are questioned. In 'c' His disciples asks what they should do, and in the parallel Jesus tells them. And centrally in 'd' one of His disciples cuts off the High Priest's ear. Was this seen by Luke as symbolic of the deafness of the Jewish leaders to His message?

22.47 'While he yet spoke, behold, a crowd, and he who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and he drew near to Jesus to kiss him.'

Note how Luke brings out the idea of suddenness, and the unexpectedness of such a crowd ('behold, a crowd'). One moment Jesus was quietly speaking to His disciples in the darkness about their need to pray, and the next thing that happened was that out of the darkness came this great crowd of people carrying torches. And the torches revealed that amongst them was Judas, leading the way and coming to carry out his mission. As he advanced on them it was no surprise to Jesus. He had been expecting it. But the disciples were no doubt both bewildered and confused. What was Judas doing bringing such a crowd here at night?

'He who was called Judas.' The reference brings out that at the time of writing he was a has-been. He was now long forgotten, a distant memory, for the twelve had been made up by the

**inclusion of Matthias.**

**‘One of the twelve.’** The phrase has a foreboding sound. This man had been one of the chosen few. Jesus’ own familiar friend was lifting up his heel against Him. And by his action he was forfeiting his destiny.

**What happened next may possibly have even surprised Jesus. For Judas had had to find some way of indicating which man they should arrest in the darkness. And the way he had chosen brought out just how hardened he had become. Indeed we cannot even feel pity for a man like this, for it indicates that he must have been callous through and through. For he betrayed Jesus with a kiss of friendship, a kiss which may well have been given deliberately in order to disarm Jesus’ companions, and which he had given from other motives in better days. To believe Judas guilty of betrayal would have been almost unbelievable. But to think that he would do it with a kiss of seeming friendship would have been seen as absolutely impossible.**

**‘He drew near to Jesus to kiss him.’** As his intention to kiss Him would not have been known had he not actually made the attempt, (he would hardly have walked up with his lips pursed), the assumption must be that he did kiss him. Thus the suggestion that he did not go through with it is not tenable. He drew near with the aim of kissing Him, and he did. A parallel example of betrayal and hypocrisy is found in 2 Samuel 20.9. For other examples of non-genuine kisses compare Genesis 27.26-27; 2 Samuel 15.5; Proverbs 7.13. The kiss was usually an attempt to show friendliness or win favour. In betrayal it was infamous, and accentuated the betrayal.

**The purpose of the kiss was undoubtedly identification. All knew how dangerous it would be if they arrested the wrong person in the darkness with the result that the information of what they had intended to do then filtered through to the Galileans present in Jerusalem with Jesus still free. The consequences were unthinkable. And such a mistake would have been so easy to make. In the darkness one beard is much like another.**

**22.48 ‘But Jesus said to him, “Judas, do you betray the Son of man with a kiss?” ’**

**Jesus, however, knew better what was happening, and He responded by looking Judas firmly in the eye and asking him whether he really felt that such infamy could be justified. Surely even he must recognise that any other way would have been better than this? Did he not think that it portrayed a callousness which was extreme, even for him?**

**For while, once we think about it, his perfidy went along with Judas’ presence, seemingly without a qualm, at Jesus’ own Table, and with his ability to partake in the bread and wine, and receive the sop of friendship, as though he was one with them all. And it went along with his pretended surprise in the Upper Room that anyone should betray Jesus, (which he no doubt must have expressed in order to cover himself). Nevertheless the utter heartlessness that lay behind it cannot be overlooked. This was the mark of a man without a speck of decency, and it revealed, as little else could have done, what kind of a man he really was. It removes from our minds any suggestion that there was anything perversely noble about what he was doing. He was demonstrating that he was rotten to the core.**

**“Judas, do you betray the Son of man with a kiss?”** The mention of Judas’ name as though he were a friend stresses that Jesus was both hurt and at the same time seeking to somehow reach his heart, even though it was now a little too late. It was both a reproach and a plea. And His reference again to ‘the Son of Man’ in this context (see 22.22) emphasises that the use of the title is deliberate. In Daniel 7 also ‘the son of man’ had been betrayed. But there at least it had been by the beasts, although no doubt with the assistance of traitors, but surely not by a friend? Was he aware that thereby he was betraying the whole suffering nation, and to all outward appearances removing their hope? It was a desperate attempt by Jesus at offering him a kind of redemption.

**22.49 ‘And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we smite with the sword?” ’**

After a few moments of total bewilderment those who were with Jesus caught on to what was about to happen, and turning to Jesus they asked whether they should act to defend Him, so that He could slip away while they engaged His opponents. Were they to use what swords they had? The question was really rhetorical. It expressed their intention rather than a suggestion, for speed was of the essence, although it deferred to the fact that Jesus was their leader. In the darkness it is quite possible that they did not realise immediately that this was an official arresting party, headed by the Temple police and supported by a Roman cohort, and thought that it was a band of thugs and would be assassins (which, of course, it actually was).

**22.50 ‘And a certain one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his right ear.’**

So one more impulsive than the rest did show the way, and immediately drawing his sword, and lashing out in the amateurish fashion of a man not used to swords, cut the right ear off the servant of the High Priest (the man clearly dodged to the left in order to avoid a swinging amateurish blow by the right handed Peter). It is a suggestion that gives such an absurd picture that it must be true. An inventor would have suggested something much more effective, especially as a healing was to follow. We learn later from John that it was impetuous Peter who did it, and no one would have wanted to make a fool of Peter like that.

But no one who knew the disciples would ever have doubted that such an action was that of Peter. With Peter present who else could it have been? It was typical of the man. The anonymity preserved in the first three Gospels was probably in order to safeguard Peter while he was alive. It would not have done him any good for it to be known to the authorities what he had done in the face of an arrest party supported by Rome.

To lose an ear like that would have been a huge blow to a servant of the High Priest. The man would now be classed as mutilated and would no longer be able to take part officially in Temple worship. And furthermore, to disable the official representative of the High Priest was equivalent to treason. So matters had suddenly become very tricky. The truth is that the whole group could well have been arrested as a result. For a moment all was tension.

**22.51 ‘But Jesus answered and said, “Allow them to go thus far.” And he touched his ear, and healed him.’**

But Jesus stepped in on the side of the law and commanded that there be no interference with His arrest. It was after all something that they had a right to do if only they had gone about it in the correct manner. This far they must be allowed to go. And He reached out and touched the man’s ear, which was probably hanging there limply, possibly on a sliver of flesh. The result was complete healing. This would ease the situation as the sight of a wounded and bleeding man must probably have caused the Roman chiliarch to take more widespread action if he had seen it when he came up. It would have made the situation appear more immediately serious.

**22.52 ‘And Jesus said to the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and elders, who were come against him, “Are you come out, as against a robber, with swords and staves?”**

The party in front seemingly consisted of the leaders of the Jews and the Temple police led by the Temple captains, and Jesus now spoke to them sternly. He pointed out that they were clearly in the wrong in what they were doing. As they well knew there was absolutely no reason why they had needed to come out against Him in this kind of armed force, as though He was a violent brigand, when He had never tried to avoid them and had daily preached openly in the Temple. It simply revealed their guilt and hypocrisy.

Some have expressed surprise at the presence of the chief priests, but it is probable that the

chief priests had had to accompany the party in order to ensure the support of the Roman cohort (John 18.8). To justify the use of the latter the situation had to be revealed as very important. Roman cohorts did not just turn out for anyone. They would not have wanted to accompany what was simply an attachment of Temple police carrying out a simple arrest, and would have left them to do their own dirty work. But the chief priests and the lay aristocrats, knowing what they had in mind for Jesus, had constrained Pilate by their very presence that the matter was very important. It would have required such an impressive party to make him act. If the chief priests involved themselves it must have been important (not that he had much opinion of them). Mark tells us that Scribes were also there, but they were here not pushing themselves forward. They wanted to be in at the death but they did not want the blame to redound on them, and it was the Temple authorities who had power of arrest. But all without exception were acting disgracefully.

22.53 “When I was daily with you in the temple, you did not stretch forth your hands against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” ’

Jesus then turned to them and asked them why, if they had wanted so badly to arrest Him, they had they not done it openly while He was preaching in the Temple? They were responsible for the Temple, were they not? And yet they had made no attempt to stretch forth their hands against Him there. It made it quite clear then that they were behaving surreptitiously, and that they were afraid of what people would have said if they knew of it. Indeed the very hour that they had chosen revealed their villainous intent, and demonstrated that they were in league with ‘the power of darkness’. But it was not surprising. It was ‘their hour’ because that is the kind of people they were, dishonest and unscrupulous. No other types of people would have operated at such an hour. By it they were revealing the truth about themselves.

For the phrase ‘the power of darkness’ compare Colossians 1.13. It represented the Tyranny of Darkness in contrast with the Kingly Rule of God. He was thus pointing out that they were behaving like men of darkness, slaves of darkness, men who operated away from the light because their deeds were evil (John 3.19-20), men who avoided the light of God. They were doing the work of the Evil One (compare Acts 26.18) under whose rule they were proving themselves to be. They were demonstrating under whose kingly rule they were.

The point that Jesus was making was in fact very important and probably partly intended to make clear to the Roman chiliarch that all this talk about Him being a dangerous insurrectionist was a lot or nonsense. Dangerous insurrectionists do not attend the Temple every day preaching, unless they are teaching subversion, and if He had been doing that they would have arrested Him themselves. Let him judge then who were the dangerous subversives. Jesus was probably also defending the actions of His disciples. He wanted it to be realised that had the arrest been carried out properly there would have been no violence. We must remember that He was concerned that His disciples should not be arrested with Him (John 18.8).

#### Jesus Is Brought To The High Priest’s House Where Peter Denies Him Three Times (22.54-62).

Jesus’ actual arrest had been by the Temple guard, and He was now taken to the High Priest’s house, (which would have been a very large house built around a central courtyard), in order to prepare the case against Him. His being taken there demonstrates that the Romans (only mentioned by John) had only been present in case of trouble, although their presence would be necessary for an arrest of this nature, for they wanted to accuse Him of capital crimes. They wanted His sentence to be political.

Both Annas (the ‘retired’ High Priest, but still acknowledged by the people as High Priest. Scripturally High Priests were High Priests for life) and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, the current

High Priest appointed by the Romans, would each have a suite of apartments there, for it was the family residence. The pattern that would now follow would be complicated, and it is quite clear that for any writer to seek to include all that happened would have unnecessarily used up valuable writing space that could be better used for other purposes, and would have meant needless repetition. For much of what went on during the night had to be repeated again before the full Sanhedrin, who had to be convinced that Jesus was getting a reasonably fair trial. Luke especially at this stage must have been conscious of running out of space, for there were limits as to how long a scroll could reasonably be, and how much could be recorded on it. And he chose therefore only to record brief but essential details of the official hearing. Possibly this was partly because he was aware of what Mark had already dealt with. Fortunately for the historian, however, Matthew and Mark were more concerned with the hearing before Caiaphas, and John, aware of the gaps, tells us about Annas, so that we can build up a fairly full picture.

The approaches of the writers actually brings out an interesting point from our point of view. Each of them selects from the material and describes three hearings. To each of them three would be seen as indicating to the readers the completeness of the what He underwent. More than three would simply be to overload the narrative.

The night, however, appears to have gone as follows:

- First Jesus would be interviewed in private by a small group led by the wily old Annas, former High Priest and father-in-law of Caiaphas the present High Priest, so as to question him and work out what charges to lay against Him (John 18.13, 19-24). Annas was both astute and experienced, and it was probably hoped that he would be able to get some damaging admissions from Him and work out some charges that could be successfully laid against Him before the Sanhedrin. He reveals something of what he was when he allowed Jesus to be smitten without protest. But in the end, recognising that he had failed to achieve his object, he then sent him to Caiaphas to see whether with the help of the influential people he had gathered they could either overawe Jesus, or in some way trip Him up.
- While this preliminary hearing was going on an inner group of influential illwishers connected with the Sanhedrin were being gathered together by Caiaphas at his house in order to prepare for the trial in the morning, and if necessary, to iron out the case against Him. These would then examine Him further (Mark 14.53-65; Matthew 26.57-68), and this would clarify in their own minds what tack they should take before the Sanhedrin in the morning. It was important that they build up a case which would stand examination. Thus they sought to discover reliable witnesses, and find a charge that would stick. All knew that legally no sentence of death could officially be passed at night. If the matter was to stand up to examination afterwards, the full Sanhedrin would have to be brought together in its official meeting place in the morning in order to pass sentence. But it was necessary for the case to be cut and dried before then so that once morning came there would be no delay.
- When light did come there was then a meeting of the full official Sanhedrin (22.66-71; Mark 15.1; Matthew 27.1) at their official meeting place. Only they could actually come to an official conclusion on a serious matter like the condemnation of a false prophet. And all knew that some of the members of the Sanhedrin might be difficult to convince. They were not all enemies of Jesus. So the case had to be as cast iron as the accusers could make it. Indeed we learn later that the vote was not unanimous (23.51).
- Once their 'verdict' had been reached He would then be handed over to Pilate, because they wanted Him condemned by the Romans for a political crime so that they themselves would not become even more unpopular with the people. In the end Pilate was the only one who could sentence Him to death for political crimes. Luke also includes within this hearing the consultation before Herod. But that was in no sense a

trial. Indeed the only real trial that resulted in the passing of a sentence was that before Pilate.

Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke only deals with the final and most important Jewish tribunal. This was the one recognised by the Romans which passed the official verdict, and which would provide the basis of the charge brought before Pilate. And that particular hearing occurred after the incident that follows.

For meanwhile, along with another disciple, Peter had followed the arresting party and now found himself in the courtyard of the house warming himself at a fire while the first of the above examinations was going on. In one chiasmus (see the opening of Section 8) this passage parallels that of Jesus' earlier warning to him about his denial, in another it parallels and contrasts with Judas' betrayal. But it appears that Peter himself had temporarily forgotten Jesus' warning in the face of the urgency of the situation in which he found himself. This account will highlight four things, firstly Peter's own weaknesses, secondly the supreme courage, confidence, openness and strength of Jesus which is in stark contrast with them (He had steadfastly prayed and Peter had not), thirdly the amazing foresight of Jesus concerning what Peter would do, and fourthly the way in which God sometimes allows His own to fail, so that He might finally make them strong.

#### Analysis.

- a They seized Him, and led Him away, and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed afar off (54).
- b And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the court, and had sat down together, Peter sat in the midst of them (55).
- c And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire, and looking steadfastly at him, said, "This man also was with Him" (56).
- d But he denied, saying, "Woman, I know Him not" (57).
- c And after a little while another saw him, and said, "You also are one of them" (58a).
- d But Peter said, "Man, I am not" (58b)
- c And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying, "Of a truth this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean" (59).
- d But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying." And immediately, while he yet spoke, the cock crew' (60).
- b And the Lord turned, and looked on Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the cock crow this day you will deny Me three times" (61).
- a And he went out, and wept bitterly (62).

Note that in 'a' Peter followed afar off, and in the parallel he went out and wept bitterly. In 'b' he settled down together with Jesus' enemies, and in the parallel Jesus turned and looked on Peter. In each of 'c' there comes an accusation, and in each 'd' we have Peter's reply. These threesomes are the central part in the passage (The three questions and answers could thus be seen as one central item. The pattern is paralleled elsewhere in Scripture, see especially our commentary on Numbers 22-24 for examples).

22.54 'And they seized him, and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed afar off.'

So Jesus was arrested on the Mount of Olives and led away, and was brought to the house of the High Priest. The disciples meanwhile had scattered. Jesus had forbidden resistance and they wanted to avoid arrest. But Peter, determined not to let Jesus down, and so that he could prove his loyalty, did not go far, and when the arresting party moved off, he followed them at a distance (accompanied, we learn in John 18.15, by another disciple, which was probably John himself).

**‘Peter followed afar off.’ It would not have been wise to do anything else, but Luke’s words may well be intended to include the thought that Peter’s heart was not as it should have been. They are a warning to his readers lest they too ‘follow afar off’.**

**22.55 ‘And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the court, and had sat down together, Peter sat in the midst of them.’**

**Introduced into the courtyard of the house by the other disciple, who was known in those circles, Peter found himself surrounded by people who were no doubt discussing the arrest, and who were also no doubt mainly unsympathetic. Few, if any, would be Galileans.**

**Now up to this point in time, while there was still some action to take, Peter’s courage had remained relatively firm. For his impulsive courage, the kind that wins medals of honour, was well up to such situations. But now as he looked around him in the semi-darkness, and realised that any one of those who were gathered there would be only too pleased to betray him to the guards if they knew who he was, a deep apprehension began to take hold of him. He was not so good at patient endurance.**

**And yet he felt that he had to remain quietly there and wait to see what would happen next, for he would not totally desert his Master. Thus he also had the courage for a decision like that. But the problem was that he was not a man who liked inaction, and the result was that the situation began to chafe him so that he became very uneasy, and then even frightened. And it was now, with nothing else taking up his thoughts, that the truth about the whole situation was beginning to come home to him. It was enough to try the strongest of men. Thus the longer he waited the more apprehensive he became. Every shadow began to appear like an arresting soldier, every voice a potential accuser, and he soon realised that if he was to escape with his liberty he would have to avoid being noticed. He was discovering what Jesus had meant when He had said, ‘You are those who have accompanied me in my temptations’ (verse 28, compare verse 46). And at that stage he was not happy about it.**

**And behind it all we must remember the sinister figure of Satan, ‘sifting him as wheat’ (verse 31). So in the darkness he was also experiencing the power of darkness. And he did not have the resilience and strength of his Master. Nor was he fortified, as he should have been, by the prayer in which he should previously have engaged.**

**22.56 ‘And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire, and looking steadfastly at him, said, “This man also was with him.”’**

**Thus when a maid who saw him in the light of the fire, unexpectedly stared at him and then pointed him out to those around as a companion of the accused man, his nerve broke, and the result was that, panic-stricken, he reacted with an immediate lie.**

**22.57 ‘But he denied, saying, “Woman, I know him not.” ’**

**Looking the woman straight in the eye he declared that what she had said was not true, and that the real truth was that he did not know the man at all. She was quite mistaken.**

**22.58 ‘And after a little while another saw him, and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” ’**

**A short time later a man looked at him and said, “You are one of them.” His panic then grew worse and he said fiercely, “Man, I am not.” How he wished then that he was anywhere but where he was. And yet he was still brave enough to remain there. He probably argued to himself that his reaction had been justified.**

**(Mark tells us that it was the maid who had again insisted to those who stood by that Peter was a follower of Jesus. Thus this man, who spoke directly to Peter, must clearly have been one who took her up on her words and actually made the accusation to him. Here Luke is following his other source, whether oral or written. In a crowded courtyard, where there was**

much interest in the subject, any comments would naturally be taken up by others, and she had already challenged him once. In the face of his vehement denial she would hesitate about doing it again.).

**22.59** ‘And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying, “Of a truth this man also was with him, for he is a Galilaeen.” ’

Another hour passed and then yet a third person pointed him out, and speaking confidently indicated that he was a Galilean (his accent had given him away - Matthew 26.73), and must therefore have been with Jesus. If not, why else was he here? Peter’s nerves were now strained to bursting point. Would these challenges never end?

**22.60** ‘But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are saying.” And immediately, while he yet spoke, the cock crew.’

So, at the end of his tether, Peter cried out vehemently, “I don’t know what you are talking about.” And then he heard the cock crow.

**22.61** ‘And the Lord turned, and looked on Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crow this day you will deny me three times.” ’

And at that moment he became aware of Jesus, possibly at this point being led through the courtyard from one trial to another. And as his eyes lighted on Him, the Lord turned and looked at him. It was immediately clear to Peter that He knew exactly what had happened. And he remembered the words of Jesus and recognised the truth about what he had done. Within the aura of the Light of the world all his excuses collapsed. The truth was that instead of bearing witness to Jesus’ innocence he had not only sat by and done nothing, he had denied him vehemently. Jesus’ words had been fulfilled to the letter. He had denied his Lord three times.

**22.62** ‘And he went out, and wept bitterly.’

Broken at heart he staggered from the courtyard and found a quiet place and there he wept as though his heart would break. He knew that he had betrayed the One Whom he loved more than life itself, and that that would be Jesus’ final memory of him. He would find it hard to forgive himself for that.

The story is one of the few told in one way or another in all four Gospels, which brings out how important it was seen to be. For all knew that in the end it was not the story of Peter but the story of God. By the time it was written Peter was one of the most admired men on earth. But he retained his humility to the end. And all knew that one of the reasons why he was able to do so was because of what had happened here. It was all part of God’s preparation for his future.

Verse 62 is missing in one Greek manuscript and a few versions. But for it to be in all the other Greek manuscripts must indicate that it is original, otherwise it could not possibly have got into them all. The omission was probably a careless copying error, which was then passed on. Compare Matthew 26.75.

**Notes.** The problem of reporting briefly in few words on the rather complicated behaviour of Peter as a result of his agitation while he was in the courtyard, and the comments that he had to face from people there, comes out in the apparent differences in the accounts. We must after all reckon both on the fact that Peter was on tenterhooks and could not sit still for long, so that to pinpoint where he was at any point in time would be complicated, and on the fact that the conversations and situations are both translations and abbreviations for the sake of the readers. A number of people may well have made a number of comments about him, as well as to him, especially when he spoke in his ‘foreign accent’. Such things happen when people are gathered together with nothing better to do. And they possibly did not really care what he was one way or the other. They may indeed have been secretly amused to think that

he was there, rather than vindictive. No writer would want to record them all.

And we should be able to understand Peter's own problem. The fire beckoned because it was chilly, but he found that it drew unwelcome attention to him, while the porch beckoned because it was outside the direct fire light, and would enable a quick escape if there was a move to arrest him, and also because he was constantly not sure whether to stay or go. Furthermore the porch was clearly not far from that particular fire because the girl who watched over the porch could also be found near the fire. Thus being near the fire and by the porch were not all that different.

It is probable therefore that in his agitation and fear Peter nervously went between the two more than once (he would never be one to sit still under stress), and this may possibly well have been what drew the girl's attention to him. At his first denial he was by the fire, but clearly in his embarrassment soon moved to the porch, possibly waiting for what happened next. When the serving girl again pointed him out to her companions a second time he was by the porch so that nothing may have been said to him directly that time, until he returned to the fire and found himself directly challenged. Thus both accusation were responsible for his denial. He was possibly also keen to get away from girl, who would perforce be moving between the two, which might further have kept him on the move. The third incident is given no background. Thus we obtain from all this some idea of his agitated movements. We also gain the impression of some talking about him, and some addressing him directly. This again should not surprise us. Crowds with nothing to do, gathered at night when they would rather be at home enjoying a feast or a sleep, would be only too pleased to have something spicy to talk about in order to pass the time, while to serving girls a companion to a known criminal would be especially exciting. It had probably taken her a great deal of courage to challenge him in the first place. The general comments overheard by him would then arouse his fears, while the comments made to him would then demand an answer. Both could therefore be seen as responsible for his denials. And the content of them would clearly be varied, so that each writer could choose what appealed to him.

With regard to the crowing of the cocks Mark alone refers to this occurring twice. But he probably lived in Jerusalem and recognised the fact of life in Jerusalem that the actual crowing of cocks occurred more than once, possibly because they first echoed over the mountains from outside Jerusalem, before finally affecting Jerusalem itself. Alternately he may have had in mind the regular times during the night when cocks did crow in eastern countries, or of a special crowing that took place because of unusual weather connected with that night. Compare with regard to the weather the hours of darkness that occurred on the following day. The other three, who had little experience of all this, possibly had their minds more on the official cock crow which ended the third watch of the night (Mark 13.35), which would be known to all their readers, and would not want to cause confusion. They wanted cockcrowing to be the focal point of the narrative.

Some have argued that as the cock was seen in the Talmud as 'unclean' because it scratched in dunghills it would not be found in the High Priest's house at night. But quite apart from the fact that Pilate would certainly have cockerels available while he was in Jerusalem, whose crowing no doubt reached a long way, there are also no grounds for assuming that the Sadducees felt bound by Pharisaic niceties. There was nothing about hens in the Law of Moses (they were probably introduced by the Romans). So the cock could have been either Roman or Jewish.

End of note.

### Jesus is Mocked And Beaten (22.63-65)

What followed was now an indication of the inhumanity of man. It was quite the usual thing to have fun at the expense of those who had been arrested, and a Jewish prophet rejected by

the authorities would have been seen as fair game. For in spite of the fact that they were Temple police, and Levites, they were no different from the rest of their kind. The Temple authorities had few scruples, and the temple police probably even less. And who were they to argue with their superiors?

### Analysis

- The men who held Jesus mocked Him, and beat Him (63).
- And they blindfolded Him, and asked Him, saying, “Prophecy, who is he who struck you?” (64).
- And they spoke many other things against him, reviling him (65).

Note how in ‘a’ they mocked and beat Jesus, while in the parallel they reviled Him, while centrally in ‘b’ they called on Him to prophesy. They had the typical view of a prophet as being a kind of fortune-teller as that held by the average man.

**22.63 ‘And the men who held Jesus mocked him, and beat him.’**

In those days the beating of prisoners before trial was seen as a softening up process. It was seen as making them less able to defend themselves, and as therefore more likely to tell the truth. The mockery was also typical of the vast majority of mankind. But significantly, and unknown to its perpetrators, it was fulfilling Scripture. For remarkably Scripture had declared that this kind of treatment was exactly what would be meted out to the Coming One (e.g. Isaiah 50.6; 53.3). (Nor did Luke probably have that in mind, for although it was perfectly reflecting that prophecy, had Luke realised the fact he would probably have made it verbally more like it).

The imperfect tense of ‘mocked’ indicates a continuing process. This treatment would continue whenever Jesus was left in the custody of the soldiers between the different arraignments. After all the guards had to keep themselves amused and relieve the boredom of their watch, and they were inured to brutality. It is not therefore a question of when exactly this kind of treatment took place. It would take place constantly.

**22.64 ‘And they blindfolded him, and asked him, saying, “Prophecy, who is he who struck you?” ’**

These men had never had a self-proclaimed prophet in their hands before, and it was too good an opportunity to miss. They decided that they would discover whether He really was a prophet. So they blindfolded Him, and in turn struck Him, and called out, ‘Come on. Prophecy who struck you.’ They had the common man’s view of a prophet, that he had a supernatural ability to discern whatever he wanted.

**22.65 ‘And they spoke many other things against him, reviling him.’**

And they then vented on Him all the spite that was in their hearts against Him, a spite which resulted from the perverse views that they had of His teaching. They were of the common man. It was not only the leaders who treated Jesus badly. And thus was God mocked as an introduction to the worse mockery that would follow. It is described literally as ‘blasphemy’. And it was that. For they were by their actions not only mocking Jesus, but were mocking the One Who was behind His ministry. For to mock Jesus was to mock God.

### The Official Trial Before The Sanhedrin (22.66-71).

Luke is only concerned with the official and final trial before the Sanhedrin (all the Synoptics agree that such a final trial did take place - Matthew 27.1; Mark 15.1). He is keen to establish the fact that ‘all’ the Jews were involved in this travesty of justice (see Acts 4.27). It was not just a few miscreant leaders who sentenced Jesus, it was the highest Jewish body in the land. Nor was he interested in the detail of the trial. He centres only on the final conclusion. To him that was the point that mattered.

With regard to regulations governing how the Sanhedrin had theoretically to operate, we have a general idea of these, although probably in an idealistic form, for they were formulated after the Sanhedrin had ceased to exist. Examples of these are:

- All charges had to be evidenced by at least two witness, independently examined (that had been true from the time of Moses).
- A majority of at least two was required for any condemnation.
- Execution could not take place on the day that the sentence was given, because time must be allowed for reflection.

But these regulations might well have been seen as not applying to an informal night time 'preparation' meeting by people who were not too fussy about their behaviour and were full of their own importance and the 'justice' of their case. And except in so far as what was done there would actually need to be repeated in front of the official meeting of the Sanhedrin, they were probably not overly concerned. After all, no one would ever know but them. And indeed, in view of this, what is interesting is rather how carefully they did on the whole stick to the most important rules out of habit, partly in order to justify themselves to their own consciences, and partly with the whole Sanhedrin in mind. It was only when he became over-exasperated at the failure to make any charges stick that the High Priest forgot himself. And he did not do it before the official Sanhedrin. Nor was it in the end relevant whether the Sanhedrin had to wait a day before carrying out sentence, for they did not actually intend to carry out any sentence. Having made their decision they rather intended to hand Jesus over to Pilate to be tried as a 'self-confessed' Messiah and revolutionary. And there were no such restrictions on Pilate. They would assure themselves that it was not their fault if he did it in a hurry.

But what we can certainly say beyond question is that they did not observe the spirit of the Law. However, that is hardly unusual, even in our own less authoritarian days. It is in fact very rarely that authorities observe the spirit of the law unless it is in their favour. All they are concerned about (where they are concerned) is being able to do what they want while being at the same time able to prove that they have not broken the letter of the law. And we are given no grounds for thinking that the official Sanhedrin broke the letter of the Law. Even the adjuring of Jesus to speak the truth about a question put to Him by the High Priest did not take place at the official meeting of the Sanhedrin, where it would almost certainly have been frowned on, if not illegal. It took place in private. It certainly broke the spirit of the Law, but perhaps in view of the occasion it did not strictly break the letter of the Law. And once they had had His unofficial confession, the Sanhedrin then only had to ask Him whether it was true when He was undergoing questioning, the better of them possibly not even being aware of what led up to it. (And even that is not said to be a trial, for they did not pass a sentence. Rather they decided to hand Him over to Pilate). So when He replied 'satisfactorily' they did not need to resort to illegal tactics. On paper they were satisfied that all was legal. In reality it was a mockery.

### Analysis.

- a As soon as it was day, the assembly of the elders of the people was gathered together, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away into their council, saying (66).
- b "If you are the Messiah (the Christ), tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer (67-68).
- c "But from henceforth the Son of man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (69).
- b And they all said, "Are you then the Son of God?" And He said to them, "You say that I am" (70).
- a And they said, "What further need have we of witness? For we ourselves have heard from His own mouth" (71).

Note how in 'a' He is brought before the Council (the Sanhedrin) to be tried and in the parallel they consider Him convicted out of His own mouth. In 'b' they question whether He is the Messiah and He replies, while in the parallel they question Him as to whether He is the Son of God, and He replies. Central to all in 'c' is His declaration that He will shortly be seated at the right hand of the power of God. It is that which is to be emphasised the most.

22.66 'And as soon as it was day, the assembly of the elders of the people was gathered together, both chief priests and scribes, and they led him away into their council, saying,'

The Sanhedrin consisted of chief priests, Scribes, and lay elders/aristocrats of the people. These were now all gathered together, having hurriedly been assembled. Many would not have been pleased at having been dragged away from the festivities. But they had been made to recognise that the matter was important. So they were probably mainly concerned to get the matter over as soon as possible. Handing the matter over for Pilate to judge, especially as there appeared to be a capital charge involved, probably seemed a good idea.

We are clearly intended to read here 'the elders of the people -- including the chief priests and Scribes', for Luke was well aware of the threefold nature of the Sanhedrin (9.22; 20.1; Acts 4.5, 23; 6.12; etc.).

22.67 "If you are the Messiah (the Christ), tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe,"

Luke wastes no time on the preliminaries. He goes to the heart of the charge against Jesus, and involves all present in it. As far as he was concerned they were equally responsible with their spokesman. Unless they protested (and we know nothing direct about a protest, but see 23.51) they bore joint responsibility. All other attempts to trip Him up had failed. Now they moved to the central one, which if proved could raise a charge of blasphemy, and could then be manipulated into the criminal offence of treason. As far as they were concerned the former would justify them before the people, the latter should hopefully be sufficient for Pilate.

So they questioned Him as to whether He was claiming to be the Messiah, and pressed Him to 'tell' them the truth. They would then interpret His reply in the way that they wished. Men never change. They use catch phrases which they interpret in their own way and then apply regardless of the facts. In the main they are not interested in truth. They are only interested in getting their own way while at the same time convincing themselves that they have retained their 'honour'. The world is, and always has been, duplicitous. And never more so than today. For democracy and civil rights are both hotbeds of duplicity and hypocrisy. The only thing to be said in favour of democracy, when men and women are involved in it, is that it is better than the alternatives. For absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Jesus quietly pointed out to them that their question was not an honest one. They had not asked it with a view to believing it, or with a genuine wish to discover the truth. They had asked it simply because they were out to trap Him. For they were looking for any excuse to find Him guilty by the use of words and titles which once admitted to would then be interpreted according to their own particular slant.

22.68 "And if I ask you, you will not answer."

Jesus then pointed out to them that were He to question them about themselves and about Messiahship and about the Old Testament Scriptures, judging by past form they would not answer. Indeed He had had enough experience of them previously to know that this was so. See for example 20.7 where they had refused to give an answer about authenticating what was of God, because they did not want to condemn themselves or lose popularity. And 20.41-44 where they had given no answer at all to an important question about Messiahship, because they had no answer. So what they were asking Him to do was what they themselves would not do, reply openly to what seemed to be straight questions in a possibly critical environment.

**But He also wanted them to appreciate that their questions were not really straight at all, they were simply just a method of getting their own way and making out that He was in the wrong. There is a certain irony here. For the truth is that Jesus had constantly during His ministry been barraged with their questions, and His real crime was that He had answered them too well.**

**So Jesus may here well be looking back to previous times when He had sought dialogue with men like those before Him. But it may also be that He had attempted to put questions to them earlier at this very hearing and had been brushed aside, in the same way as He had been before Annas (John 18.22). Either way the intention of His point was in order to establish their perfidy and hypocrisy.**

**22.69 “But from henceforth the Son of man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”**

**And then Jesus unleashed the truth about Himself, knowing full well what the consequences would be. He pointed out to them that as the Son of Man He would shortly be seated at the right hand of God. Every man present knew the reference to the Son of Man as being connected with the throne of God in Daniel 7.13-14. Here then Jesus was claiming that He would shortly come in the clouds of heaven into the presence of God in order to receive divine authority, and that there He would take His seat. He would share the Father’s throne and by being seated there would put Himself on a level with the Father, in contrast with the angels, and the mighty Cherubim and Seraphim, who only dared to stand in His presence (1.19; 1 Kings 22.19; Daniel 7.10). While the basic idea may come originally from Psalm 110.1 it has been expanded. Psalm 110.1 was symbolic. Here the idea is more literal.**

**John later gives us the same picture in Revelation 4-5, and, although, uniquely, there were there twenty four elders who sat on thrones, they did not remain on them, but fell down before the One Who sat on the throne and cast their crowns before Him (Revelation 4.4, 10). This was a very different picture from that of the Son of Man being seated at the right hand of God. And there too they were in contrast with the Slain Lamb Who shared the Father’s throne, even though at that particular point in time He was standing ready for action, as in Acts 7.56, in that case so that He could open the seals of destiny (5.6) . And we should note that the elders not only fell down before the One on the Throne. They also fell down before the Lamb.**

**Furthermore it is clear, and specifically stated in Matthew 26.64, (‘you shall see --’), that this change in His situation would in some way be manifested to them. It had to be otherwise it would be irrelevant. God would in some way make men aware of what had happened.**

**Thus to *sit* at His right hand would be to accept authority on behalf of, and in close association with, the One on the throne, and to claim to be on the divine side of reality. It would suggest that not only was He to be shown forth in His glorified Manhood as God’s unique representative, but, by being seated in Heaven at God’s right hand, was also to be revealed as divine. That is certainly how the Sanhedrin saw it for they were then moved to ask Him whether He was the Son of God.**

**Furthermore as there has as yet been no certainty in their minds that He would be put to death, it suggested to them that He expected to be placed in this exalted position as a human being. It was thus to be seen as claiming Messiahship at a divine level for Himself as He stood before them. Let them recognise, He was saying, that although they might now be judging Him now, shortly He would have responsibility for judging them in God’s presence. By emphasising this aspect of the hearing Luke was in fact preparing for what is to come in Acts where Jesus is seen as enthroned, and glorified, and as being at the right hand of God (2.33-36; 3.13; 7.55-56).**

**22.70 ‘And they all said, “Are you then the Son of God?” And he said to them, “You say that I**

am.” ’

This claim that He would sit at the right hand of God in such a way could only mean one thing to them and that was that He was claiming to be more than just the Messiah. He was claiming a divine Messiahship. So they ‘all’ questioned Him further. (This is not the High Priest dunning Him). Was He then claiming to be *the* Son of God? This does not just mean the Messiah. To claim to be the Messiah was not in itself blasphemy. It was the claim that He would be literally exalted and seated at God’s right hand that was seen as the blasphemy. They rightly recognised within it a claim to some kind of divinity. Jesus reply was simple. ‘It is you who have said that I am.’ It was an admission made in all humility. He would accept their verdict on what He had said, but wanted them to understand that He did not necessarily accept what they had said on their terms, for He had little regard for their understanding.

22.71 ‘And they said, “What further need have we of witness? For we ourselves have heard from his own mouth.”

But it was enough for them. It is clear that they recognised in His reply a positive response. The need for witnesses had therefore now ceased. They were all witnesses to the most amazing blasphemy, for He had convicted Himself out of His own mouth. Thus they had been put in the position that either they must accept His claim and submit to Him, or they must claim it to be blasphemy. And they made their fatal choice. They would not accept Him to be what He claimed, and so to them He was guilty. Feeling therefore that they now had matters under control they determined to persuade Pilate to have Him crucified as a Messianic pretender. They were quite confident that that would finish off His pretensions, and no longer felt in sympathy with Him. But they had in fact, without recognising the fact, lost control. For what they did not realise was that in that moment they had sealed the fate of Jerusalem, and, unless they later repented, their own eternal destinies as well.

#### Jesus Is Brought before Pilate (23.1-7).

Having convinced themselves of His blasphemy the majority of the court now acted and brought Him to Pilate. But once again their perfidy is revealed. For they did not bring against Him the charge of blasphemy, or of claiming to be the Son of God, rather they twisted what He had said and turned it into a political charge. And in doing this they also twisted other evidence. They probably hoped that Pilate would give in to their request without taking too much trouble over it. After all, they were the recognised Jewish authorities, and Pilate had no reason for doubting their word. But for some reason Pilate was not compliant. One reason was probably because he was not on the best of terms with these Jewish leaders, and rather despised them, and was delighted to have the opportunity to annoy them. And secondly he appears to have sensed that there was something that was not quite right about the whole affair. For we do have to take into account the impression that Jesus would make on him.

Pilate would not seem a very good candidate to act as one who would defend Jesus. Philo describes him as unbending and callous in nature and speaks of him as, ‘a man of inflexible disposition, harsh and obdurate’. He makes clear that in his view he totally failed in the fulfilment of his official duties. But even such men occasionally come face to face with something that for a moment pierces their hard shell, and that was what, unknown to him, was about to happen to Pilate.

#### Analysis.

- a And the whole company of them rose up, and brought Him before Pilate (1).
- b And they began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ (the Messiah) a king (2).
- c And Pilate asked Him, saying, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (3a).
- d And He answered him and said, “You say so” (3).

- c And Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no fault in this man” (4).
- b But they were the more urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judaea, and beginning from Galilee even to this place” (5).
- a But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. And when he knew that He was of Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem in these days (6-7).

Note that in ‘a’ He is brought before Pilate, and in the parallel He is brought to Herod. In ‘b’ an accusation is made against Him, and in the parallel a further accusation is made against Him. In ‘c’ Pilate questions Jesus and in the parallel says that he finds no fault in Him. While centrally in ‘d’ Jesus agrees that He is the King of the Jews.

**23.1 ‘And the whole company of them rose up, and brought him before Pilate.’**

The Sanhedrin as a whole then brought Him to Pilate. ‘Whole company’ is probably not to be taken literally. It may not have included dissenters, and Pilate would certainly not have been happy to see them all at once. Luke’s point is rather to involve ‘the whole Sanhedrin’ as a group (although in 23.51 he mentions at least one member who did not agree with the verdict. There may well have been others). All were responsible for Him being brought to Pilate.

The chief priests remembered how He had hit at the Temple revenues by casting the traders from it, were angry at what they had heard of His suggestions that the Temple would be destroyed, and possibly feared that He might disturb the equilibrium with the Romans which was so much to their advantage (John 11.48-50). The Scribes and Pharisees were bitter because He showed up their teaching and refused to side with them and accept their complete authority on religious matters. The rich laymen were probably concerned lest anything be done that might disturb the maintenance of the status quo, securing their wealth and position. They would not feel that they could get involved in religious matters when the recognised religious experts, the ‘scholars’, were all seemingly against Jesus. Thus all for their own reasons were agreed that it was a good idea that He should be got rid of.

**23.2 ‘And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ (the Messiah) a king.’**

The charge, based on what has gone before, is a travesty of misrepresentation. It was they who had said that He was Messiah the King, as He had pointed out to them. He had certainly not misled the nation, nor had they been able to prove so. And we actually know the basis on which He was being accused of forbidding the giving of tribute to Caesar, and that that charge was therefore totally false (20.21-25). Jesus neither sought to arouse an insurrection, nor did He forbid the payment of taxes.

But the charge was clever. All three counts were of a kind that would disturb Pilate. They probably thought that when challenged about the giving of tribute to Caesar Pilate might not like His theological reply. Pilate would not appreciate any suggestion of reluctance in the matter of taxes. That might thus count as a point against Him. The thought that He was stirring up trouble among the people would certainly be enough to disturb Pilate, and he might well think, why should they say such a thing if it did not have some truth in it? And claiming kingship was a charge that Pilate dare not be seen to treat lightly. They were in many ways astute men and were playing on his fears.

‘This man.’ We can almost hear the contempt in their voices.

‘Perverting our nation.’ From their point of view this was true, for He had only too successfully rebutted their teaching, but it was certainly not politically true. What they nevertheless wanted Pilate to think was that He was constantly stirring up trouble among the masses.

‘Christ (Messiah) a king.’ The last words are added for Pilate’s sake lest he fail to realise the

political implications of a claim to Messiahship.

**23.3 ‘And Pilate asked him, saying, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him and said, “You say so.” ’**

‘You?’ The word is emphasised. Pilate had expected them to haul in a glaring insurrectionist, the type that he knew exactly how to deal with. And now here was someone who was calm and fearless, who spoke to him quietly as man to man, who argued philosophy and who had a quality about Him that could not pass unnoticed. This was not at all what he had expected.

“Are you the King of the Jews?” This is very much an abbreviation of all that was said, but deals with the essential point. What Pilate overall wanted to know was what claims He did make, and whether it was true that He was claiming to be a King in opposition to Caesar and his appointee. Jesus replied by pointing out that it was all something that had arisen from people’s own ideas. The claim, in the way in which the court meant it, had not come from Him, it had come from Pilate himself, via the Sanhedrin. While then there was a sense in which He was a King, it was not in the way that everyone was saying. Whatever else was said (see John 18.33-38) it convinced Pilate, who was very experienced and no fool, that the charge was baseless. This man may be a clever arguer. He might even be more. But He was no revolutionary.

**23.4 ‘And Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no fault in this man.” ’**

So Pilate went out to the chief priests and the crowds (for they would not enter his residence as it would have been seen as defiling at Passover time) and declared that as far as he could see the charges were baseless, and Jesus was innocent.

‘The chief priests.’ They were the ones who were now representing the whole Sanhedrin. The High Priest himself was a government appointee, with recognised, if limited, authority, and his relatives, those who ran the Temple which was of such importance to Jews everywhere, would be accepted by Pilate (however much he disliked them) as men of political importance. They had therefore been made the chief spokesmen.

‘The crowds.’ It should be emphasised that these ‘crowds’ were not composed of the people who had listened to Jesus in the Temple, or of Galileans. Those were still in their camps or lodgings, unaware of what was going on. These were probably local Jerusalemites who had gathered after the news got around of an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin, suggesting that an interesting case was in process, and very probably included supporters of the insurrectionists who were in custody and awaiting execution, who had come hoping to take advantage of Pilate’s regular release at Passover time of one ‘popular’ criminal in order to please the people.

**23.5 ‘But they were the more urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judaea, and beginning from Galilee even to this place.” ’**

Fearful that Jesus might be released without charge, ‘they’ (the chief priests) tried to put pressure on Pilate. Their protests ‘grew stronger’. Did he not realise that this man was stirring up the whole country? And indeed had also previously done it in Galilee, which was as usual the source of all the trouble. With their contempt for Galilee they thought that this in itself should be enough to prove their case. Galilee was a hotbed of troublemakers and heretics.

**23.6-7 ‘But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. And when he knew that he was of Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem in these days.’**

At the mention of Galilee Pilate pricked up his ears. If the man was a Galilean then perhaps Herod would know what He was talking about. For he himself certainly did not. (Compare how Festus consulted with Agrippa - Acts 25). So he sent him to Herod, who was also in

Jerusalem for the Passover, not so that Herod could try Him, but in order that he might investigate the matter and give his views on the matter.

### The Hearing Before Herod (23.8-12).

In a few rapid strokes Luke brilliantly brings out what the hearing before Herod involved. Rather than being concerned about the rights and wrongs of the matter Herod is depicted as being more interested in getting Jesus to perform some wonders before him, than in arriving at a conclusion. Thus his questioning was apparently on a superficial scale, rather than a genuine attempt to arrive at the truth. Jesus in return knew exactly what was going on and treated him with contemptuous silence, and said nothing. He was not there to provide a spectacle, nor to perform wonders at Herod's whim. (Had Luke just invented this hearing for the reasons suggested by some he would have made it very different) The mention of the Scribes is significant. They had been irrelevant to Pilate, but they hoped to have greater influence on Herod. He was after all a half-Jew. He would be more likely, they hoped, to listen if they were present. But they did not really know their man.

### Analysis.

- a Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was very, very glad, for he had for a long time been desirous to see Him, because he had heard things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him (8).
- b And he questioned Him in many words, but He answered him nothing (9).
- c And the chief priests and the scribes stood, vehemently accusing him (10).
- b And Herod with his soldiers set him at nought, and mocked him, and arraying him in gorgeous apparel sent him back to Pilate (11).
- a And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before they were at enmity between themselves (12).

Note that in 'a' Herod was delighted to see Jesus because he hoped that He would perform a miracle in front of him, and in the parallel a 'miracle' was performed because Pilate and Herod became friendly. In 'b' Jesus treated Herod and His accusers with disdain, and in the parallel He is in turn treated with disdain. Centrally in 'c' are the chief priests and scribes trying desperately to have Him accused. Here Luke is bringing out who is really to blame for all this.

23.8 'Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was very, very glad, for he had for a long time been desirous to see him, because he had heard about him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by him.'

Instead of seriously going about the business of ascertaining the truth, Herod is revealed as more interested in seeing a show. The charges against Jesus meant little to him, but he had heard much about Him and had for a long time wanted to see Him for himself. After all He had something of a reputation in Galilee and Peraea over which Herod ruled. So his hope now was to see Jesus 'perform' and relieve the monotony of the hour.

23.9 'And he questioned him in many words, but he answered him nothing.'

But all his attempts to make Jesus respond, and they were apparently considerable, failed. As a sheep that before His shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth (Isaiah 53.7, compare Acts 8.32). He had stated His case to Pilate, and had convinced him of His innocence. It was clear to Him what Herod's view of the situation was and He saw no point in responding to attempts to bully or cajole Him into putting on a show. So He maintained a dignified silence. He was now resigned to the fact that justice was not available to Him whatever He did. He had them all summed up in His own mind, and knew them exactly for what they were.

23.10 'And the chief priests and the scribes stood, vehemently accusing him.'

Meanwhile, probably infuriated by Herod's attitude, the chief priests and Scribes pressed

home their case with as much force as they could muster, probably aware all the time that Herod was treating them with contempt. In fact he had no doubt had Jesus closely observed while He was preaching in Galilee and knew perfectly well that all the charges were false. Thus he was dismissing the claims as irrelevant, and making it obvious that he was doing so. The centrality of this verse in the chiasmus brings out the emphasis on who were the main perpetrators of the crime against Jesus, although it was only made possible because those mainly responsible for justice failed. Pilate was a shifting sand who had to constantly watch his back in case he was reported to Caesar, and in the end sought only expediency. Herod was a bored and irreligious ethnarch who wanted only to relieve the monotony of the occasion. Neither wanted to sentence Jesus. The ones who finally achieved this end, but tried to keep clear of the blame for it, were the chief priests and Scribes.

We see in this the fulfilment of one of Luke's objectives, and that was to convince his readers that the high authorities appointed by Rome in both Judea and Galilee found no fault with Jesus politically. He had rather been crucified because of the hatred and jealousy of religious minded countrymen.

23.11 'And Herod with his soldiers set him at nought, and mocked him, and arraying him in gorgeous apparel sent him back to Pilate.'

Having exhausted his attempts to get something out of Jesus Herod was no doubt convinced that He was after all a fraud, and so proceeded to make fun of Him. He is the only one of all those who were 'trying' Jesus who actually himself participated in this kind of treatment. The others had not interfered with it, but had not participated themselves (Matthew 26.67-68 probably has in mind the guards). It brings out Herod's unfitness to rule. But his behaviour might well have hidden a sense of awe of Jesus, similar to the sense of awe he had had of John the Baptist. This was probably his way of indicating that Jesus had no power over him, especially to Pilate, while at the same time confirming His innocence.

So he and his soldiers made a mockery of Jesus and humiliated Him, and then mockingly arraying His bleeding figure in royal robes as though He were a king, sent Him back to Pilate. But this act was significant. It was Herod's callous way of indicating what his view was. Pilate could accept that his view was that the accusers were wrong and that in some kind of way, not to be taken too seriously, Jesus was a Messiah of sorts, but nothing to make a fuss about.

23.12 'And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before they were at enmity between themselves.'

The interesting consequence of all this was that the enmity which had existed between Pilate and Herod was now broken down. Herod probably saw Pilate's gesture as a recognition of his status (and we all like people who recognise our status) and Pilate was probably grateful that Herod had tried to help him out of a hole and had supported him against the accusers of Jesus.

But Luke's mention of this had a twofold reason. Firstly it indicated that while Jesus might not have been willing to perform wonders before Herod, He had achieved what was truly a wonder, the reconciliation of two such opposite characters as Pilate and Herod, and secondly it emphasised why Jesus was here among men. He was present as the Prince of Peace.

#### Pilate's Second Attempt To Clear Jesus And His Final Abject Surrender (23.13-25).

Having received the prisoner back with the confirmation from Herod that he found no fault in Jesus (Herod was not about to admit that the prisoner had refused to speak to him) Pilate made a further attempt to argue his way out of his position. He should, of course, have simply declared Jesus innocent and let Him go, and his very prevarication would thus have encouraged Jesus' accusers. They knew now that if they continued in what they were doing they would get their way, for Pilate had revealed that he was not willing to simply put their

accusations to one side. Thus they pressed on to achieve the verdict that they required.

### Analysis.

- a Pilate called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said unto them, “You brought to me this man, as one who perverts the people, and behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things of which you accuse Him, no, nor yet Herod. For he sent Him back to us, and behold, nothing worthy of death has been done by Him. I will therefore severely beat Him, and release Him” (13-17).
- b But they cried out all together, saying, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas (one who for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison) (18-19). 23.20
- c And Pilate spoke to them again, desiring to release Jesus (20).
- d But they shouted, saying, “Crucify, crucify Him” (21).
- e And he said to them the third time, “Why, what evil has this man done? I have found no cause of death in Him. I will therefore flog Him and release Him” (22).
- d But they were urgent with loud voices, asking that He might be crucified. And their voices prevailed (23).
- c And Pilate gave sentence that what they asked for should be done (24).
- b And he released him who for insurrection and murder had been cast into prison, whom they asked for (25a).
- a But Jesus he delivered up to their will (25b).

Note that in ‘a’ Pilate declares Jesus doubly cleared, and yet in the parallel he hands Him over to His accusers. In ‘b’ they call for one guilty of insurrection and murder to be released, and in the parallel the one guilty of insurrection and murder is released. In ‘c’ Pilate desires to release Jesus (because he is innocent) and in the parallel he gives sentence that what the Jewish leaders asked for should be done. (Note how, as in ‘a’, the blame is laid squarely on the Jewish leaders). In ‘d’ the call comes for Him to be crucified, and in the parallel the call is repeated. And centrally in ‘e’ Pilate declares Jesus innocent. This can be compared with the central point in the previous analysis.

23.13-17 ‘And Pilate called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said unto them, “You brought to me this man, as one who perverts the people, and behold, I, having examined him before you, found no fault in this man touching those things of which you accuse him, no, nor yet Herod. For he sent him back to us, and behold, nothing worthy of death has been done by him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him.” ’

Jesus having been returned to him by Herod, Pilate again made his appeal to the chief priests (who would also have returned), the lay rulers and gathered crowds. He pointed out that Jesus had been thoroughly examined, both by himself and Herod, and had been found innocent on all charges. There were in fact no grounds for putting Him to death. His verdict therefore was that Jesus be lashed as a matter of course, a reminder that He should behave whether guilty or not, and then set free. Acts 23.9; 26.31 ff may point to the fact that legal language is being used here.

He in fact probably based more faith in their willingness to take notice of Herod than was justified. To him Herod was a Jewish king. To the chief priests and Scribes he was an outsider thrusting himself on the Jews.

The lashing of a prisoner after trial, even when found innocent, was a regular occurrence. It was intended to make him think twice about being brought before the court again, and a warning to avoid the attention of the authorities.

‘And the people.’ The continuing reference to the people is intending to bring out the guilt of the whole unbelieving Jewish people with regard to Jesus’ death. Judaism had rejected Jesus.

**It was, of course, here only a small section of the people, and not at all representative, certainly excluding the many who believed on Him. But in Acts the division between those who believed and those who did not will be made clear, and in Luke's eyes this crowd represented those who finally refused to believe, a position exemplified in Acts 12.**

**'I, having examined him before you, found no fault in this man.' Compare verses 4, 22' John 18.38; 19.4; 19.6. The continual repetition of Jesus' faultlessness suggests that Luke wants us to see a comparison with the Servant in Isaiah 53.9. It would also indicate to his readers that although He had been crucified, it was not because of any crime that He had committed.**

**23.18-19 'But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas (one who for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison).'**

**The chief priests' men had been at work among the crowds who, knowing that a prisoner was due to be released according to Jewish custom (John 18.39), now called out as one that Barabbas be released to them and that Jesus should be sent to His fate. Barabbas was an insurrectionist awaiting execution for murder.**

**A first century Egyptian papyrus mentions a similar releasing of a prisoner by a Roman prefect as a result of popular demand. It is ironic that the name Barabbas can mean 'son of the father' (and that his name may also have been Jesus - Matthew 27.16-17 in B Theta fl Origen). They had had to choose between the false and the true.**

**23.20 'And Pilate spoke to them again, desiring to release Jesus.'**

**But Pilate, desirous of releasing Jesus because he was convinced of His innocence, made a further plea for his release. The ludicrous nature of the situation is revealed. The judge was pleading with the prosecutors. And this was so unlike Pilate, who had a reputation for acting abruptly and brutally, that it probably arose because of the fear that Pilate had of a complaint going to Caesar that he had failed in his duty of protecting Judea from a self-proclaimed king. It was now no longer a case of guilt or innocence and everyone knew it. It had become a political seesaw. The question was whether Pilate would do the right thing or would give in to political blackmail.**

**For Pilate's problem was that in the past he had tried to brutally enforce his will on the Jews in a number of ways and, after revealing his cruelty, had had to back down, something which was no doubt already known to the emperor (or at least so he would suppose). Thus he was well aware that a complaint against him might mean the end of his career. And it was something that he dared not risk. Thus he did not want to provide them with any cause for complaint. Yet at the same time it was clear that his conscience also was at work. This man had made an impression on him, and he did not want to have to condemn Him. And on top of that he also did not want to give the Jewish leaders their way.**

**23.21 'But they shouted, saying, "Crucify, crucify him." '**

**But by now the leaders, and the crowd who were present, scented blood and fanatically took up the cry, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him'. They knew now that Pilate had no way back. He had committed himself too far by his prevarication.**

**23.22 'And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found no cause of death in him. I will therefore flog him and release him." '**

**But Pilate again made his plea. He was unwilling to yield Jesus to them. So he asked why they were doing this. What evil had the man done? And he emphasised again that he found no reason why He should be put to death, and again suggested His release after flogging, a flogging which he then carried out (John 19.10) probably hoping by that means to win the people's pity for Jesus. It would tear Jesus' back to shreds, and He would come out of it a pitiful and bloodied mess.**

Such overall behaviour was undoubtedly unusual for Pilate, But from the other Gospels we obtain some idea of why this was. Not only had he been impressed by Jesus, Whose words and manner had probably stirred something decent within him, in Whom he probably saw the man that he himself would like to have been, and Whom he recognised to be in every way his superior (compare John 19.8-9), but his wife had also reinforced this idea by advising him that she had had a dream warning against him having anything to do with the man (Matthew 27.19). In a superstitious age that would not be something taken lightly. So unusually for him Pilate's conscience was stirred, and he was unhappy about what was happening. There are times in the lives of even the most evil of men when such things happen. And it had happened to Pilate. He was filled with a kind of superstitious dread which was disturbing his conscience. This man had awakened him to a sense of his judicial responsibilities. And this is supported by the fact that he took the unusual step for a judge of seeking to remove from himself the blame for what had been done by a public washing of his hands by which he tried to shame his opponents (Matthew 27.24). Psychologically it all fits together. But his capitulation prevented this new sense of decency from taking root. he had his opportunity and failed to take it. And later he would suffer the very fate that he had tried to avoid. (We can compare him with Felix in Acts 24.25-27 who was brought to a similar situation and failed to take his opportunity).

These words of Pilate are central in the chiasmus. Luke wanted it made clear to all that the verdict of the authority who spoke on behalf of Rome was unequivocal. Jesus was free of all blame and should never have been crucified. And he wanted it known that He was without blemish and without spot.

23.23 'But they were urgent with loud voices, asking that he might be crucified. And their voices prevailed.'

But the crowds had now been worked up to fever pitch, and they cried with strong voices that Jesus be crucified. So on both sides of the declarations of innocence (in verse 22) comes the baying of the crowds for crucifixion (here and in verse 21) There could be no doubt in the minds of Luke's readers who really were to blame for what was about to happen. It was now apparent that the Jews would not take no for an answer, and Pilate's weakness was again revealed. His momentary lapse into comparative decency was put behind him. 'Their voices prevailed'.

23.24 'And Pilate gave sentence that what they asked for should be done.'

And weakly and helplessly Pilate gave way and gave sentence that the crowd's will might be done. His desire to release Jesus (verse 20) had now collapsed before their pressure. He had given way to mob rule.

23.25 'And he released him who for insurrection and murder had been cast into prison, whom they asked for.'

Luke makes no attempt to cover his shame and makes clear the full extent of what he had done. Simply because of the request of the crowd he had released from prison a murdering insurrectionist, while at the same time handing over to a cruel death the purest of men. His true character was laid bare for all to see.

23.25b 'But Jesus he delivered up to their will.'

What words can be found to comment on this statement? It is almost incomprehensible. The flower of humanity, the light of the world, the Son of God, was delivered by Pilate, the representative of worldly power, to the will of an evil crowd. He was handed over to the wolves. And no one sought to stop it. We may accept that Joseph of Arimathea, and even possibly Rabban Gamaliel, were not happy with the decision, but they must have known of it and yet made no open protest against it before Pilate. So there was no one there to speak up

for Him. Luke wants us to know that the responsibility lay with the whole of Jerusalem. It was Jerusalem as a whole that slew Him.

These words parallel the act of Pilate in washing his hands before them in order to indicate to them and to the gods that it was all through no fault of his (Matthew 27.24). The washing of hands was probably a religious act to clear himself in the eyes of the gods bringing out the superstitious dread that he has felt about this man all the way through, something finally confirmed to him by his wife's warning dream (Matthew 27.19). He had begun to feel that here he was dealing with something outside his usual sphere, and sought to avert the consequences in the only way he knew how. Luke makes clear the same idea here a little less vividly, but just as emphatically. Pilate is in complete disagreement with what they are doing and hands Him over to them, washing his hands of the matter. He wants nothing more to do with it. But it was not quite that easy. For he could not evade the fact that his was the final choice, and joins the gallery of infamy (Acts 4.27).

It is also quite probable that Luke intends us to see here in the release of Barabbas and the handing over of Jesus the idea of substitution. The one who deserved to die was released, and the innocent One took his place. For He was the One Who gave His life a ransom in the place of many (Mark 10.45) being numbered with the transgressors (22.37), so that a transgressor might go free.

#### The Crucifixion of Jesus (23.26-33).

The moment that this last part of the Gospel has been building up to has now come. Jesus had spoken of His trials and temptations (22.28), and of the suffering that lay ahead (22.15), and He had prayed in the Garden that if it was possible within the will of God He might be spared it (22.42), and now His final trials had begun in earnest. The Jesus of the Upper Room was no more. Instead there was a bloodied and broken physical wreck, and there was more to come. But He was no different underneath. He moved on undaunted, His spirit strong though His flesh was weak. He would not be able to carry His crosspiece for long (23.26), but He was able to carry the sins of the world, and even as He staggered along He sought to warn and comfort the weeping women, whose tears reminded Him of the terrible judgment soon to come on Jerusalem for what it had done (23.27-31).

To Luke in what He was doing He was offering up the blood of the new covenant (22.20). He was being reckoned among the transgressors (22.37). He was suffering so that men might be altered in heart and mind and receive remission of sins (24.46-47). He was purchasing His people with His own blood (Acts 20.28). Luke is in no doubt about the significance of His act. And all the way through this narrative we are aware of something far beyond martyrdom. No martyr ever faced death with the weight on his shoulders that Jesus is revealed to have had. Here is depicted One who was facing in death something that was unique and applicable only to Him.

#### Analysis.

- a When they led him away, they sequestered one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and laid on him the crosspiece, to bear it after Jesus (26).
- b And there followed Him a great crowd of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented Him (27).
- c But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children" (28).
- d "For behold, the days are coming, in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the breasts that never gave suck'" (29).
- c "Then will they begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us', and to the hills, 'Cover us'. For if they do these things in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?" (30-31).
- b And there were also two others, evildoers, led with Him to be put to death (32).

- a And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified Him, and the evildoers, one on the right hand and the other on the left (33).

Note how in 'a' a stranger is called on to keep Jesus company and to bear His crosspiece, and in the parallel Jesus is crucified on the cross and two evildoers keep Him company. In 'b' the great crowd, and especially the women, wept over Him, and in the parallel two evildoers were led along with Him. (Note in both 'a' and 'b' the concern of the common decent people contrasted with the evil of His companions). In 'c' He tells the women to weep for themselves and for their children, and in the parallel He explains why they need to do so. And centrally He warns that the Jews will as a result bewail the fact that children are born to them (a direct reversal of the usual attitude. Things will have been turned upside down).

23.26 'And when they led him away, they sequestered one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and laid on him the cross, to bear it after Jesus.'

These few words cover a multitude of suffering. Luke omits mention of how the soldiers also engaged in horseplay towards Him (Mark 15.16-20). And then in His bloodied and broken state He would be taken from Pilate's presence and stood in the midst of four soldiers with His crosspiece over His shoulder and the procession would then move forwards as fast as the prisoner's condition would allow. Ahead would march a soldier bearing the accusation, 'This is the King of the Jews'. He would then be led throughout the many streets of Jerusalem as an example from which all should take warning, while the passing crowds looked on, some in pity, others in contempt. But gradually the leaden weight, reacting on His physical weakness and pain, would be too much for Him, and He would sink to His knees. Dragged up again and forced to continue He would seek to do so, until at length it was clear even to the hardened soldiers that He could carry it no more. Outwardly He was a broken man. He seemingly had nothing left to give.

Then the soldiers would glance around, and using the powers granted to them by Rome, would select a passer-by or spectator to bear the cross for Jesus. It just happened that they chose a man from Cyrene in Africa, who probably looked burly and strong, whose name was Simon. And to him they delegated the cross. There is good reason to believe that the man was never the same again, for the mention of the names of his two sons by Mark suggests that he became a Christian (Mark 15.21). And 'he bore it after Jesus'. We can hardly doubt that Luke had in mind Jesus' words in 9.23; 14.27. Now all would know what was involved in taking up the cross as never before.

'Coming from the country' may suggest that he was a poor man who had come to the Passover and was camped outside Jerusalem, although within the permitted area. Or it may signify that he had arrived late for the Passover because he had been delayed.

But note that Luke expresses this all in a few simple words. There is no thought of drawing attention to Jesus' sufferings. His concern is with their significance. The Lamb of God is going forward to die (John 1.29).

23.27 'And there followed him a great crowd of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him.'

Inevitably as the procession moved along (the two insurrectionists were also in the procession bearing their own crosses - verse 32) people gathered, and many would recognise in Him the prophet Whose teaching they had found so moving. We can only imagine their feelings towards Rome when they saw what Pilate had done to Him. At this stage they would never dream that it was the result of the activity of their own admired Rabbis. Others would feel sorrow for Him as they would feel sorrow for any Jew who had to suffer in this way. They had probably known about the executions that were due to take place, and would realise that this was one of them. Many women wailed and lamented. They would do this for any Jew who was in the same plight, including the two insurrectionists, but undoubtedly some would have

recognised Him and be even more grieved.

Such executions as this were not rare, and would always be accompanied by weeping women, whose hearts went out to the sons of Israel who were suffering. It would be considered an act of merit, and some would be bearing wine which they would give to the men once they had been crucified.

**23.28** ‘But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.”

And Jesus, bloodied and broken, hardly able to keep moving without support, saw their weeping and His heart was moved. For it brought home to Him a day that was coming, a day of which He had previously warned, when they would be weeping not for Him but for themselves. And His tender heart went out to them. He thought not of Himself but of them. And through His cracked lips He warned them not to weep for Him, but to weep for themselves and for their children. He wanted them to know what was coming on them so that they might be at least partly prepared for it, and even take the opportunity to escape it (21.21).

Note that He is speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem. He is aware that the festive crowds have not yet gathered. Compare here Zechariah 12.10-13.1.

**23.29** “For behold, the days are coming, in which they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs which never bore, and the breasts that never suckled.’ ”

And He pointed out to them in the grief of His heart that days were coming when it would be better for those who had never borne children, because of the suffering that their children would have to endure. In a complete reversal of what men saw as good, those would be called blessed who were barren. Such would be the total upheaval.

**23.30** “Then will they begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’, and to the hills, ‘Cover us’. For if they do these things in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?”

And they will then call on the mountains to fall on them and the hills to cover them, in order to save themselves from the anguish that is coming on them (compare Hosea 10.8, which emphasises that this will be because of their sinfulness). And this will come on them because of what, through their representatives they are doing, and because of what they are doing in their own lives. They will have brought it on themselves.

The saying may have in mind a plea for an earthquake to take them out of their misery, or it may simply be strong symbolism indicating the desperation they are in to find a hiding place. The latter thought is similar to His earlier, ‘let those who are in Jerusalem flee to the mountains’ (21.21).

“For if they do these things in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?” Then He gives the reason parabolically for them all to mull over and consider. In Ezekiel 17.24 the green tree and the dry tree represent a nation that is flourishing and a nation that is dried up. Taking this as a precedent we may see Him as here referring to Israel as at present a green tree, but later becoming a dry tree. Thus He may have in mind His own ministry and that of John prophesying within Judaism, revealing that there was still life in Israel, and be comparing it to when the voice of prophecy in Jerusalem has been cut off by His own death and by the departing from it of the Apostles, so that the very centre of Judaism has lost its proffered life, resulting in the behaviour that will end in its forecast destruction (compare the cursing of the fig tree in Matthew and Mark). Or the ‘green tree’ here may refer to Jesus Himself so that He may be saying, ‘if they do this while I am alive, what do you think that they will they do when I am dead?’ Or He may be referring to Himself as the green tree being cut down by Rome, in comparison with the dry tree of Jerusalem which will also one day be cut down by Rome. Or He may be saying, ‘if they (the Romans, or the Jewish leadership) find it possible to consume

live wood like this, think how easy they will find it to consume (or bring about the consumption of) wood that has become dry' (Ezekiel 20.47; Isaiah 10.16-19; ). Or He may be referring to the people of Jerusalem and Judea as being at present still open to the message that He has brought, still a green tree and having an openness that will later cease as they harden their hearts against it and thus become like the withered fig tree (compare Mark 11.13, 20). This last could be seen as illustrated by the cursed fig tree and by the first part of Acts when His word goes out until saturation point is reached and Jerusalem's heart is finally closed to Him and His word (as expressed symbolically in Acts 12, especially verse 17; 21.30). But the overall idea is the same in all cases. They are refusing the truth to be found in Him, while life is available to them, and one day it will no longer be available to them, and they will perish at the hands of the Romans because by their hardness of heart they will have become dead (compare Daniel 9.25-26).

Comparison may be made with the words of a Rabbi being led to crucifixion who cried out, 'If this happens to those who do His will, what of those who offend Him?' But is unlikely that 'they' here means God, and Jesus' words almost certainly go deeper than that, for in His final days what is to happen to Jerusalem has been constantly on His mind (19.41-44; 20.16; 21.20-24).

23.32 'And there were also two others, evildoers (criminals), led with him to be put to death.'

It would seem that along with Jesus were being led in a similar way two insurrectionists who were also due to die. But here they are called 'evildoers'. His grave was being made with the wicked (Isaiah 53.9. Possibly Luke also wants us all to identify ourselves with them). These men were sharing in His fate, and by many He was no doubt directly linked with them. Luke is the only one who mentions them at this point, no doubt because they illustrate for him Jesus' words in 22.37. Those confirm that Isaiah 53 is very much in mind here (compare also 24.25-26, 46-47). So He was reckoned with them for another reason, because through His death He could offer hope to at least one of them, and in the end to 'many'.

Some have tried to suggest that Luke is short on the atonement, but like many early writers he makes his statements and then leaves people to interpret his inferences. No one who knew the teaching of the early church (Acts 3.14-15 with 19; 3.26; 4.10 with 12; 4.27; 5.30 with 31; 8.32-35, note especially the continuing connection with the Servant of the Lord) could be unaware of the implications lying behind these inferences. Yet at the same time he probably wanted the fascination of Jesus to seize the hearts of Gentiles without deterring them by too open a reference to Jewish sacrificial ideas. So it was a delicate balance. (We could add, 'let him who reads understand'). However, as we have seen above, he really leaves us in no doubt of what he is inferring, and that is that Jesus was offering up through His own death the blood of the new covenant (22.20), that like the Servant in Isaiah He was being reckoned among the transgressors (22.37), that He was suffering so that men might be altered in heart and mind and receive remission of sins (24.46-47), that He was purchasing His people with His own blood (Acts 20.28). What further witness do we need?

23.33 'And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the evildoers, one on the right hand and the other on the left.'

And finally they reached a place, aptly named The Skull, where the soldiers placed the crosspiece on the ground nailed Jesus to it by His hands and feet (John 20.25; Colossians 2.14, and see Luke 24.40) and then attached the crosspiece crosswise over a longer beam and nailed them together. After that they lifted up the whole and dropped it with a thud into a hole in the ground, regardless of the consequences for the victim, or for the effects on His hands and feet. The same process would also be carried out on behalf of the two insurrectionists. The description stresses His reckoning with the transgressors. Then they would be left to a slow, lingering death, a spectacle for all to see, bearing the shame of being accursed by hanging on a tree (Deuteronomy 21.22-23; Galatians 3.13). For the Jew it was the most dreadful of deaths

both physically, and even moreso spiritually.

‘Called The Skull’. Matthew and Mark cite the Hebrew name, Golgotha. The Skull was probably the Greek name, possibly based on the shape of a hill or a mound in the vicinity. In a multi-lingual society different names would be given to places in a number of languages.

So Luke has traced the story of Jesus through from the moment of the announcing of the birth of John the Baptist to the final crucifixion of Jesus, and it has now reached its lowest ebb. And in most life stories that would be the end. But for Jesus in His representative Manhood it was only the beginning. For Luke now closes off his Gospel with a message of hope, springing from the cross, expressed in the form of a final chiasmus, a chiasmus which leads from death to life, and which will result in the glorious triumphs of Acts. In the words of Jesus Himself, ‘Except a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides by itself alone, but if it die it brings forth much fruit’ (John 12.24).

### The Coming Hope (23.34-24.52).

From this moment on the whole emphasis changes. For even while Jesus is on the cross and suffering for the sins of the world, the message of hope is first proclaimed. In the midst of the fulfilment of His destiny He obtains its firstfruit. And that message will then blossom outwards until it is a message of hope for the whole world. This last group of passages may therefore be analysed as follows:

- a Even while He is being mocked Jesus bears witness to the dying thief that this day he will be with Him in Paradise (23.34-43), the firstfruits of what is to come.
- b Jesus commends His spirit (pneuma) to God and breathes His last (epneusen) in such a way as to be a testimony to the Centurion (23.44-49). Life has gone from His body, but it departs at His own behest.
- c Jesus is buried by a previously unknown righteous man, now revealed by name, in an unused tomb, the sign of His special and distinctive holiness (23.50-53).
- d After the Sabbath the tomb is revealed to various witnesses as empty, and the angels declare that Jesus is risen (23.54-24.12).
- c The risen Jesus walks with two previously unknown disciples, one of whom is revealed by name, and opens to them the Scriptures concerning Himself, revealing that He is alive through the breaking of bread (24.13-35).
- b Jesus reveals in the Upper Room that He is not pneuma, but flesh and bones. He has experienced the resurrection of the body. Life has returned to His transformed body (24.36-43).
- a The disciples will shortly be prepared for their great witness to all nations and Jesus is taken up into Heaven (24.44-52).

Note how in ‘a’ the witness begins with the dying thief and Jesus declares that He will shortly be in Paradise, and in the parallel the disciples are to be witnesses to all nations of salvation through the cross, while Jesus is taken up into Heaven. In ‘b’ Jesus’ spirit leaves His body and He commends it to God, giving thereby a testimony to the Centurion, and in the parallel He reveals that His spirit has returned to His body, giving thereby a testimony to the disciples. In ‘c’ Jesus is buried by a previously unknown disciple, and in the parallel appears alive, out of His tomb, to two previously unknown disciples. Centrally in ‘d’ the empty tomb is testified to, both by the women and the rest, and the angels testify to the fact that Jesus is risen.

There is an interesting phenomenon here of previously unknown persons being involved in this final period, the previously unknown thief, the previously unknown Joseph of Arimathaea, the unknown angels, the two previously unknown disciples. We can compare this with the time of Jesus birth at the commencement of the Gospel where the unknown shepherds, the unknown angels, the previously unknown Simeon, and the previously unknown prophetess Anna, bore witness to His birth. It is a testimony to the many unknowns among

mankind in general who were and are involved in the coming of the Kingly Rule of God.

**The King of the Jews Is Declared, And The First Beneficiary of the Cross Is Revealed (23.34-42).**

If we accept verse 34 as part of the text this passage opens and closes with an emphasis on the forgiveness now being made available. Forgiveness is seen as central to the cross (compare 24.46-47; Acts 5.30-31).

(Note how the chiasmus is evidence for its inclusion. We can well understand why later copyists, aware of the destruction of Jerusalem, which they may have seen as indicating that the prayer no longer applied, and aware of fierce persecutions continually brought on their fellow Christians by Jewish informers, may have excised this verse (understandably but quite wrongly) precisely because they saw it as no longer applying, and possibly because it provided a basis for unbelievers to argue that Jesus' prayer had failed, or because they were unable to be quite so forgiving as Jesus, arguing that the Jews now did know what they were doing. Something of the bitterness of unbelieving Jews against Christians, which existed from the beginning and went on for centuries, comes out in Acts 14.5, 19; 17.5, 13; 18.6; 21.27; 23.12).

The evidence for the inclusion or otherwise of the verse is remarkably equally divided, but with the evidence of early writers supporting its inclusion. Thus it is included in Aleph (Sinaiticus); A (Alexandrinus); D corrector; f1; f13; 565; 700; old latin and some syriac versions; Marcion; Irenaeus; Clement of Alexandria; Origen. It is, however, excluded in p75; Aleph corrector; B; D; W; Theta; 0124; 1241; 579 and some syriac; etc. and later by Cyril, admittedly a powerful combination.

Either way it has to be argued that it was included (or excluded) very early on, and if Luke did at some stage issue a revised edition that may well explain the situation. Significantly the language suggests that it is Lucan. And its place in the chiasmus argues for its inclusion from the beginning. We will therefore interpret the text on that basis.

**Analysis.**

- a Jesus said, "Father, forgive them" (34a).
- b "For they do not know what they are doing." And parting His garments among them, they cast lots (34b).
- c And the people stood watching, and the rulers also scoffed at Him, saying, "He saved others, let Him save Himself, if this is the Christ (Messiah) of God, His chosen." And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself" (35-37).
- d And there was also a superscription over Him, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS (38).
- c And one of the evildoers who were hanged, railed on Him, saying, "Are you not the Christ (Messiah)? Save yourself and us" (39).
- b But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (40-41).
- a And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your Kingly Rule." And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, Today you will be with me in Paradise" (42).

Note that in 'a' Jesus prays for forgiveness for those who are doing this to Him, and in the parallel He assures the repentant evildoer of forgiveness. In 'b' the Jewish leaders (and possibly also the people) do not know what they are doing, and in the parallel the railing evildoer is informed that he does not know what he is doing. In 'c' the rulers and the soldiers scoff at Him, and in the parallel one evildoer scoffs at Him. And centrally in 'd' is the verdict of Rome, 'This is the King of the Jews'.

**23.34a ‘And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” ’**

**In this prayer we see the greatness of Jesus’ compassion, as He recognises that these people are acting blindly rather than deliberately. And it is for this reason that He can seek forgiveness for them. Theirs was not high handed sin. Thus for those who have committed it there is still a way back. (Once it became highhanded sin through the constant witness of the Apostles they would have ‘blasphemed against the Holy Spirit’. Then their hope would have gone)**

**Unless there had been good grounds for doing so in the tradition of what Jesus had said, no one would have put these words in Jesus’ mouth after the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus we have good grounds for seeing here Jesus’ compassion, which He had previously expressed to the weeping women, now being expressed on behalf of those who had put Him there. We can compare with this the words of Stephen, ‘Lord, lay not this sin to their charge’ (Acts 7.60).**

**By ‘them’ Jesus may have been speaking of the Roman soldiers, or He may have had in mind all His accusers, but He prays that this sin, the greatest ever committed on earth because of Whom it concerned, might be forgiven. Had He not done so, and looking at it from a human point of view, perhaps the earth would have been consumed at that moment. Without such forgiveness on the part of God it undoubtedly would have been, because of the heinousness of the crime. Angels but awaited His word. But the forgiveness was on the basis that it was not a deliberate sin committed by some who knew precisely what they were doing, a sin with a high hand, but a sin resulting from ignorance (compare Acts 3.17-19). It is therefore no indication that God will one day forgive all, including even those who sin deliberately. It offers hope to all who will repent, but it does not offer a way out for those who choose to deliberately and continually defy God until their hearts are so hardened that they cannot repent. For such this forgiveness does not apply.**

**In the chiasmus this act of forgiveness parallels Jesus act of forgiveness towards the dying thief. He too had not known what he was doing when he had reviled Jesus (verse 43).**

**23.34b ‘And parting his garments among them, they cast lots.’**

**Underlining the blindness of men and the need for such forgiveness is this act of the Roman soldiers. Before His very eyes, almost at the foot of His cross, they divided up His clothing, which was the right by Roman custom of the execution squad, and cast lots for what could not be divided. He was stripped there of all that He possessed, and hung naked before God. He Who had previously had nowhere to lay His head, now had nothing with which to cover Himself. In His death the world would allow Him nothing but ignominy. This underlines the callousness of mankind, and its willingness to rob God. It also fulfilled the Scriptures describing the lot of the Davidic king (Psalm 22.18). The Scripture demonstrated that it was the destiny of the Davidic king to be stripped naked by his enemies. But this is no manufactured scene to accord with the Psalm. That it happened is undeniable. For it always happened at a crucifixion. But what the Psalm makes clear is that it happened within the purposes of God.**

**Another significance also lies behind this action. By doing this they left Him naked, so that naked He hung on the cross. The moment the first man and woman sinned they ‘knew that they were naked’ (Genesis 3.7). Nakedness was ever therefore the symbol of man in his sin. By the Jews to be naked was ever considered to be shameful. It was also therefore necessary for the One Who died for them to be stripped naked so that He might hang there on display in their place. He was stripped naked that we might not be stripped naked before God. He was there as the son of Adam as well as being there as the Son of God (3.38), naked in our place, so that if we believe in Him we ourselves may not be found naked (2 Corinthians 5.3).**

**23.35 ‘And the people stood watching, and the rulers also scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others, let him save himself, if this is the Christ (Messiah) of God, his chosen.” ’**

Meanwhile the people, and the rulers, combined in gazing at the spectacle before them (compare verses 13-23 where they had united in condemning Him). The use of 'watched' may reflect Psalm 22.7 (in LXX 21.8). And the rulers scoffed at Him. This mirrors Psalm 22.7-8 where the description of the treatment of 'David' is remarkably apposite. Here was the greater David was suffering it to an even greater extent, another case of prophecy being 'filled full'. This idea of the attitude of the rulers will later be taken up in Acts and compared with the action of the rulers in Psalm 2 towards the Davidic house (Acts 4.25-28). But here all concentration is on their act. And they jeered at Jesus and congratulated themselves on the fact that in spite of His bold words at His trials He was unable to do anything to help Himself. They clearly felt that it vindicated them. He had 'saved others'. Even they had at this time had to admit to the reality of His healings and exorcisms. But He could not save Himself. Surely if He really were the Messiah of God He would now be able to save Himself? Why then did He not do so? Peter could have given them the answer, 'He suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3.18). Paul could have informed them, 'He was made sin for us, He Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him' (2 Corinthians 5.21). Luke could have told them, 'He was reckoned among the transgressors' (22.37). He was buying His people with His own blood (Acts 20.28). He was sealing the new covenant with His blood (22.20).

The suggestion here is probably not that the people did not scoff, but that they scoffed in their hearts while their representatives did it vocally for them. They were there supporting what their leaders did. Others who were simply passers-by also scoffed (Mark 15.29), but Luke is concentrating on those who were there more permanently. 'The people' here represents the unbelieving mass of Judaism. It is the vox populi. It does not have in mind those who have believed. Note the direct connection between 'the Messiah' and 'His chosen'. The latter expression reflects Isaiah 42.1 and the voice at Jesus' transfiguration (9.35). The One Whom God has sent, and has revealed in glory on the mountain before His own people as represented there by the three Apostles (9.28-36), is now mocked on the cross, before a rejecting people. The believer therefore has seen what the rulers cannot see. He has seen the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4.4-6). That is the difference between the believer and the unbeliever.

23.36 'And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself."'

The people and rulers mocked Him, and now the soldiers also mocked Him. Shortly it would be one of the evildoers who would mock Him (verse 39). The threefold mocking is intended to indicate that the whole world mocked, Jews, Gentiles and the riffraff of society. In the case of the soldiers it was emphasised by their giving to him of their coarse wine (which was their own drink), as though to a king. By this they sought unknowingly to make Him Who had promised that He would drink no more of the fruit of the vine, do so in contravention of His purpose. They knew not what they did. And as they did so they jeered saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself." They did not, of course believe it for a moment. They were merely aping what others had said. It just seemed to them too good jest for them not to be involved.

'Offering him sour wine.' In Psalm 69.21 and in the Dead Sea Scrolls such an act is seen as hostile, but here it was probably rough humour.

23.38 'And there was also a superscription over him, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.'

And then in stark contrast to all that they were doing we are told of the proclamation above His cross. Written on a placard above His head were the words THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.' But this was not in jest. We learn elsewhere that Pilate had done it deliberately in order to annoy the Jewish leaders, and when they objected had declared, 'what I have written I have written' (John 19.19-22). While he did not acknowledge Jesus, he at least acknowledged why He was there. The placing of such an accusation above the head of a condemned man was a regular practise, but never was one more important or more revealing than this.

Note how this verse is central in the chiasmus amidst all the mockery which is gathered on both sides, leading on finally to His recognition by the second evildoer. To Luke these words meant even more than they did to Pilate. Here was the truth for the world to see. This One Who hung here was the promised King Who would yet be set to rule over all creation and all who are in it. He was the One Whom the magi had sought, the world ruler of the last days (Matthew 2.2).

**23.39 ‘And one of the evildoers who were hanged, railed on him, saying, “Are you not the Christ (Messiah)? Save yourself and us.” ’**

The mockery and anger continued. Now it was one of the evildoers who had been crucified alongside Him, who turned his pain-wracked attention to him, and muttered at Him through His parched lips. His words were no doubt spoken in the bitter irony of despair, for he clearly did not really believe what he said. The Messiah was what he had been waiting for. And he had never come. So if this fellow claimed to be the Messiah why did he not get down from the cross and save him too? But it was said in bitter irony and misery. He had no expectation that He would, nor that He could, do him any good. He was just expressing the bitterness in his soul. And the sad thing was that had he but said it in another frame of mind and from another outlook he would have been saved. His words are in deliberate contrast to those of his compatriot that follow. He said almost the same thing, he saw what the other saw, but how different was his intent. For there was nothing within this first evildoer that responded to what Jesus was.

**23.40-41 ‘But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ’**

Meanwhile something had been happening in the heart of the other evildoer. He too had railed at Jesus to begin with (Matthew 27.44). But then something about Jesus had come home to him (as to a certain extent it had to Pilate). We cannot fully know what it was. What does speak to a man at a time like this? But we can surmise, for we know that Jesus was like no other. Humanly speaking it was probably because there was something about this unusual man who prayed for His enemies, and who bore His death so calmly, that struck a chord in his heart, so that he could not bear to hear Him run down. Probably he had recognised that He was the prophet Who had stirred the people, and he may even have heard Him preach. And he knew an innocent man when he saw one, and yet One who bore His fate without recrimination. So turning to the other evildoer, whom he no doubt knew from better days of being a comrade in insurrection, he rebuked him and suggested that this was no time for mockery when soon they would meet the Judge of all men.

Did he really want to meet his Maker with bitter words on his lips about this man who was clearly so superior to them both? For here was a man who, if anyone was, was clearly innocent. It shone from His face and His eyes. It was clear from the accusations being yelled out by those arrogant Sadducees. It was apparent from His responses. They really had nothing against Him at all. And it is almost certain that this evildoer had recognised Jesus as the prophet Who had gathered such crowds, and Who had done such good, from the words that he later addressed to Him. And he realised that He at least was only here for being too good for those hypocritical religious Jewish leaders to stomach.

**23.42-43 ‘And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your Kingly Rule.” And he said to him, “Truly I say to you, Today you will be with me in Paradise.” ’**

And then he turned to Jesus. To his memory probably came back words that he had heard Him preach about the coming of the Kingly Rule of God, stirred by the mockery of the rulers. And something told him that here was One for Whom at least this was not the end. So wistfully, and probably almost hopelessly, he humbled himself and sought only that this Man

would remember him when He entered in on that Kingly Rule that He had spoken about. Similar requests to be remembered are found on contemporary gravestones, a wistful hope rather than a confident pleas. It was a plea to be remembered, sinful though he was. He probably did not even himself understand fully what he was asking. Rather it was an expression of some inward faith caused by the presence of Jesus. And he probably little dreamed that he would receive a reply far above his expectations. But what he asked was enough, for it came from a true heart and was addressed to the right Person.

For Jesus turned His head towards him, and said those immortal words, “Truly I say to you, Today you will be with me in Paradise.” It was the last ‘truly’ that Jesus would say on earth, but it saved a human soul.

“Today you will be with me in Paradise.” Behind these remarkable words, spoken in such dread circumstances, lie a host of significant truths. The first is the utter certainty of Jesus. He had no doubt that within a short while He would be enjoying the presence of God. There was not a single doubt in His mind in spite of what He had gone through and what He would still have to go through. The second is His certainty on behalf of this repentant evildoer. He knew without any shadow of doubt that this man would join Him there, because He had determined it. In this He expressed quite clearly His right to grant the forgiveness that brought eternal life, the power to bring this broken, sinful man into an eternal relationship with God. He did not say to him, ‘Look to God and you will be forgiven’. He did not say, ‘Pray, for you still have hope.’ In that hour of outward darkness and despair He said, ‘I say to you’. Even while He was seemingly powerless in the hands of man, He was controlling a human destiny, with a certainty that clearly revealed who He was. These words alone demonstrate His supreme deity. No Messiah who accorded with the belief of the Jews could have spoken with such certainty. How could a man desiring to be remembered by another man have his forgiveness confirmed to him in this way? No godly man would have dared to be so presumptuous. Only Jesus could have done it, because of Who He was.

What Jesus said was sufficient to bring rest to the man’s soul. For He spoke in terms that the man could understand. There was no time here for an expansion of His words, no time for explanation, no time for subtle theology. He had to ask Himself, ‘How can I convey My thought in one sentence in words that will speak to this man as he is, so that he will understand? And He found the answer in the idea of ‘Paradise’, which originally referred to the walled gardens of kings, was used in LXX to refer to the Garden of Eden, and which had come to mean the intermediate level of bliss for the righteous. And so He promised him Paradise. We must not try to build up theories from this reply, or seek explanations from it about life beyond the grave, fitting it into some complicated scheme. It was not a part of His schematic teaching. It was a word spoken to convey the idea of comfort and salvation to a dying man in terms that he would at that moment understand. Basically it promised him that in that very day he would be enjoying joy in the presence of God. It promised him all that his heart could desire.

But if we take His words literally then it indicated that that very day both of them would be consciously in the presence of God awaiting the resurrection (compare Philippians 1.21-23), a resurrection which He anticipated for Himself within a short while, and anticipated for the ex-evildoer at the general resurrection. So when Jesus ‘descended into Hades’ we must see Him as ‘descending’ into Paradise (descending because the body descended into the tomb). The descent merely speaks of His body going into the grave without reference to what happened to His spirit.

Here then was the firstfruit of the cross, a man who most would have considered a hopeless case, but who was now brought within the folds of His saving power. For he had met and submitted to the One Who had the power to give life to whom He willed (John 5.21), and he had passed from death to life (John 5.24).

An interesting parallel is found a hundred years later referring to Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion. When he was being burned to death as a martyr c 135 AD his executioner supposedly asked him if he would bring him to the life of the world to come if he stopped tormenting him. The Rabbi is said to have agreed with the consequence that the executioner joined him in the fire. Then a heavenly voice came which said, 'Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion and the executioner are destined for life in the world to come'. But it should be noted in this case that the authoritative statement about his deliverance comes from Heaven and not from the Rabbi, confirming what we have said above. The Rabbi could express the pious hope, but it required the voice from Heaven to give certainty. It is also noteworthy that the executioner is seen to have earned his deliverance by his willingness to cease his torments and be a martyr. It was thus a very different case from the dying evildoer who received his deliverance totally undeservedly simply because he looked to Jesus, and it was probably rather intended to be a pious tale with a moral than to be taken literally.

#### The Final Hours (23.44-49).

It was now half way through the day, and for Jesus the worst was yet to come. For now He entered into such an experience as was to tear at His very soul. But Luke passes it over in silence and we have to go to Matthew and Mark to learn briefly and dimly of what He experienced (Mark 15.34), although even then it is only revealed by a cry. All are dumb in the face of something that none can understand.

Indeed we should note how the Gospels limit their descriptions so as to remove all excessive emotion. They describe what happened almost matter-of-factly. For their concentration is not on His sufferings, but on the fact that He was there in the purposes of God, and was fulfilling the will of God, so that every step was in accordance with the Scriptures. He was not seen as a martyr. He was seen as God acting in the world in a way which no one could fully understand, in a way partly explained by what He had done at the Last Supper, once it was more fully understood. It was summed up in the words linking Him with the Servant of the Lord Who had died for the sins of His people, 'He was reckoned with the transgressors' (22.37; Mark 15.28; Isaiah 53.12).

#### Analysis.

- a It was now about the sixth hour, and a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, the sun's light failing. And the veil of the temple was rent in the midst (44-45).
- b And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (46a).
- c And having said this, He yielded up the spirit' (46).
- b And when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous man" (47).
- a And all the crowds who came together to this sight, when they beheld the things that were done, returned smiting their breasts, and all his acquaintance, and the women who followed with Him from Galilee, stood afar off, seeing these things (48-49).

Note that in 'a' darkness came on the earth and the veil of the Temple was rent, and in the parallel the crowds were in darkness of soul and beat their breasts. The reference to Galilee might suggest that Luke had in mind 'the people (of Galilee) that sat in darkness' (who will see a great light) (Isaiah 9.2). In 'b' Jesus commends His spirit into His Father's hands, and in the parallel the centurion declares Him to be a righteous man. And centrally in 'c' Jesus yields up His spirit.

23.44-45a 'And it was now about the sixth hour, and a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, the sun's light failing.'

How remarkable it is that these three last hours of Jesus' final agony are passed over in total

silence in all the Gospels. Was there nothing that could have been said? It is as though they recognise that no one on earth could comment on these moments so that every comment had to be left to God. A veil of darkness is drawn over His last hours. But all make clear that God did comment. 'A darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, the sun's light failing.' (No eclipse could take place at the time of the full moon, but it may well have been caused by a sirocco wind sweeping the sand in from the desert, or by the arrival of unusual cloud formations, or even by some phenomenon in space. Unusual darkenings of the sun have been witnessed to in the past). That was God's comment, and all the evangelists clearly felt that they could not add to it, except to express His final words. Such thoughts were rather left to the hymnwriters to express. 'But none of the ransomed ever knew, how deep were the waters crossed, or how dark was the night which the Lord passed through, e'er He found the sheep that was lost.'

And no wonder that they could not understand, for as another hymnwriter declares, 'Tis mystery all, the immortal dies, who can explore His strange design? In vain the firstborn seraph tries, to sound the depths of grace divine. Tis mystery all, immense and free, but, O my God, it found out me.'

'A darkness came over the whole land -- the sun's light failing.' The significance of such an experience is described in Jeremiah 15.9, 'her sun went down while it was yet day'. And what did it indicate? It indicated that anguish and terror had fallen on her. It indicated that she was shamed and disgraced. And so did Jesus enter into the terror and anguish of sin and death, and bear shame and disgrace for us. 'He Who knew no sin, was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5.21).' The significance of darkness is made clear in Luke in three ways:

- The One Who was coming, was said to be coming to those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death (1.79), to those sat in helplessness and hopelessness, and here therefore He may be seen as entering into that darkness and death on their behalf so that He might deliver them from that helplessness and hopelessness that gripped them.
- To be in darkness was the result of being out of the light (11.34-35), and thus we may see here that Jesus had for a while chosen to forfeit the light of God and had willingly taken on Himself the darkness that resulted, with the result that for a while the light of God had ceased to shine into His heart. This so that He might not only be reckoned among the transgressors, but might take our experience on Himself, in order to save us from it.
- Those who came to arrest Him had been said to be operating in 'the power of darkness' (22.53). Thus here we may see Jesus as experiencing that 'power of darkness' in Himself. Compare how in Acts 26.18 being turned from darkness to light parallels being turned from the power of Satan to God. But here the opposite was the case. Jesus was being turned from light to darkness in order that He might face up to Satan and deliver 'many' from his darkness, and bring them to the light.

So this was a darkness that indicated a state of death and hopelessness. It was a darkness that indicated that He was for a while forsaken by the light of God for our sakes. It was a darkness that indicated His being brought into the sphere of the tyranny of Satan, from which in the end He would emerge victorious having triumphed over him in the cross (Colossians 2.15). It is the darkness that is in mind in Isaiah 53.11 LXX (and in the same verse in a Hebrew text at Qumran which otherwise on the whole parallels MT) where it is said, 'from the travail of His soul He will see light and will be satisfied'. And that was what He was undergoing, for us. He was enduring the travail and darkness of sin, and death, and Satan, in order that He might achieve light for all Who are His. No wonder it drew from Him that terrible cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?' He was forsaken that we might never be forsaken.

'The sun's light failing.' In 21.25 the sign in the sun was to be the indication of terrible judgments coming on the world. Here then were those same terrible judgments being met on

**Jesus Christ. It was an indication that He was suffering in Himself the eschatological judgments of the world. All mankind's sin and suffering, past, present and future, was meeting on Him. It would be foolish of us to seek to add more. The expression of such things can only be left to God.**

**23.45b 'And the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.'**

**And as a result of that time, the veil of the Temple was torn in two. There is a difference of opinion as to which veil is meant, the veil which separated the Holy Place in the Temple from the Holy of Holies, or the veil that guarded the way into the Holy Place. Both were only symbolic for they had been replaced by doors, but the veils were hung over the doors so as to preserve the old features of the Tabernacle. The tearing of the veil was almost certainly intended by the evangelists to indicate that the way into the presence of God was being laid open (compare Hebrews 10.19-20). Although the alternative was that it indicated that God had deserted the Holy of Holies (compare Ezekiel 11.22-23). Or that it represented the equivalent of His 'rending His garment'.**

**In favour of the outer veil being torn is the fact that it would then be a sight visible to all, and if a sirocco was the cause of the sudden darkness, that could also have caused the splitting of the veil. In favour of the inner veil is its deeper symbolism, and even though it would not be seen by all, such a happening would not be able to be hidden. Too many priests would become aware of it, to say nothing of those who had to replace the veil.**

**The Jewish Talmud (the Gemara - Rabbinic comments on the Mishnah which latter was the written record of the oral Law) states that forty years before the destruction of temple, thus around this time, something happened which made the massive doors of the temple open of their own accord (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 39b).**

**And that strange things happened in the temple some time prior to its destruction at the fall of Jerusalem is recorded also by Josephus (Jewish Wars 6.5.2 - although not referring to this particular event). Among other things Josephus describes how the eastern gate of the inner court, which was of brass and very heavy, which took twenty men to shut and rested on a base strengthened with iron, and had bolts fastened very deeply into the firm floor which was made of one solid stone, opened of its own accord. It would seem that the temple mount was subject to earth movements which caused strange things to happen. It may well therefore also have happened forty years before.**

**Note that in the chiasmus this descent of darkness and splitting of the veil parallels the distress and beating of the breasts of the onlookers (verse 48). God's distress at what was happening is seen to have communicated itself to men.**

**23.46a 'And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." '**

**Luke omits Jesus' citation of Psalm 22.1, possibly because he does not feel that his Gentile readers will recognise its source and may therefore receive the wrong impression. He does not want them to think that Jesus died in despair but rather that He was in control of His departure. Thus while both the Jewish writers emphasise the final travail of soul, very much in line with Jewish thinking, the Gentile is concerned rather to present Jesus' power over death. All Luke tells us is that He 'cried with a loud voice'.**

**"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Luke is the only one who cites these words, but that is not surprising. It is quite understandable why Matthew and Mark both wanted to end with His terrible cry, and did not want to take attention away from it.**

**The loud voice goes with the experience expressed. It is His one last expression of life as His life begins to ebb away. And following it He commended His spirit to God. The quotation that follows comes from a regular evening prayer, but was here applied to an obviously deeper**

experience. By it Jesus was committing His spirit to His Father. Luke wants us to see that as in life, so in death, Jesus was in control.

**23.46b 'And having said this, he yielded up the spirit.'**

By these words Luke makes clear that His words had not been just a pious prayer, but a deliberate committing of His spirit to God. He really was in control. His work being done He handed Himself over to the care of the Father, and we are to see that all was finally well. The speed of His death confirmed the severity of the flogging that He had received, a fact further evidenced by His being unable to bear His cross all the way. And yet all His thought had been for others. The weeping women on the road to the cross, the guilty men who stood before Him lying under the wrath of God, the evildoer dying beside Him. His scope had been wide. It was only at the end that He allowed a thought for Himself.

**23.47 'And when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous man."'**

The centurion in charge of the execution squad was deeply impressed. The previous signs had filled him with awe. They had drawn from him the cry, 'Truly this was the son of God'. But this more specific commitment of Himself to God indicated to him Jesus' uniqueness among men. Possibly he even felt a little ashamed of his earlier cry. So he covered himself by declaring, well at least He was a righteous man. The idea behind his statement is that only a righteous man could have such a relationship with the divine, or could receive such favour. The words also indicated to Luke's readers that even His executioner had found Him to be without fault.

Luke lays great stress on the innocence of Jesus He emphasised that Pilate declared Him innocent three times (verses 4, 14, 22). He noted Herod's testimony to Jesus' innocence (verse 15). He contrasted Jesus' innocence with the guilt of Barabbas (verse 25). He recorded the thief's testimony to Jesus' innocence (verse 41). And he finally here emphasises the centurion's declaration of His innocence. Thus we have a sevenfold declaration of His innocence.

**23.48 'And all the crowds who came together to this sight, when they beheld the things that were done, returned smiting their breasts.'**

The things that had happened moved the crowds. They had long sought signs from Jesus, and they had had signs today. And as they went away they beat their breasts as they thought of what had happened. They were moved and stirred. But we are given no cause to think that it went further. They had 'beheld these things', but by the morning it would all be just a memory.

**23.49 'And all his acquaintance, and the women who followed with him from Galilee, stood afar off, seeing these things.'**

In what contrast were the crowds with His disciples and the women who followed Him. They too had stood afar off seeing these things. They were probably afraid to come too close in case they were arrested. But the way this is expressed suggests that they would continue to remember it. They saw these things. The cutting short of the sentence without an explanatory final clause such as we find in verse 48 indicates that with them the effect continued. They would not easily forget.

#### **A Man Called Joseph (23.50-53).**

But there was one man who acted positively. He had been present when the Sanhedrin met, but he had not agreed with their verdict, and had given his vote against them. Perhaps he now felt that he should have done more. But he would not have realised then how easily Pilate could be made to cave in. He was a good and righteous man, looking for the Kingly Rule of God, and while he had been unable to prevent this terrible deed at least he now felt that he could ensure that Jesus had a decent and worthy burial. And bravely, for association with a

condemned criminal would certainly be frowned on, he went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, a request that Pilate granted. And wrapping it in a linen cloth he laid it in a new tomb that had never been used before.

The importance of this incident is that it prepares for the later description of the empty tomb and emphasises its significance. Jesus' body was not just put anywhere. It was reverently laid in a tomb that could at the time be clearly identified. Thus when it was gone, and no one (apart from the angels) was able to say where, there was no doubt of what it indicated. He truly had risen.

#### Analysis.

- a And behold, a man named Joseph, who was a councillor, a good and righteous man (50).
- b He had not consented to their counsel and deed (51a).
- c A man of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, who was looking for the Kingly Rule of God (51b).
- b This man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus (52).
- a And he took it down, and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet lain (53).

Note that in 'a' Joseph is a good and righteous man suitable to see to the burial of Jesus, and in the parallel He buries Him in an unused tomb, fit to receive what has been offered to God and is holy. God ensures that all is pure in the burial of Jesus. In 'b' he was a man who was free from any part in the death of Jesus, but in the parallel rather seeks to show that he is for Him and will care for Him in His death. And centrally in 'c' he is a Jew who is seeking the Kingly Rule of God. Jesus is in safe hands.

23.50 'And behold, a man named Joseph, who was a councillor, a good and righteous man,'

Here Joseph is describe in language reminiscent of 2.25, 36-37. Both at the beginning and the end of His life Jesus is borne witness to by the righteous in Israel. It is a shining reminder that within the corrupted nation were those whose lives were still lived before God. He 'was a councillor'. He had his place on the Sanhedrin. And yet he was also good and righteous. God had His representatives in high places, as well as low.

23.51a 'He had not consented to their counsel and deed.'

Furthermore it is made clear that he had not consented to what had happened to Jesus. He had not voted for Jesus' death. And yet we cannot hide from the fact that his voice against it had not been heard sufficiently to be commented on, apart from here. He had accepted the verdict reluctantly but he had not stood up to be counted, until now.

23.51b 'A man of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, who was looking for the Kingly Rule of God.'

But primarily, while he came from a city of the Jews, he was a man who was 'looking for the Kingly Rule of God' (compare 2.25, 38). He was a true believer, seeking first the Kingly Rule of God and His righteousness (12.31; 18.29; Matthew 6.33). His hear was thus set rightly towards God.

Arimathea was probably twenty miles north west of Jerusalem at Ramathaim-zophim (1 Samuel 1.1), now known as Rentis. The explanatory 'a city of the Jews' was for Luke's Gentile readers.

23.52 'This man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.'

Concerned that at least Jesus might have a decent burial he approached Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He had not been able to save Him from ignominy in life. He would do so now that He was dead. It was quite normal for families to ask for the return of the bodies of condemned relatives. But by his act Joseph, who was not a relative, was identifying himself

with Jesus. Possibly he wanted Pilate to know that not all the Sanhedrin had agreed with the treatment meted out to Jesus.

23.53 'And he took it down, and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet lain.'

The request being granted he arranged for the body to be taken down from the cross, had it wrapped in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb, hewn into stone, where no man had ever been laid. It is possible that he actually took part himself in order to honour Jesus now that He was dead, or the main task may have been left to his servants under his supervision. But either way it was undoubtedly his tomb, cut out in preparation for his own burial. That His body was first anointed in accordance with the usual practise comes out in John 19.39-40.

'Where never man had yet lain.' This is a clear indication that in Luke's eyes Jesus' death was seen as a kind of offering. The use of what was totally unused, which is emphasised here, indicated something that was for the use in connection with what was supremely holy to God. We can compare the colt that took Jesus up towards the Temple (19.30). See also 1 Samuel 6.7; 2 Samuel 6.3; 1 Chronicles 13.7.

#### A Day Of Waiting (23.54-56).

The approaching Sabbath, commencing at sunset on the day of the crucifixion, necessarily prevented any further activity, so that the women followers of Jesus, who had watched and had seen where His body was laid, had to wait for the Sabbath to be over. Meanwhile they began to prepare spices and ointments so that they too could pay their last respects to their beloved Master. It was as though the whole of creation was waiting for what would happen next.

This dedicated activity, first of Joseph, and then of the women, draws attention to the fact that all were now agreed that the wonderful time was over. From now on Jesus would be a glorious memory. But that He was dead was unquestionable. All that remained was for them to pay their last respects before they returned home. They had believed that it would be He Who was to redeem Israel. But events had proved them wrong. He had died bravely, even mysteriously, certainly unfairly. But that only laid all the more emphasis on the fact that He was dead, and that they knew where His body lay. And in the lives of most men that would be all that needed to be said, with possibly a postscript to say how His life had resulted in certain after effects. But as we shall see in this last chapter and the book of Acts, for Jesus it was only the beginning. And His story is still going on.

#### Analysis.

- a And it was the day of the Preparation, and the sabbath drew on (54).
- b And the women, who had come with him out of Galilee, followed after, and beheld the tomb, and how his body was laid, and they returned, and prepared spices and ointments (55-56a).
- a And on the sabbath they rested according to the commandment (56b).

Note that in 'a' the Sabbath draws near, and in the parallel they rest according to custom. And centrally in 'b' they prepare to anoint the body of Jesus.

23.54 'And it was the day of the Preparation, and the sabbath drew on (or 'shone forth').'

'The day of the Preparation.' This would normally be seen as indicating the Friday of Passover week (or more strictly Thursday sunset to Friday sunset), which was always called 'preparation day' (in modern Greek paraskeue refers to Friday). (An alternative would be for it to refer to the day of preparation (paraskeue) for the special sabbath which opened the week of Unleavened Bread). However, what the women wanted to do would not be seen as the 'necessary' tasks that had to be done in order to bury the dead, for the dead was already buried, and thus the sabbath had to be fully observed.

**‘And the sabbath shone forth.’ Some see this ‘shining forth’ as referring to the lighting of the lamps after sunset, or the shining forth of the evening star. Others relate it to sunrise on the following morning. Either way it had to be observed by no activity other than that required for the feast, as seen in Exodus 20.10. And the women probably did not feel like feasting.**

**23.55-56a ‘And the women, who had come with him out of Galilee, followed after, and beheld the tomb, and how his body was laid, and they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.’**

**Instead they used the last moments before the Sabbath in order to observe what happened to His body, watching as His corpse was carried into the tomb. Then in order to prepare spices and ointments with which they would show their love for their dead Master, they returned to where they were staying. The idea of the spices and ointment was that for a while they would counteract the approach of decay while the spirit might still be in the body, and keep the corpse from smelling too pungently. It was all that they could do.**

**The impression we get from the narrative is that they prepared the spices and ointments prior to the Sabbath, but may not necessarily be so. Representing things chronologically was not the fetish then that it is today. They were more interested in what was done than in when it was done. This is something that comes out constantly in the Old Testament where statements are made, and then the narrative goes back to fill in the detail. Certainly we may see that they made certain preparations before the Sabbath, but equally certainly they would want their offering to be fresh when it was offered, and that suggests that they would expect to leave the main preparations until after the Sabbath (any woman would know that). Indeed Mark makes clear that they had to buy more because they did not have sufficient, which was in fact extremely likely. This was not after all something that they had come from Galilee prepared for. So Luke’s statement must be seen as applying to all their preparations, both before and after the Sabbath.**

**23.56b ‘And on the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.’**

**Having done what they could of initial preparation and making ready for what they had to do, (what they would have to do as soon as the Sabbath was over would be the final preparing of the spices so that they would be fresh and subsequent anointing of the body of Jesus), they then obeyed God’s commandment and rested on the Sabbath Day. Nothing further could be done until the Sabbath was over. We are intended to recognise that all these labours were in fact unnecessary. For while in ignorance they were lovingly preparing their last tribute, God was busy rendering it unnecessary. This was one body which would not suffer corruption, as they would soon discover.**

**Jesus Rises From The Dead (24.1--52).**

**As we come to the final chapter of Luke’s Gospel it is interesting to note the presumably deliberate parallels with the opening chapters. The Gospel opens in the Temple (1.9), and it closes in the Temple (24.52). It opens with one who is hindered from blessing the people because of unbelief, but who later blesses God (1.68), and with Simeon who blesses God (2.28), and it closes with Jesus blessing His disciples (stressed twice) and His disciples blessing God (24.50-51, 52). There is no hindrance to blessing now, for they believe. It opens with Anna praying continually in the Temple (2.37) and closes with the disciples praying continually in the Temple (24.52). It opens with the appearances of angels (1.11, 26; 2.9-11), and closes with the appearances of angels (24.4) and of the risen Jesus (24.36). It opens with the frightening appearance of one who comes from God (1.11-12), and closes with the frightening appearance of One Who comes from God (24.36-37). It opens with two witnesses to Jesus’ coming as the Deliverer (2.25-38), and closes with two witnesses to His resurrection as the One Who will deliver (24.13). It opens with a question as to why Jesus’ parents could not understand His need to be in His Father’s house (2.49), and closes with a question as to why the women are so lacking in understanding that they seek the living among the dead and could not understand**

that He could not possibly be in the tomb, but must be in His Father's house (24.5) for God is the God of the living (20.38). It opens with a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins offered because the Coming One is coming (3.3). It closes with a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins because the Coming One has died and has risen again (24.47). It opens with reference to 'the power of the Most High' (dunamis 'upsistou) coming on Mary (1.35), and closes with a reference to 'power from on high' (ex 'upsous dunamin) coming on the Apostles (24.49). It opens with the expectancy of redemption (1.68-69; 2.30, 38), and closes with the expectancy of redemption (24.21, all Luke's readers knew that the expectations had been fulfilled). Yet there is no artificiality about these parallels, which arise naturally from what happened and are not forced. The point is being made that the opening activity of God has come to its fulfilment, and goes on. What He has begun He will finish.

But the chapter not only looks back, it also looks forward to Acts. Here in chapter 24 are revealed the 'many infallible proofs' of the resurrection spoken of in Acts 1.3. Here they were commanded to wait for power from on high, which is described in Acts 1.4 in terms of the Holy Spirit. Here our appetites are wetted concerning the Scriptures that tell us of the Messiah and His work (verses 26-27, 44-45), and this will be expanded on in the speeches in the first few chapters of Acts. Here we learn that they are to be His witnesses (verse 48), and this is confirmed in Acts 1.8, and is the main theme of Acts (see 1.8 and note that it is followed by the completing of the twelve so that there can be twelve witnesses to the life of Jesus and the resurrection, covering the twelve tribes of Israel.

This connection between the two books comes out especially in the chiasmus that binds the two books together:

- a 'And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and those who were with them' (Luke 24.33).
- b 'And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem' (Luke 24.47).
- c 'And, behold, I send the promise of my Father on you, but tarry you in the city (of Jerusalem), until you be endued with power from on high' (Luke 24.49).
- d 'And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God' (Luke 24.52).
- c 'And, being assembled together with them, He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, says He, you have heard of me' (Acts 1.4).
- b 'But you will receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts 1.8).
- a 'Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey' (Acts 1.12).

Note how in 'a' they returned to Jerusalem and in the parallel they did the same. In 'b' repentance and remission of sins was to be preached throughout all nations beginning at Jerusalem, and in the parallel they were to be His witnesses to the whole world, beginning at Jerusalem. In 'c' they were to wait for the promise of the Father, and in the parallel they were to wait for the promise of the Father. And centrally in 'd' they returned to Jerusalem and spent their time of waiting filled with joy and praising and blessing God. It was the time of blessing and spiritual preparation before the storm.

A further theme of this chapter is the certainty of the empty tomb, and the unbelief and uncertainty of the people involved concerning it. The women bring spices to the tomb. They do not believe that Jesus has risen, and are astonished at finding the tomb open and empty (verse 4). But at the words of the angels (verse 6) they go and tell the disciples what the angels have told them. The disciples, however, simply think that they are talking rubbish, and

dismiss their words as untrue. They do not believe them (verse 11). The two disciples on the way to Emmaus are seen to be in great doubt about the question, even after the women's testimony about the empty tomb and the words of the angels. They dismiss what the women have seen as 'a vision of angels', although it had been enough to sow doubts in their minds (verse 23). Peter is left wondering after what he sees at the empty tomb (verse 12), but it does not bring conviction until the Lord Himself appears to him (verse 34). And even when Jesus appears to them the disciples can hardly believe it (verse 41), even though they had been prepared for it by the evidence of Peter (verse 34). So it is made quite clear that there was no expectancy on anyone's part that they would ever see Jesus again on earth. None are revealed as people of expectant faith.

Such a situation confirms the accuracy of the narrative, for in terms of what was later the accepted norm for belief their attitude was paltry. They demeaned the women, and revealed an attitude of obstinate unbelief that was positively unsatisfactory. No one would even have hinted at such attitudes in the great Apostles if they had not been an accurate picture.

The chapter begins with the puzzle of the empty tomb, leads on to a full explanation of the periods of doubt and the appearances of Jesus in response, before He is finally taken up into Heaven, and ends with the enigmatic promise of 'power from on high. But for what that resulted in we have to wait until Acts.

#### All Are Puzzled Over The Empty Tomb (24.1-12).

When at last the time came for them to be able to go to the tomb, the women carried out the final preparations on the spices and ointments, and as Mark suggests, having found that they had insufficient for the purpose among them, had to hurry out to buy more. Both activities were likely in the circumstances, for they would carry some with them, but as they were only in Jerusalem as visitors and would be unlikely to have with them all that was necessary for a burial, once they had pooled their resources it was always likely that they would not have enough. These differing descriptions of their activities in fact bear the stamp of genuineness, for no one was particular about the detail, which would hardly be seen as important, but the various statements all fit in place and depict a situation that with a little thought we will see was most probable.

Having finalised their preparations they then went to the tomb and found it open, with the stone rolled away. Baffled by this unexpected event they entered it, only to discover to their dismay that the body had gone. But even while they were still looking at each other and wondering what to do next, two men whose clothes shone brilliantly, appeared to them and explained that Jesus had risen as He had promised.

Recognising that something remarkable must have happened, although probably not sure what, they raced back to the Apostles and told them all that they had seen and heard, but none of the men believed them. They dismissed their story as fairy tales. Although, Luke tells us, Peter did at some stage go to the tomb to see for himself what the situation was. And at what he saw he was clearly made to think deeply. John tells us that this was as a result of the arrival of Mary Magdalene to inform them about the empty tomb (John 20.1-10).

This account reads like history (contrast the later so-called Gospels written in the second century and later), and its soberness must be seen as confirming its accuracy. Someone who invented such a story would have made it far more exciting, for its potential was huge. Had they been writing with the intention of 'making an impression' they would have written it very differently. That was how people who were not serious historians wrote in those days. Nor, unless that was what had really happened, would any Christian inventor have had the women discover the truth first, with the Apostles then revealing their unbelief by refusing to accept what they said. It was too much of a slight, both on these revered women and on the Apostles, and it was putting the emphasis on the kind of witnesses who would be considered

by all to be the least reliable. The facts thus speak for themselves. Those who do not want to believe them because of their own presuppositions, or are predisposed to reject anything that they cannot fully explain, will no doubt continue to argue about them. But we would suggest that anyone who is genuinely seeking with an open mind to discover what really happened, and is willing to accept eyewitness testimony, can only be convinced that this is a true record of events. It is not the kind of description that people would invent, and is so much more sober than anything that they would have suggested if they had been making it up, that it demonstrates that they restricted themselves simply to the facts. They were not out for effect. They were out to tell what they saw, and to tell it soberly.

#### Analysis of 24.1-12.

- a But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, and they entered in, and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus (1-3).
- b It came to about that while they were perplexed about it, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel (4).
- c And as they were afraid and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (5).
- d He is not here, but is risen. Remember how He spoke to you when He was yet in Galilee” (6).
- e “Saying that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (7).
- d And they remembered his words, and returned from the tomb, and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest (8-9).
- c Now they were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them told these things to the Apostles (10).
- b And these words appeared in their sight as idle talk, and they disbelieved them (11).
- a But Peter arose, and ran to the tomb, and stooping and looking in, he sees the linen cloths by themselves, and he departed to his home, wondering at what had happened (12).

Note how in ‘a’ the women come to the tomb, find the stone rolled away, enter it and find it empty, (and are perplexed), while in the parallel Peter comes to the tomb, finds it empty, and goes home wondering at what he has seen. In ‘b’ the women are perplexed before the angels and in the parallel the disciples are disbelieving before the women. In ‘c’ the women are asked by the angels why they seek the living among the dead, and in the parallel we are told who these women were. In ‘d’ they are told to remember what Jesus had said and in the parallel they do remember. And finally in ‘e’, and centrally, we are told how the words of Jesus have been fulfilled in His resurrection.

24.1 ‘But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared.’

‘On the first day of the week.’ This is literally ‘on the first of the sabbaths’. It is a phrase that regularly indicates what we see as the first day of the week. But the word ‘sabbaths’ was used to indicate the seven days in a seven day period ending on a sabbath. Thus the ‘first of the sabbaths’ was Sunday (commencing at sunset on Saturday).

‘At early dawn.’ Literally ‘at deep dawn’. Mark indicates that this is just after the sun has come up. It is indeed unlikely that at such a perilous time for the followers of Jesus, when danger would be seen as lurking everywhere, the women would venture abroad in the dark.

‘They came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared.’ we must remember here that Luke is intending to give the gist of what happened without going into too much detail. We discover elsewhere that Mary Magdalene (John 20.1) and the other Mary (Matthew

28.1) went ahead in order to try to work out a way of removing the stone blocking the entrance and getting into the tomb. It would seem that at what they found the other Mary went back to warn the women, while Mary Magdalene sped off to tell the leading Apostles. But Luke is more interested in what happened to the whole body of women.

24.2-3 ‘And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, and they entered in, and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.’

What the group of women found is simply and briefly described. They found the tomb open with the stone rolled away from the entrance, but when they entered it did not find the body of the Lord Jesus, which is what they were looking for. This perplexed them. What were they going to do now? This situation was totally unexpected and would suggest to them that someone had removed the body. But the question was, who? And where had they taken it?

There is no difficulty in the suggestion that the women all entered the tomb. In Jerusalem today there is an ancient tomb called the Garden Tomb. While it may or not be the actual tomb in which Jesus was buried, it illustrates the type of tomb in which He was probably laid, and there would certainly have been little difficulty in a small group of women crowding inside.

24.4 ‘And it came to about that while they were perplexed about it, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel,’

And it was while they were still perplexed, a state which would certainly have continued for some time had they not met the angels, that they became aware of two men standing by them in ‘dazzling clothing’. Both Mark and Matthew only mention one. Mark describes one who was sitting in a particular place who spoke to them. This does not discount the presence of a second, but emphasises who the main player was. Mark always concentrates on the particular one who is most important in the story, and ignores any other. In contrast Matthew elsewhere (but not in this case), and sometimes Luke, advert to more of the detail so that Matthew in a number of cases, and Luke in this case, regularly speak of twos where Mark has only one, possibly in the case of Matthew because having been there he actually remembered more of the detail. For two angels compare also John 20.12; Acts 1.10. See also Genesis 19.1 ff.

The dazzling clothing is clearly intended to indicate supernatural visitants, even though they are called ‘men’. For such an idea compare Daniel 10.5; Ezekiel 8.2; Acts 12.7, and see Luke 2.9. These were men ‘of the light’, or ‘angels of light’ (for the idea compare 2 Corinthians 11.14). The message they brought was therefore light and not darkness (Acts 26.18).

24.5 ‘And as they were afraid and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”’

The appearance of the men was such that the women were afraid, and ‘bowed down their faces’ before the men. This may have been because of the brightness of the light, or simply because they were filled with awe. But the men gently asked them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” Given what follows it was a clear indication that the reason why Jesus’ body was not here was because He was alive, and that that was because He had ‘risen’. The words are a gentle rebuke. The suggestion is that the women should not have been looking for Jesus in the tomb on the third day, for Jesus had told them that by then He would have risen from the dead. The thought is that had they been spiritually aware they would have known.

24.6-7 “He is not here, but is risen. Remember how he spoke to you when he was yet in Galilee, saying that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”

The men then made clear exactly what they meant, “‘He is not here, but is risen’. And lest there be any doubt they linked it with Jesus’ promise, given while they had all been with Him

in Galilee, that having suffered, and having died, He would rise again on the third day. The words are not an exact quotation but combine the ideas in 9.22 ('must') with 9.44 ('be delivered').

The main difference between this quotation here by the men, and what Jesus had said (see 9.22, 44), lies in the change from 'killed' to 'crucified', an indication of the accuracy of Luke's recording. Initially the form of death had not been spelled out. Now it was crystal clear. We can understand that the women, burdened with grief, were astounded. While Jesus had spoken of such a thing they had never really considered the genuine possibility of it as a real current event. And now it seemed that the promise which had seemed so strange at the time had been genuinely fulfilled. They no doubt found the thought both amazing and exciting.

There is no reason for assuming that Luke's mention of Galilee on the lips of the angels indicates that he has altered Mark's words in Mark 16.7. The angel would not have been limited to two sentences, and what Mark says is of a very different import to what we find here in Luke. Thus we may reasonably accept that he said both. But Luke would not want to mention the words spoken in Mark's Gospel, for he does not want to involve the appearances in Galilee. He wants to concentrate attention on Jerusalem, which to the Gentiles to whom he was writing was seen as the centre of Israel's religion. It is from Jerusalem that the Gospel will go out (Acts 1.8).

**24.8 'And they remembered his words,'**

All that Jesus had said now came flooding back to them. And now, how could they doubt that it was true? For they recognised that what the angels were telling them, about what Jesus had said, was undoubtedly true, which served to confirm that they knew what they were talking about. It is perhaps noteworthy that the angels were willing to give to the women as evidence the fact that they themselves had knowledge of what Jesus had taught them. It brought home to the women that they were not dreaming, and that these angels were genuine.

**24.9 'And returned from the tomb, and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest.'**

So the women left the tomb and went to find 'the eleven', together with all the other disciples and women who were with them, and explained to them what had happened. Note this first use of 'the eleven' as a technical term, compare 24.33; Acts 2.14; Mark 16.14.

**24.10 'Now they were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them told these things to the apostles.'**

Luke then lists the names of some of the women who were involved, but makes clear that there were others. Mary Magdalene appears throughout in all four Gospels, but for quite a while was not with the other women because, having been sent on ahead with 'the other Mary' as a scout, she had gone to tell Peter and John about the empty tomb. She would, however, be seen by all as having been an essential part of the women's party. Joanna is only mentioned elsewhere in 8.3 as the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Luke expects us to remember her from there. She was clearly a 'regular'. She may well be mentioned by Luke here because she was one of his sources of information along with the two Marys. Mary the mother of James (compare Mark 16.1) is elsewhere called Mary the mother of Joses (Mark 15.47), and Mary the mother of Joses and James (Mark 15.40).

**24.11 'And these words appeared in their sight as idle talk, and they disbelieved them.'**

At what they had to say the men, instead of being excited and overjoyed, were incredulous. The women's words seemed like 'idle tales'. Such talk about dazzling angels in an empty tomb at the beginning of a new day, when the sun rising on the horizon could cause people to be dazzled, was just what one might expect of women. There was no way in which they themselves were going to believe it.

**24.12 'But Peter arose, and ran to the tomb, and stooping and looking in, he sees the linen**

cloths by themselves, and he departed to his home, wondering at what had happened.'

Peter, however, (at some stage - the account is telescoped) ran to the tomb, and stooping and looking in saw the linen clothes that had covered Jesus lying by themselves, and departed for his own home (his lodgings in Jerusalem) wondering at all that was said to have happened. This is the same incident as we find in John 20.1-10, tacked on here without giving a full explanation of the background so as to parallel the women's discovery in the tomb. Note how in verse 24 Luke speaks of 'they', probably with this incident in mind, thus indicating that Peter thus had someone else with him (who, as we know, was John). Impulsive Peter, remembering what Jesus had said, just wondered whether there might be something in what he had been told (as it turns out from John by Mary Magdalene). And when he found that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus' grave clothes were still there it made him wonder even more. But he was still not wholly convinced.

We note that here, as with those on the way to Emmaus there is a gradual building up from total scepticism to a feeling of uncertainty. They are not going to be convinced easily.

As the chiasmus reveals, Luke commenced this passage with the women looking into the empty tomb, and now it ends with Peter looking into the empty tomb, the former soon having been brought to belief by the angels, while the latter was left wondering whether there might be something in what they had said, having not yet come to belief. In typical Lucan fashion Luke thus makes clear how important the women are in the life of the people of God.

There is a slight question mark over whether verse 12 should be omitted, but the evidence for inclusion is strong, including p75, Aleph, B, W, Theta, 0124, f1, f13 and most latin, syriac and coptic versions, a very powerful combination. It is omitted by the Greek/old latin MS D/d, and old latin versions a, b, e, l, r1 and Marcion. But we know that the Greek text of D was sometimes changed in order to agree with the old latin version d with which it was written in parallel and thus it may well be only the old latin versions that really exclude it. Its inclusion everywhere else makes the case for its inclusion almost certain, otherwise we would have expected some evidence of its absence elsewhere. Interpolating into the sources of every known MS but D would quite frankly have been impossible unless it the interpolation was so early that it was almost written at the same time as the original, the original then being sent to the area where the old latin versions were produced. But in the nature of the omissions that is unlikely

Furthermore in view of the important place of the verse in the chiasmus, and the fact that its omission is explicable in terms of its being seen as demeaning Peter in comparison with the women, and possibly also as contradicting verse 34, (both of which might have been seen as good reason for omitting it), we should almost certainly include it, especially as verse 24 cross references to it.

#### Two Disciples Meet Jesus on the Road To Emmaus (24.13-34).

The women having been brought to believe, Jesus now brings two 'unknown' disciples to belief. It may be that by these means He was hoping to bring most of the Apostles to belief before He appeared to them physically, so that they would have the greater blessing (John 20.29), and would obey Him by going to meet Him in Galilee (Mark 16.7), without Him having to appear to them in Jerusalem. But if so the hopes to some extent failed to materialise. Or it may be that the aim was to establish the fact that both women and unknown disciples were important parts of the Kingly Rule of God, a reminder to His Apostles that they themselves must be servants and not masters to the flock.

Either way this appearance is of great importance, both as providing further witnesses to the resurrection, and because of the content of what Jesus said to the two. For it brings out (verses 19-21) that He was indeed the suffering Prophet Who was to redeem His people (as in Isaiah 53,4-8; 52.13-53.12).

## Analysis.

- a Behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty furlongs from Jerusalem. And they spoke heart to heart with each other of all these things which had happened (13-14).
- b And it came about that while they communed and questioned together, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them (15).
- c But their eyes were held that they should not know Him. And He said to them, “What are these things that you are talking to each other about with one with another, as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad (16-17).
- d And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said to Him, “Do you alone stay for a time in Jerusalem and not know the things which are come about there in these days?” (18).
- e ‘And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (19).
- f “And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we hoped that it was he who would redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came about” (20-21).
- g “Moreover certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb, and when they did not find his body” (22-23a).
- h “They came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive” (23b).
- g “And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it to be even as the women had said, but Him they saw not” (24).
- f And He said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Did it not behove the Christ (the Messiah) to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?” (25-26)
- e And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (27).
- d And they drew near to the village, to which they were going, and He made as though He would go further, and they constrained him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent.” And He went in to stay with them (28-29).
- c And it came about that when He had sat down with them to a meal, He took the bread and blessed, and breaking it He gave to them, and their eyes were opened, and they knew Him, and He vanished from their sight (30-31).
- b And they said one to another, “Was our heart not burning within us, while He spoke to us in the way, while He opened to us the Scriptures?” (32).
- a And they rose up that very hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and those who were with them, saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.” And they rehearsed the things that happened in the way, and how He was known of them in the breaking of the bread (33-34).

Note how in ‘a’ they were discussing together what had happened, and in the parallel they meet with the other disciples and discuss what has happened. In ‘b’ they walked with Jesus in the way, and in the parallel they spoke of how their hearts had burned within them while they walked with Jesus in the way. In ‘c’ their eyes were ‘held’ so that they did not know Him, and in the parallel their eyes are opened so that they did know Him. In ‘d’ Cleopas speaks of Jesus as staying in Jerusalem and being in ignorance, and in the parallel they invite Him to stay with them in ignorance of Who He is. In ‘e’ they speak of Jesus as a prophet mighty in word and deed, and in the parallel Jesus expounds to them from the prophets the things concerning Himself. In ‘f’ they describe how He had been put to death and how it had been their hope that He would redeem Israel, and in the parallel Jesus asks them whether in fact the prophets

had not said that He would suffer, and then enter into His glory. In 'g' the women had been to the tomb, but had not found His body, and in the parallel others had been to the tomb, and they had not seen Him. And centrally in 'h' the angels had informed the women that Jesus was alive.

**24.13 'And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty furlongs (stades) from Jerusalem.'**

The two disciples prominent in this story were returning home to the village of Emmaus. There is no certainty as to where Emmaus was, but we are told that it was sixty stades from Jerusalem. It must be recognised that sixty stades would be very much an approximation (thus signifying 'more than fifty stades') and much would depend for identification purposes on what part of Jerusalem it was measured from. A stade is about 192 metres or roughly two hundred and two yards, and thus about a furlong. This would make the village roughly six to seven miles from Jerusalem, which was quite a long trek which would take a few hours, although they would be used to walking such distances.

Emmaus means 'spring (of water)'. But the spring might have disappeared long before. Names tend to live on. And besides all villages would need a water source. Identification is often made with El Qubeibeh, a village seven miles north west of Jerusalem at which a village of first century date has been discovered. It has no prominent spring, but its water source may have been enough to provide the name. However, we must recognise that Emmaus, being only a village, may have been totally wiped out by the Roman invasion, with all traces removed, depending on how large it was. Thus any identification must be tentative.

Like Mary and Martha these two presumably had little to do with the ministry in Galilee, but had probably responded to Jesus' preaching in Jerusalem. And they would not know Him as well as Mary and Martha did, for as far as we know He had never visited their house before, although they had clearly at some time broken bread with Him, possibly at Mary and Martha's home. Thus they did not on the whole know Him all that well. We must take this into account in considering why they failed to recognise Him.

**24.14 'And they spoke person to person with each other of all these things which had happened.'**

As they went on their way the two talked seriously together about all the things that had been happening. They had been momentous and disturbing days and there was much to discuss, and they did it with grief in their hearts.

**24.15 'And it came about that while they communed and questioned together, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.'**

But as they were talking together in this way a man caught up with them who was a stranger to them, who began to walk with them. A man walking by himself would always be glad of companionship in view of possible muggers, especially at a time when many strangers were around. We are told immediately that it was Jesus, but to them He was just another Jew who had been in Jerusalem for the feast and was returning home.

**24.16 'But their eyes were held that they should not know him.'**

The two, however, did not recognise Him. We should note that this was not the only occasion when there was an indication of non-recognition (see Matthew 28.17; John 20.14, 21.4). This would suggest that there was something about Him in His resurrection body that looked different so that recognition did not happen immediately. And for similar indications of a divine hand being involved in preventing understanding compare 9.45; 18.34. It is often argued by sceptical people that such a situation could not have happened. But there are in fact a number of factors to be taken into account here, quite apart from that of God's ability to prevent them from recognising Him if He wanted to.

- Firstly if they lived near Jerusalem then they would only see Jesus when He came up for the feasts. They would thus not know Him awfully well physically. It is one thing to see a preacher at arm's length, it is quite another to have daily contact with him. And it is quite possible that these two had not spent much time in close proximity with Him so as to know about His special characteristics. In such cases when a well known person is out of context people very often do not recognise them, even though in context they would recognise them instantly.
- Secondly, Jesus might well have been wearing different clothes from those in which they were used to seeing Him. A complete change in style of clothing can render someone a stranger for a while, even if we know them well. It would help to explain why they did not recognise Him immediately.
- Thirdly, the very last person that they had been expecting to meet was Jesus. Indeed they knew that they could not possibly meet Him. So even if they saw a resemblance to Him in this man, while it might have seemed intriguing, it would not necessarily have brought recognition. They would have dismissed such an idea as impossible. This would especially be so as He gave absolutely no hint of recognising them, and spoke as though He did not know what they were talking about, which would be partly what made the non-recognition continue. Whatever likenesses there were they would dismiss. So if they did notice a likeness they would no doubt have pushed it to the back of their minds and considered it just a coincidence, a little disturbing perhaps, but not unusual. For they knew that it could not be Jesus. Most people have their doubles, and beards can look very much like one another, and be very deceptive, especially if they are trimmed in the same way and if the head is covered. Furthermore Jesus may here have been deliberately much better groomed than He was when He was 'on the road' or living in camp. He may have looked a very different person, even from that point of view.
- Fourthly we must remember that at the time they were in a grief stricken state and probably not taking too much notice of what was around them. They were totally absorbed in their own conversation and would probably not have given Him close scrutiny. In such a state people can be very unobservant. And if Jesus did not want to be known He could have spoken in a different voice and different accent from the one He had normally used.
- Fifthly, Jesus in His resurrection body would certainly have looked different from the man who had been preaching in the Temple a few days previously, and certainly as they would have expected to see Him now. They would quite reasonably have anticipated that if Jesus were to appear it would be as a hopeless cripple, not as this stranger who had been athletic enough to catch up with them and bore no marks of any disability. It is true that the Apostles did later recognise Him, but they had known Him intimately, and the circumstances of His appearance would have aided their recognition. And even then He had pointed to His hands and feet in order to make clear to them Who He was.
- Sixthly, while it is true that it was early light, and He might have been standing in the sun, we must remember that Mary Magdalene, who knew Him well, did not recognise Him at first, until He called her name (John 20.14).

I remember when moving into my present house that by coincidence a friend of my daughter's was living next door. She introduced me to her husband. He was the spitting image of Les Dennis, a well know British TV comedian. But I knew that he was not Les Dennis. Thus the thought of him being Les Dennis never crossed my mind, at least for a time. The point was that the situation proved that he was not Les Dennis, whatever his looks might have suggested to the contrary. But one day he had had his hair cut to a similar style to Les Dennis and he looked so much like him when he came out of his door that I had to say to him, 'You are not Les Dennis, are you?' For a second I really was not sure whether Les Dennis had come to visit

them.

So taking all these factors into consideration the failure of these two to recognise Jesus is not really as surprising as it first appears, and that is especially so given that it was God's intention that they should not recognise Him.

24.17 'And he said to them, "What are these things that you are talking to each other about with one with another, as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.'

The 'Stranger' then asked them what they had just been talking about. It suggested that He had been observing them for some time (as he might have done if He was slowly catching up with them). At these words they stopped, the grief apparent on their faces. We have here an indication that the account was told by someone who was there. His words had brought them to a halt, and they remembered it well.

Now it is true that a consummate storyteller might have introduced such factuality into a fictional account, but we know from the crucifixion narratives that Luke was far from seeking to do things like that. He was telling things as they were without embellishment. Thus there is no reason for thinking that it was any different here.

24.18 'And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said to him, "Do you alone stay for a time in Jerusalem and not know the things which are come about there in these days?"

Then one of them spoke. His name was Cleopas. This suggests that by the time the account was written Cleopas was well known in the early church, and that he may well have been Luke's source. The other may have been his wife (see John 19.25, although the spelling of the name is slightly different), especially as they lived together, but it could equally well have been a servant and master, or two brothers, or a father and son, or close relatives who shared a home.

He expressed amazement that the stranger was not aware of the tumultuous things that had been going on. (We always feel that people should be aware of what we think is important). Was he the only one who had been staying in Jerusalem who was not aware of what had happened? This was an exaggeration. There were probably many people in Jerusalem who were as yet unaware of what had happened. The Stranger's questions would, however, further confirm to the two that any sense that they had had that this man was like Jesus was pure coincidence.

24.19 'And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,"

To this the Stranger asked, 'What things?' And that caused the dam to burst and it all poured out. Verses 21-24 need to be read as one in order to see how they hurried on from one idea to another in a typical outburst of feeling. They read precisely like the words of people who had been under constraint, as they gabbled out one idea after another, including ideas which the Stranger could not possibly have known about. They just could not keep it in any longer. Notice the 'they'. The point is that there were two witnesses.

They firstly described Who Jesus was from a Jewish, pre-resurrection point of view. He was Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the eyes of both God and man. Jesus was very much seen as a great prophet by His followers (see 4.16-30; 7.16; 9.7-9, 18; 13.31-35). They could still see Him in their mind's eye as He stood in the Temple courtyard, or on the mountainside, outstanding in the power of His preaching. They could still see Him walking among the sick and demon possessed, laying His hands on those who were diseased and healing all of them, and casting out evil spirits with a word of power. So they had every reason for thinking of Him as a prophet, for that is how Jesus had described Himself. He had revealed Himself as the anointed Prophet of Isaiah 61.1-2 (4.17-19). He had declared

that it was the failure to hear His preaching as the One Who was greater than Jonah and Solomon that condemned the current generation (11.31-32). He was seen as the great Prophet like to Moses (Acts 3.22). He was God's Servant, fulfilling the promises concerning the Servant in Isaiah (Matthew 8.17; 12.18-21; Acts 4.30). He was the Prophet Who must not die outside Jerusalem (13.33).

The unusual word used for 'Nazarene' (Nazarenou as in p75, Aleph, B, etc) serves to confirm that Luke is citing a source.

24.20 "And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him."

They then went on to describe the heinousness of those who had condemned Him to the cross. The chief priests and their own rulers had 'delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and had crucified Him'. It was still something that they could hardly believe. They found it incredible. But nothing was more vivid to them than the fact that He had been snatched from among them even while the festivities in Jerusalem had been going on, and had in an amazingly quick time been put on trial and sentenced to death, and then executed. It had all happened so suddenly without warning. And then He had been crucified, the most hated and feared death of them all, for it rendered a man accursed. The crucifixion was something that had come home to them in all its stark realism, for at this point the idea of the cross did not contain any of the redeeming features that would attach to it later when it became something that could be gloried in (Galatians 6.14). At that stage it was simply a barbaric and horrific method of dying that had left them shaken and dismayed.

'They crucified Him.' This means that they had had Him crucified as is evidenced by the fact that they had 'delivered Him up'. But Luke has no hesitation in putting the blame on them.

24.21 "But we hoped that it was he who would redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came about."

They have described the reverent view that they had had of Him, they have emphasised their shock at what had happened to Him, but now they also reveal the hopes that they had had of Him. They had not only seen Him as a prophet, they had 'hoped that it was He Who would redeem Israel'. He had been their hope. Their words echo those spoken around the time of Jesus' birth (1.68-69; 2.30, 38). Jesus had been looked on as the Coming Expected Deliverer Who would bring about the emancipation of His people, and now those hopes had been dashed.

Note the reference to 'redeeming Israel'. This is another sign of authenticity. It is a pre-resurrection idea, and certainly prior to the activities in the second part of Acts. An inventor would have phrased it very differently. Paul could speak like this to unbelieving Jews (Acts 28.20) but not to Christians.

"Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came about." However, they explained, there was a little more to it than that, for strange events had meanwhile occurred. It was now the third day since these things had come about, and they could not forget that Jesus had often referred to 'the third day' after His death in unusual ways (9.22; 13.32; 18.33; 24.7), especially as the angels had drawn it to the attention of the women (verse 7). Alternately it could be that they were thinking of the popular Jewish belief that the spirit left the body after the third day, if that belief was really held at that time, for the evidence for it is questionable, but that would not have much point here, unless the idea was that they had still had a brief glimmer of hope which had now been dashed. Luke probably rather intends us to connect with other references to the third day.

'It is now the third day.' This is literally 'he/it is now spending the third day'

24.22-23 "Moreover certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the

tomb, and when they did not find his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.”

And there was no doubt that rumours about strange things were flying around. For some of their womenfolk, who had gone to His tomb, had not found His body there. It had seemingly disappeared. And not only that, but they had also spoken of seeing a vision of angels who had said that He was alive. Note the reference to ‘a vision of angels’. Those were not the actual words of the women who had seen the angels quite plainly, they were the words of sceptical men who had heard them say so. Nevertheless, questionable though it might be, there were some among their womenfolk, who were actually claiming on the testimony of those angels that Jesus had risen from the dead.

24.24 “And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it to be even as the women had said, but him they saw not.”

But, of course, things had not been left there. For dependable, reliable men had also gone to the tomb, and they had indeed found the tomb empty as the women had said, and they had not seen Jesus’ body. Him they had not seen, either dead or alive.

The conflicting hopes and fears are easy to discern. On the one hand the hope that the women may be right, and on the other the great fear that it was all a mistake. For who could lay any dependence on the testimony of women? Nevertheless whatever the women’s views might have been, there was no doubt that the body had disappeared. Note how the plural ‘certain of those who were with us’ confirms that someone had accompanied Peter, as John also states (John 20.2-10).

24.25 ‘And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”

The Stranger’s reply came back to them as a rebuke. Not because it was harshly uttered, but because He apparently had more confidence in God’s promises than they had. It opened with a gentle remonstrance. ‘O foolish ones.’ We can sense the tenderness and slight exasperation that lies behind it. ‘Fools’ would be too strong a translation. He was not expressing any contempt. It was their lack of understanding that He was hinting at, the lack that had put them in this mournful state, not their mental abilities. A ‘fool’ in the Old Testament is regularly someone who is unaware of spiritual realities.

And then He explains why He calls them foolish. It is because He considers them ‘slow of heart’ in that they have refused to believe the many things of which the prophets had spoke concerning the matter. What they had said concerning the women in fact summed them up accurately. They had received good news, but their hearts were slow to take it up. Had they believed the prophets they would have had no such doubts.

24.26 “Did it not behove the Christ (the Messiah) to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?”

For was it not right and fitting, indeed *necessary*, that the Messiah should suffer these things (compare Acts 3.18), thereby entering into His glory? Was that not what the Scriptures had said?

The thought of glory may refer mainly to His crucifixion as the way of entering into His glory (see John 12.23-24), but if it was so it could only be in the light of the certainty of His resurrection. However, Daniel 7.13-14 and its use by Jesus (22.69; Matthew 16.28; 26.64) suggests that both are included, and that it also includes the idea of His enthronement. The Son of Man will suffer (along with His people - Daniel 7.25 with 27), but then He will come to the throne of God to receive glory (Daniel 7.13-14).

This idea of ‘necessity’ appears constantly throughout Luke. See 2.49 - it was necessary for Him to be in His Father’s house; 4.43 - it was necessary for Him to preach the Good News of

the Kingly Rule of God widely; 9.22 - it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things, and be rejected by the Jewish leaders, and be killed, and on the third day be raised; 13.16 - it was necessary for a woman bound by Satan to be freed; 13.33 - it was necessary for Him as a prophet to go up to Jerusalem to die; 15.32 - it was necessary that they should be glad when a lost one was found; 18.1 - it was necessary for His disciples always to pray and not to lose heart; 19.5 - it was necessary for Him to stay at the house of Zacchaeus; 21.9 - it is necessary for judgments to take place throughout history; 22.37 - it was necessary that the Scripture be fulfilled that He was reckoned among the transgressors; 24.7 - it was necessary for the Son of Man to be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified and on the third day rise again (compare 9.22); 24.44 - it was necessary for everything written about Him in the Scriptures to be fulfilled. Jesus was driven along by the divine necessity.

24.27 'And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.'

And then to their amazement this Stranger began to give them a lesson from the Scriptures. Commencing with Genesis to Deuteronomy, and then going on to the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (including those concerning the Messiah, taking the word in its widest sense as signifying the Promised One). The words suggest a considerable amount of material, taken from the whole range of Scripture, for Jesus saw the whole of the Old Testament as pointing forward to Himself (see John 5.39, 46-47). But some of what He said we can understand from the subsequent preaching of the Apostles. It would almost certainly, for example, have included Genesis 12.3 (see Acts 3.25-26); Deuteronomy 18.15 (see Acts 3.22); 2 Samuel 7.11, 16 (see Acts 3.24); Isaiah 35.5-6 with 61.1-2 (see Acts 4.30); 52.13-53.12 (see Acts 3.13; 8.30-35); Psalm 2 (see Acts 4.25-28; 13.33); 16.8-11 (see Acts 2.25-28); 110.1 (see Acts 2.14); 118.22 (see 20.17; Acts 4.10-11), for it is incidents like this that explain how the Apostles became so enlightened about these Scriptures in so short a time (compare also verse 45).

And to those we may probably add some of the following Genesis 3.15 (see Romans 16.20); Psalm 22.1 (see Matthew 27.46); 22.6-18 (see Matthew 27.35-43); Isaiah 40 (see 4.4-6); 42.1-6 (see Matthew 12.17-21); 49.1-6 (see Acts 13.47); 50.4-8 (see Matthew 26.67; 27.30); Daniel 7.13-14 (see for example 22.69; Matthew 16.28; 26.64); Zechariah 13.7 (see Matthew 26.31); Malachi 3.1 (see Matthew 11.10); as well as a number of other Scriptures. And we can no doubt add to these all the scriptures that spoke of the Old Testament ritual, the offerings, sacrifices and ordinances that pointed forward to what He had come to do, and also recognise that, as Stephen did in Acts 7, He may well have seen Old Testament figures as forerunners of Himself. For He was the last Adam, the second Man (1 Corinthians 15.45-50); the greater than Abraham who rejoiced to see His day (John 8.56); the new prophet like Moses (Acts 3.22-23; Hebrews 3.1-4.13); the High Priest more powerfully effective than Aaron (Hebrews 4.14-5.10; 7.1-9.28); the mightier conqueror than Joshua/Jesus (Hebrews 4.8), and above all great David's greater Son (1.32-33). All the mighty men of God by their lives and achievements had pointed forward to Him, and were completed in Him, as indeed are we (Hebrews 11.40-12.3).

24.28 'And they drew nigh to the village, to which they were going, and he made as though he would go further.'

We can imagine the fascination with which they listened to Him and recognised how little knowledge of the Scriptures they really had, and may well have regretted reaching their village so quickly. They no doubt saw Him as one of those people that the Master had regularly met and talked with, like for example Nicodemus (John 3.1-7). And on their arrival the Stranger made as though to take His leave of them. He would not presume on their hospitality.

Jesus rarely forces Himself on us. Had they not issued an invitation to Him to stay with them that would have been the last that they saw of Him, and they would not have experienced

what was to come. And they would have deserved it. Jesus behaved perfectly correctly in view of the fact that He did not yet want to reveal Himself, but wanted them to see Him as a Stranger.

‘Made as though.’ This a good translation. It is not the same thing as pretending (which the word can mean) but makes clear that He expected to be invited in. It would in fact have been gross discourtesy in the light in which He was depicting Himself had He not been so. It would have been bad manners to indicate that He expected hospitality.

24.29 ‘And they constrained him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent.” And he went in to stay with them.’

Equally correctly they ‘constrained Him’ (strongly pressed Him) to accept a night’s hospitality. Darkness was coming on and the roads could become dangerous for a solitary person, and even though there was a full moon, travelling in the dark could be unpleasant. Besides He must be hungry. And the Stranger accepted their invitation and went in to stay with them.

The fact that they shared the house into which they invited Him may suggest that they were husband and wife (compare John 19.25, although the spelling is different). But not necessarily. They may have been master and servant, or two brothers, or related to each other in some other way.

24.30 ‘And it came about that when he had sat down with them to a meal, he took the bread and blessed, and breaking it he gave to them.’

Once indoors they sat Him down for a meal and brought food to the table, and then something happened which must have astonished the two disciples. For without a by-your-leave the Stranger reached out, took the bread and blessed it and broke it. (See especially 9.16; 22.19 which reveal a pattern. Compare also Acts 2.46; 20.7, 11; 27.35). At first this appeared to break all the rules of Eastern courtesy, for it was the host or master of the feast whose responsibility it was to take the bread, and bless and break it, and distribute it to those who sat at table. The guest was expected to recognise his position.

But their initial astonishment disappeared to be replaced by an even greater astonishment, for probably as a result of the way in which He did it they recognised that this was no discourtesy or arrogance. They recognised that the One Who had done it had the right to take charge of the feast, for it was the Master Himself.

Mealtimes were a regular place for teaching, so this was no exception. Compare 5.29; 7.36; 14.1, 7, 12, 15-16. Compare also the Passover meal which had been a teaching medium for over a thousand years, and which as a teaching medium, was specifically continued in the Lord’s Supper. An incident like this adds a special dimension to the Lord’s Supper as it reminds us that really it is Jesus Who is distributing the elements there and sitting with us at the table (compare commentary on 22.30).

24.31 ‘And their eyes were opened, and they knew him, and he vanished from their sight.’

And it was when He performed this action that their eyes were opened and they knew Him, and He then, seemingly immediately, disappeared from their sight. It is very probable that they had a number of times been present at meals where Jesus had blessed the bread, and had broken and distributed it, and had therefore recognised the way in which He did it. And the very placing of Him in a context that they recognised would help with the recognition. This then opened their eyes to the fact that the Stranger was not just somewhat similar to Jesus, but really was Jesus. The impression is given that He did not partake of the bread. This sudden disappearance stresses the deliberate nature of His revelation of Himself to these two disciples, and made clear that He was not there as someone who had just come back again. He was there as One Who had risen from the dead and belonged to another world. Once He was

satisfied that they knew Him He departed mysteriously, His task accomplished. And they would be continuing witnesses to the resurrection in Jerusalem and Judea once the Apostles had gone.

24.32 ‘And they said one to another, “Was our heart not burning within us, while he spoke to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?” ’

Startled the two looked at one another and commented on how their hearts had been burning within them when He had been expounding the Scriptures to them while they were still on their journey. Now they knew why. Compare for the idea of a burning within Psalm 39.3; Jeremiah 20.9. It was expressing the work of the Holy Spirit and fire (3.16).

24.33 ‘And they rose up that very hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and those who were with them, saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.”

Recognising the significance of what they had seen for their fellow-disciples, who would no doubt accept their word more than a woman’s, they immediately rose up from the table and returned to Jerusalem. And there they found ‘the eleven’ gathered together, along with other disciples, who no doubt included the women, and they were told that the Lord had risen indeed and had appeared to Simon. Now that Simon Peter had seen Him it could be accepted that He had risen indeed.

This appearance to Simon Peter has been already prepared for by Luke in verse 11, seemingly in view of the lack of any further material. Note that he did not just make some up. For evidence of such an appearance to Peter compare 1 Corinthians 15.5. Peter had seemingly testified to the fact that he had seen the Lord, but we may probably assume from the lack of any details that he had been unwilling to give further details of the meeting in view of what was said there. It had been his first meeting with Jesus since his denial. Compare how his public rehabilitation before the other disciples takes place later in John 21.15-18.

‘The eleven.’ The technical term at this stage for the Apostles, in spite of the fact that Thomas may not have been there. The part constituted the whole.

(Reading it as the two from Emmaus ‘saying’ it makes little sense. Why would the unnamed companion be named and not Cleopas, in such a way as to suggest that Cleopas had not been involved?)

24.35 ‘And they rehearsed the things that happened in the way, and how he was known of them in the breaking of the bread.’

Then the two from Emmaus told their story, explaining what had happened on their journey, and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of bread. (This is possibly worded in such a way so that Luke’s readers can recognise that He is also made known to them in the breaking of bread at the Lord’s table, and can there identify with this incident).

#### Jesus Appears To ‘The Eleven’ (24.36-43).

We now come to the climax to which all that has gone before is building up, the appearance of the risen Jesus to His Apostles and His ascension into Heaven. For Luke it is the ultimate moment. He is being revealed as the Son of the Most High.

In this passage He comes to them, shows them His hands, (which would include the wrists, the word can mean both), and His feet, eats with them and makes clear to them the genuine reality of His resurrection. It is the final earthly evidence of Who He is, which would gradually come home to their hearts as it did so vividly to Thomas in John 20.28. This is a parallel account to John 20.19-23 although the differences make clear that one is not just an extract from the other. Compare also Mark 16.14-18 which similarly contains tradition not mentioned by Luke. That too would appear to be from a separate source.

Just as at Jesus' baptism Luke had made clear that the Holy Spirit descended in *bodily* form (3.22), so now does he make clear that Jesus really did appear in His real resurrected body. It was a body that could be felt and touched. It thus consisted, in some sense, of flesh and bones (the mention of blood is noticeably absent). Here was the ultimate evidence of the resurrection.

Mention must be made here of the gullibility of the disciples. When they saw the living flesh-and-bone Jesus they thought that they were seeing a ghost. It took some solid down to earth practical fact-proving to convince them otherwise. Jesus had to remove their doubts by good old-fashioned scientific evidence. And in the end He succeeded.

Here as elsewhere the manuscript D omits one or two phrases. But as they are included in p75, Alpha, B, A, W, etc we have included them. There seems no good reason for not doing so as they fit the context, in general agree with John without just being copied from there, and we know that D is not always reliable, being influenced by d and the other Old Latin versions.

#### Analysis.

- a As they spoke these things, He himself stood in the midst of them, and says to them, "Peace be to you" (36).
- b But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed that they saw a ghost (37).
- c And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And for what reason do questionings arise in your heart?" (38).
- d "See My hands and My feet, that it is I myself. Handle Me, and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you behold Me having" (39).
- c And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet (40).
- b And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, He said to them, "Have you here anything to eat?" (41).
- a And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish. And He took it, and ate before them (42-43).

Note that in 'a' He stood among them and wished them 'peace' in order to demonstrate that He was risen, and in the parallel He ate a piece of fish in front of them for the same purpose. In 'b' they were terrified and frightened, and in the parallel they 'disbelieved for joy' and were filled with wonder. In 'c' He asked them why they were questioning and in the parallel showed them His hands and feet so as to resolve their doubts. Centrally in 'd' He allows them to handle Him to see that He really is flesh and bones, and not a ghost.

24.36 'And as they spoke these things, he himself stood in the midst of them, and says to them, "Peace be to you".'

While the conversation with the two disciples from Emmaus was going on Jesus suddenly appeared to His Apostles. And there He stood among them and said, 'Peace to you,' shalom elechem, the standard Jewish greeting. He wanted to make it seem as natural as possible. But His words had a double meaning, for in a very real sense they could now have peace as a result of what He had done for them as never before. For He had died that they might be reconciled to God, and have peace with God.

24.37 'But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed that they saw a ghost.'

But Jesus' sudden appearance among them unnerved them. The problem was that this was not an hallucination, it was real. Notice the multiplication of words, 'they were terrified and frightened', for they genuinely thought that Jesus was a ghost. How else could He have suddenly appeared among them like this? (They had necessarily previously had no experience of things like this, so their fears were understandable).

24.38 'And he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And for what reason do questionings arise in your heart?"'

Then Jesus sought to soothe their nerves. He asked them why they were troubled. Had they not expected Him? Why were their hearts so full of questionings. Had He not promised through His angels that they would see Him? Although He had intended it to be in Galilee. But they had not heeded His directions (Mark 16.7; Matthew 28.7). And so here He was. No wonder He rebuked them for their unbelief, for in spite of His earlier teaching, they had not believed those to whom He had appeared (Mark 16.14), when really they should have been expecting Him (compare 24.5).

24.39-40 “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you behold me having.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.’

Then He showed them His hands and feet, and told them to handle Him and make absolutely sure for themselves that He really was flesh and bones. For then at least they would surely realise that He could not be a ghost (pneuma), a phantasma. Ghosts just did not have flesh and bones like He had. This is a detailed explanation of what happened. It is not just something that may or may not have been remembered, or about which there might be uncertainty. Either it is a deliberate lie, or it is what happened. Furthermore we should consider the extreme unlikelihood of the obstinate unbelief implied by it being invented.

The slightly more common New Testament description for a man was ‘flesh and blood’ (Matthew 16.17; 1 Corinthians 15.50; Galatians 1.16; Ephesians 6.12; Hebrews 2.14), but significantly we are informed that ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingly Rule of God’ (1 Corinthians 15.50). Jesus had taken on Himself ‘flesh and blood’ when He had become man (Hebrews 2.14), in order that He might help those who were flesh and blood, and it was that flesh and blood that He had sacrificed for them (John 6.53-57), so that by partaking of Him they might find life.

But now He was no longer ‘flesh and blood’, although He was ‘flesh and bones’ as they could feel for themselves (compare here Ephesians 5.30). But we should notice that as such He could appear and disappear at will, so that it was clearly not solid flesh and bones as normally known to man, even though His disciples could feel them. Rather He is shown to have deliberately manifested Himself in this way so that they might be able to satisfy themselves of His reality. We cannot therefore read out from this the nature of the resurrection body, which is a ‘spiritual body’ (1 Corinthians 15.44-50).

Nevertheless Paul’s reference in Ephesians 5.30 serves to demonstrate that ‘flesh and bones’ was to be seen as an appropriate description for Jesus in His heavenly existence, possibly because Paul was connecting with these very words of Jesus, which were thus clearly known to him. But the question is, why? The answer may well be connected with Genesis 2.23 where flesh and bones represented the man and the woman in their perfect manhood (before they became creatures of ‘flesh and blood?’). Thus flesh and bones may be intended to indicate perfect manhood, whereby the One Who was God became perfect manhood, the second man, the last Adam, in order to also bring us to perfect manhood. ‘He was the son of Adam, who was the son of God’ (3.38). We can only leave it there. Any further theorising would probably only lead us into error for we are speaking of what we cannot know.

‘He showed them his hands and his feet.’ There they would see the marks and nail prints. Later He would even tell Thomas that he could put his fingers in the nail prints and put his hand in the hole that the spear had made in His side (John 20.27). He wanted them to be left in no doubt about His reality, and that He really had been crucified and had risen again. The memory of this experience was to last them a lifetime.

24.41 ‘And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, “Have you here anything to eat?”’

Then because He was aware that they were still uncertain about His reality because it seemed

so unbelievably wonderful, He took the step of joining them at their meal and asked them if they had anything that He could eat. We must not just see His action as a bit of play acting. The eating of food with them in this way (compare Acts 10.41), as He had been constantly doing for the last few years, was intended to be a sign of His continuing fellowship with them (compare John 21.9-13). As Peter said in Acts 10.41, 'we who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead'. This would suggest that now He both ate and drank with them. He had said that He would not again eat food until it was fulfilled in the Kingly Rule of God (22.16), and that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He drank it new with them in the Kingly Rule of His Father, but now He could sit at table with them, eating and drinking with them in His Kingly Rule (for He had already by now ascended to His Father - John 20.17) and appoint them to their responsibilities as rulers over 'the twelve tribes of Israel' (22.30), as indeed He did in John 20.22-23. It demonstrated that in a sense the old relationship still continued, even though He would not still be with them in the flesh (but He would be with them in spirit, see Matthew 28.20). And nothing would quieten their fears quicker than again to share a meal with Him.

But they were still not sure that they could believe that it really was Him. They were so overjoyed that they were afraid that it would turn out to be an illusion. It was true and yet it could not be true. It had been one thing for Peter, and the women, and Cleopas, to tell them that He was alive, it was quite another to see His beloved form for themselves, a form that they had never expected to see again, in spite of all His promises. But gradually it was sinking in, and they began to believe. This excludes all thought of over-excited imaginations producing hallucinations, even if it were feasible that so many people could all have the same hallucination at the same time. It was not fevered hope that broke through, but down to earth reality.

24.42-43 'And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish. And he took it, and ate before them.'

And in response to His request they gave Him a piece of broiled fish from the meal that they were enjoying and He ate it in front of them. Once again they were partaking in a fellowship meal with their Master. This was also possibly an indication that His special fasting could be seen as over because the Kingly Rule of God was now being 'fulfilled' by His presence with them as their risen Lord (22.16).

So Luke's Gospel had begun with Jesus 1) being welcomed into the world by the faithful in the Temple in Jerusalem, awaiting the Kingly Rule of God 2) being proclaimed as the Son of the Most High, 3) being in conflict with Satan in the wilderness. And it has now ended with, in reverse order, 3) His seeming defeat by Satan in being sent to His death on the cross ( 22.3), which has been turned into a victory, 2) the revelation of Himself as the One who has conquered death and ascended to His Father (verses 36-51), and 1) Himself as the One Whose faithful followers are worshipping in the Temple in Jerusalem, ready for the advancement of the Kingly Rule of God from Jerusalem to Rome (verse 52-53 with Acts 1.8).

#### The New Message And The New Power; A Final Summary Preparing For Acts (24.44-53).

Having presented what he sees as the ultimate revelation of the earthly Jesus in describing the appearance of Jesus to His Apostles Luke moves rapidly on to His ascension, ignoring most of what took place in the following days in his usual way. Instead he prepares for the opening chapters of Acts by revealing in microcosm the message that was to be preached by His Apostles. It is quite possible that by this time he was running out of space. But it is equally possible that he does not want to spoil the effects of the opening of the new story in Acts by providing too much information here.

Notice for example how Luke appears deliberately to avoid mention of the Holy Spirit here, while at the same time indicating the importance of awaiting His coming as 'power from on high'. The patent coming of the Holy Spirit is to be the first emphasis of his new book. He also

ignores the departure of the Apostles for Galilee after the seven day feast was ended. The revelation of the risen Jesus to His Apostles has been made, now the next thing is instruction as to what they are to do, and the ascension into Heaven, the explanation of which can be left to Acts.

We should not, however, that once the seven days of the feast were over, the return to Galilee is something that they would normally have done naturally even if Jesus had not told them to go there. So we should not be surprised to discover that they did so. But Luke ignores all the subsequent appearances in Galilee, for that would take his readers attention away from Jerusalem, and he feels that what he has said has been quite sufficient. He is not writing to sceptics who will analyse his account and compare it with that of others. He is finally proclaiming the truth of the resurrection, which he has adequately done. Now he wants attention to be concentrated on Jerusalem For Acts is to begin in Jerusalem (in accordance with Isaiah 2.2-4), and will gradually result in a move out from there, first to the wider locality, and then to Rome, the centre of the known world. So, ignoring the visit to Galilee, he takes up his brief narrative from when they return to Jerusalem in accordance with Jesus' instructions, and are told to wait there until they receive the power from above, the power that is to come on them and endue them for what they have to do.

We will in fact learn at the beginning of Acts that there were forty days between Jesus first appearance to His Apostles and His final departure from them (Acts 1.3), days which are unaccounted for by Luke, and about which he here gives us almost no information. All he does tell us is that during this time Jesus spoke to them of the Kingly Rule of God (Acts 1.3). He was preparing them for their future.

That suggests that what now follows is to be read in that light. For the purpose of the book of Acts is to describe the story of the spread of the word concerning the Kingly Rule of God, which is in fact all about Jesus (Acts 28.23, 31), from Jerusalem to Rome. Most of the information that he gives below is therefore preparation for this ministry in Acts.

#### Analysis.

- a He said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me" (44).
- b Then He opened their mind, that they might understand the Scriptures (45).
- c And He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (46).
- d "You are witnesses of these things" (48).
- c "And behold, I send forth the promise of My Father on you, but tarry you in the city, until you be clothed with power from on high" (49).
- b And He led them out until they were over against Bethany, and He lifted up his hands, and blessed them, and it came to about that while He blessed them, He parted from them, and was carried up into heaven (50-51).
- a And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, blessing God (52).

Note how in 'a' they learn that in Him the promises of the Scriptures concerning the Coming One have been totally fulfilled, and in the parallel, in response, they worshipped Him and rejoiced, and were continually in the Temple blessing God, a totally transformed community. In 'b' their minds were opened to understand the Scriptures (the equivalent of their special reception of the Holy Spirit in John, fulfilling the promises in the Upper Room) and in the parallel He blessed them and was carried up into Heaven before their eyes, which were opened to see His ascension. In 'c' He proclaims what their message is to be, that through His death and resurrection repentance and remission of sins has been made available to all, and is

to be preached to all nations, and in the parallel they are told of the power from above that they will receive in order to fulfil this task. And centrally in 'd' they are informed that they it is their great privilege to be His witnesses.

#### The New Message And The New Power (24.44-51)

In Mark 1.15 the Gospel is summarised as, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingly Rule of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Good News.' In other words 'the time spoken of by Scripture is here, God's Kingly Rule is at hand, and the conditions for entering that Kingly Rule are repentance and faith.' In the speeches in Acts this is expanded by introducing the Good News concerning Jesus into the pattern, for by His enthronement in Heaven He has become the essence of the Kingly Rule of God. He has become the King. But otherwise the message follows a similar pattern. (See [The Speeches in Acts](#)).

The same pattern is now revealed in the closing verses of Luke. In accordance with it we are told that the Scriptures must be fulfilled (verses 44-45), a brief summary of the work of Jesus is given describing His death and subsequent rising to God in resurrection (verse 46), and this is then followed by the call to repentance and forgiveness (verse 47). Here then is the pattern of early preaching in miniature, and the basis on which Peter patterned his own messages, following the example of Jesus Himself, and building on the experience that he had had during Jesus' earthly ministry. This is the content of the message to which the Apostles are to be witnesses (48). All that is then required is for them to wait to receive power from above with which to carry out the task (49). This is then followed by Jesus' final farewell and ascension into Heaven (50-51).

24.44 'And he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me."

'And He said to them.' A vague introductory phrase. Compare verse 38. Here we have a summary of what came out in the following forty days, of which we are given a little more information in Acts 1. Note how a similar phrase also comes in verse 46, dividing up His two statements.

The first essential ingredient of the message of the early church was that fact that what they taught was based on the Scriptures. And this was Jesus' emphasis here. He points out that while He was with them He had revealed that everything that was written about Him had to come to their full fruition. The word for 'fulfilled' indicates being 'brought to completion', being 'filled full'. It is not just a question of them happening, they will happen to the full and bring God's promises and purposes to completion.

Note especially His emphasis on 'what is written'. Then in verse 45 He speaks of 'The Writings' (the Scriptures), and again in verse 46 He speaks of what is written. To Him the written word was clearly very important. He gave no place to the oral law (the traditions of the elders). In view of this we can hardly believe that the early church saw the writing down of Jesus own words as less important. It is probable therefore that they were recorded from the beginning by such people as the ex-public servant Matthew whose business record keeping had been. Those records were probably one of the sources from which Luke derived Jesus' teaching.

(When Papias said that he preferred the living voice to what was written what he, of course, meant was that he preferred going to the source rather than receiving it second hand. He wanted to hear it first hand. He was not talking about what Justin Martyr later called 'the memoirs of the Apostles' which would be first hand).

'Which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me.'" Jesus saw the whole of the Old Testament as pointing to Himself. Compare commentary on

verse 27 which see for examples of His applications.

Jesus then defines the Scriptures as ‘ the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms’. The first refers to the first five books of the Old Testament which were seen as the Law of Moses, the second to the prophetic writings which included Joshua to Kings excluding Ruth, and what we call the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi (excluding Lamentations). The only question is as to whether Daniel was included with the prophets or was included with the third section, the ‘holy writings’. There seem to have been differences of opinion. But whichever way it was Jesus clearly used it as Scripture, for it is the source of some of His teaching concerning the Son of Man. ‘The psalms’, which were the largest book in the third section of Scripture, ‘the other writings’ (often later called the hagiographa), was a title often given to the whole of those writings which consisted of the remainder of the books in the Old Testament. Thus Jesus was aligning Himself with the Jewish canon and not including the Apocrypha or the other Apocalyptic writings as Scripture.

24.45 ‘Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the Scriptures.’

This may indicate that, as with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (see verse 31) He expounded the Scriptures to them, giving them illumination, or it may be a reference to their receiving the Holy Spirit as described in John 20.22, the ‘Spirit of truth’ of John 14-16. or, of course, both. But His basic purpose was to make clear to them the basis of their message, and to recognise how it pointed to Him.

This may be the point at which the seven day feast of Unleavened Bread ended and they returned to Galilee, where they experienced a number of appearances of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15.4-7) before being instructed to return to Jerusalem and to await the coming of power from on high at the subsequent feast at Pentecost. It is frankly laughable to suggest that Luke, who had many eyewitness contacts in Palestine, was well up on the traditions of the churches, and was a close companion of Paul could possibly have been unaware of the appearances of the risen Jesus in Galilee, one of which was to over five hundred people. But his purpose was to demonstrate the outflow of the Good News from Jerusalem, and that is the reason why he deliberately determines to retain the emphasis there.

24.46 ‘And he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day.” ’

The central point in their message as delivered to them by Him was that these very Scriptures had declared beforehand in writing that the Messiah would have to suffer, and would rise again from the dead on the third day. The idea of the ‘Coming One’ as suffering is found in Isaiah 50.4-8; 52.13-53.12, and also in Psalm 22.6-21; Daniel 7 (where the son of man suffers before being glorified); Zechariah 13.7 among others. The Jewish teachers tended to avoid applying the sections concerning suffering to the Messiah, and rather applied them to Israel, while at the same time applying other aspects of the Servant to the Messiah. But Jesus applied them to Himself.

The idea of the Messiah/Servant’s resurrection from the dead can be found in Psalm 16.8-11 (see Acts 2.24-32; 13.33-37); Psalm 110 (see Acts 2.34); Isaiah 53.11-13.

The idea of rising ‘on the third day’ probably resulted from a combination of Isaiah 53.11-13 with Hosea 6.1-2, ‘After two days He will revive us, on the third day He will raise us up and we shall live before Him’. This was initially spoken of Israel, (God’s vine). But Jesus was here as in Himself representing the true Israel, the true Vine (John 15.1). As the Servant God had declared the Coming One to be Israel (Isaiah 49.3). Thus Jesus could apply this to Himself.

Note the context in Hosea. God will wait ‘in His place’ until Israel acknowledge their guilt and seek His face, and in their distress seek Him and say, ‘come let us return to the Lord’ (let us repent). But this will not be until ‘He has torn that He may heal them, He has stricken and

will bind them up'. But when He looked there was no man, no one to stand between, until He raised up the Servant Who was torn for the sins of Israel, and stricken for her iniquity (Isaiah 53.3-5). this was what first had to be played out on the One Who would come as the representative of Israel. And the result will be a reviving and a raising up on the third day, first for Him (Isaiah 53.10, 12) and then for them. For He will have gone before them in order to be a guilt offering and make it possible for all. It could all only be because their representative had first gone through it for them that they would themselves be able to enjoy it.

So as the One Who saw Himself as suffering for Israel, in their place, and as their representative, Jesus also saw Himself as being raised again like them, on the third day.

Indeed the fact is that the Servant's task could only be fulfilled by resurrection. How else could He see His offspring, prolong His days and receive the spoils of victory (Isaiah 53.10, 12)? (Compare also Isaiah 52.13-15). And how else could the Son of Man come triumphantly out of suffering into the presence of the Ancient of Days to receive the everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7.13-14)? And unless He was raised how could the Holy One 'not see corruption' (Psalm 16.10)? And how could He become the chief cornerstone? (Psalm 118:24). Resurrection was required as God's vindication in a suffering world (Isaiah 26.19). And it is also constantly implied by such statements as 9.24-26. All this was clear from the Scriptures (18.31). It was also according to Matthew linked by Jesus with Jonah's time in the fish's stomach (Matthew 12.40), although that is more an illustration than a necessary parallel.

So this is the central point in the Apostolic message, that Jesus suffered and rose again on the third day. And as a result, at the end of Acts, Luke makes clear that the preaching of the Kingly Rule of God involves manifesting all that Jesus is to those who hear and respond (Acts 28.23, 31)

24.47 'And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'

The message having been proclaimed it then had to be applied, and here Jesus makes clear that that application has twofold prongs, repentance and forgiveness of sins. Repentance primarily indicates a turning to God, although this unquestionably also includes turning from sin and a change of heart and mind about God and about sin.

The Greek word literally means a 'change of mind' but was used to translate the Semitic idea of 'turning' to God, involving a change of direction and often sorrow of heart (1 Kings 8.47; 13.33; Psalm 78.34; Isaiah 6.10; Ezekiel 3.19; Amos 4.6). It has been common also on the lips of Jesus both as a noun and a verb (e.g. 5.32; 10.13; 11.32; 13.3, 5; 15.7, 10). It reflects the contrite heart that comes to God for forgiveness and renewal (Psalm 34.18; 51.17; Isaiah 57.15; 66.2).

John the Baptist had proclaimed the same message (3.3). But he had done it pointing forward to Jesus as the One Who would give them the Holy Spirit. Here Jesus proclaims it as linked with His sufferings and resurrection. It is because He has died and has risen again that He can offer them the forgiveness of sins. The idea of the atoning significance of His death cannot be avoided. It was because His death was seen as finally fulfilling the purpose of all the offerings and sacrifices that He could be seen as being spoken of in 'all the Scriptures'.

For the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins see Acts 2.38; 5.31; 10.43; 13.38; 26.18, and compare Luke 1.77; 3.3; Mark 1.4; Romans 3.25; Ephesians 1.7; Colossians 1.14; 2.13.

This forgiveness of sins was to be preached 'in His Name'. Thus their forgiveness is dependent on what He is and on what He has done for them. Without His death and resurrection there could now be no forgiveness. And this was to be a message for all nations, although it would

begin at Jerusalem, which is why Luke exclusively refers to Jerusalem. As he has previously made abundantly clear Jerusalem is where Jesus very deliberately came to die (9.51; 13.33), and where His death and resurrection took place. That is why forgiveness can now begin at Jerusalem. The Suffering Servant Prophet has there borne the sins of His people. And that is why Luke initially concentrates attention there.

And it is to be 'to all nations.' This could have been taken by the disciples to signify the Jews mingled among all nations (see Acts 2.5). But in Jesus' eyes as He Servant Who was also to be a light to the Gentiles we need not doubt that it extended to all, both Jew and Gentile (Isaiah 42.4, 6; 49.6; 61.6).

Matthew presents it in another way, although he too sees it as happening through the Name (Matthew 28.19), and going out to all the world. But in His case it is the presence of the risen Jesus that will be the guarantee of their power. John refers it to the Holy Spirit and links the idea with forgiveness, as Luke does (John 20.22-23).

'Beginning from Jerusalem.' See Acts 1.8; 2-11; Isaiah 2.3; Micah 4.1-3. Jerusalem was to be the centre from which the Good News initially flowed out

24.48 "You are witnesses of these things."

And the message that has just been described is the message to which they are to be witnesses. That is why they have been called. It is in order to bear witness to the One Who has suffered and risen again so that He might bring them under the Kingly Rule of God. See especially Acts 1.8, 22; 2.32; 3.15; 5.32; 10.39-41 where the uniqueness of the Apostles' witness is made clear. They testified of what they had seen.

24.49 "And behold, I send forth the promise of my Father on you, but tarry you in the city, until you be clothed with power from on high."

But before they can do this they will need exceptional power, that which the Father has promised them, the drenching with the Holy Spirit (3.6-17), the very power of Heaven itself, power from on High. In Luke the promise of this was made from the beginning, and later confirmed (11.13), but in John it is also clarified and expanded (John 7.38-39; 14.16-17, 26; 15.26; 16.7-11). There may, however, also here be a reference to the Old Testament promises of the Spirit in Isaiah 44.1-5; Ezekiel 36.25-27; 37.9-10; Joel 2.28-29 as cited in Acts 2.18)

This exceptional power came in two stages. Firstly in the Upper Room it came to the Apostles alone as their eyes were opened to understand the Scriptures (24.45), and they received the Spirit of truth from Jesus ready for the task ahead (John 20.22), through Whose direction they would offer forgiveness to all who believe and come within the range of God's mercy (John 20.23). The emphasis there was on illumination and acting as shepherds to His people. And then power would come on the whole body of disciples, forming them into the new congregation of the new Israel at Pentecost (Matthew 16.18; Acts 1.6-8; 2.1-4), as a result of which they would go out to proclaim the word of the Kingly Rule of God to the world, beginning where they were in Jerusalem.

24.50 'And he led them out until they were over against Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.'

Then having prepared them and opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and having promised them the power that was coming to enable them and give them impetus in the fulfilment of their future responsibility, He led them out to the Mount of Olives in the direction of Bethany, and there He lifted up His hands and blessed them. But Luke deliberately does not mention the Mount of Olives, for He has already shown that to be the place of suffering and judgment (22.39).

In giving His blessing Jesus is probably to be seen as acting as a father to His children, although it is always possible that He was acting as a greater Moses, leading them out and

preparing them to face battle (Exodus 17.12), or a greater Elijah, about to be taken up to Heaven, and responding to a longing for the Spirit of God (2 Kings 2.9), or possibly both (compare 9.30). If there is such a comparison there was no danger of His arms tiring, nor was there any doubt about the coming of the Spirit on His own. Here was the One Who was supreme. And He blessed them there. It was His parting blessing that they would carry with them through their lives.

24.51 ‘And it came to about that while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.’

And even while He was blessing them, He parted from them for the last time in bodily form, and was carried up into Heaven. This was the signal that His work on earth was done. The book of Acts will reveal what happened to Him next. He will be enthroned in Heaven and made Lord and Messiah (Acts 2.36), and be set at God’s right hand (7.56; Mark 16.19). And as Matthew 28.19-20 makes clear being made Lord indicated that He would enjoy the Name above every Name, the Name of YHWH (compare also Philippians 2.8-11).

Note that it is typical of Luke, unlike John, to describe the departure of a supernatural visitor (1.38; 2.15; 9.33; 24.31; Acts 1.9-11; 10.7; 12.10), and in Acts 1.9-11 we are given more detail of His departure. But here the departure was significantly final.

‘He parted from them.’ This is the ‘receiving up’ (analempsis) anticipated in 9.51 towards which the second part of his Gospel has been aiming (compare Acts 1.1-2).

24.52 ‘And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were frequently in the temple, blessing God.’

Luke’s closing words set us in expectancy for what is to follow. They now fully recognised Him for Who and What He was, and they worshipped Him. Luke almost certainly intends us to take that literally in the highest sense. Like Thomas they say, ‘My Lord and My God’ (John 20.28).

Then they returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy, the joy with which Luke has made us so familiar (1.14, 44. 47; 6.23; 10.20, 21; 15.7, 10; 19.6; 24.41; Acts 8.8, 39; 13.52; 15.3). The glad tidings of great joy promised by the angels had come to fruition (2.10). And they spent their time continually (or ‘frequently’) in the Temple praising and blessing God. This would be their headquarters for the first part of Acts. There is an echo here of Anna the prophetess (2.37). The one has become the many. But we are probably not intended to see this as signifying that they never left the Temple. Rather we are to see that they made it their centre for worship and praise each day, looking to God and ready for what He would do next. These were the days of joy and blessing which God sometimes allows to His people. But it is always in order that we might be prepared for what lies ahead. As the Apostles would discover. You cannot live your whole life on the mountain top.

This does not exclude their visit to Galilee. Luke is seeking to link them closely to the Temple from which life will flow out to the world (Ezekiel 47.1-9 with John 7.38-39). He is not giving a full itinerary. Note his continuing ‘returned to Jerusalem’. This was necessary for Jerusalem was the fountain from which the life-giving water would go out (Zechariah 13.1).

We will end this chapter as we began it by considering the connection between Luke and Acts for it caps off the end of Luke’s Gospel.

- a ‘And they rose up the same hour, and *returned to Jerusalem*, and found the eleven gathered together, and those who were with them’ (Luke 24.33), after which Jesus appears to all His Apostles.
- b Jesus appears to His Apostles and declares that ‘repentance and remission of sins *should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*’ (Luke 24.47), which is to be the consequence of Messiah’s suffering and resurrection.

- c ‘And, *behold, I send the promise of my Father on you, but tarry you in the city (of Jerusalem), until you be endued with power from on high*’ (Luke 24.49).
- d ‘And *they returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God*’ (Luke 24.52).
- c ‘And, being assembled together with them, He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but *wait for the promise of the Father, which, says He, you have heard of me*’ (Acts 1.4).
- b ‘But you will receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you shall *be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth*’ (Acts 1.8).
- a ‘Then *they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey*’ (Acts 1.12).