

**Biblical Interpretation and the Christocentric Principle: The  
Interpretation of Acts 15:1-35**

By

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# DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for a degree.

M.J. Mahlaola

Polokwane, 26 January 2016

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# ABSTRACT

## **Biblical Interpretation and the Christocentric Principle: The Interpretation of Acts 15:1-35**

In a quest to interpret the Bible christocentrically, different methods have been applied throughout different eras of Christianity. Some allegorised, some typologised whereas some sought to be literal in their christocentricity.

This study sets out to understand and apply christocentricity within the framework of a commitment to a literal historical-grammatical interpretation frequently called evangelical exegesis in this thesis.

Literature review in chapter 2 revealed that scholars throughout the history of the church have taken one of three approaches to interpret the Bible christocentrically—allegorically, typologically and literally. Some integrated these methods.

Since the Christocentric Principle is underpinned by the Bible, three primary christocentric passages, Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40 and Luke 24:27, 44-47, were exegeted in chapter 3, which clearly affirmed that Biblical interpretation should be Christ-centred because Christ is the Fulfiller, the Message and the Concern of all Scripture. From the exegesis of the three passages, a pattern was traced, which led to the deduction of the following methods of disclosing Christ from Scripture: The Inspired *Sensus Plenior* Application, which NT writers employed, often applying OT passages in the NT out of its OT context; and authorial intent, which recognises the intention of the author within a given context of the text regardless of how the same information could be used elsewhere. From these observations, it was suggested that a better way of being christocentric and still be committed to evangelical exegesis is to trace the redemptive-progressive plan, pay attention to promise-fulfilment, limit your types to those of the NT writers and use the words and the works of Christ to apply the OT in the NT church.

These methods developed in chapter 3 were tested against the interpretation of Acts 15:1-35, which was translated from the Greek text and exegeted in a commentary fashion. The conclusion is that the elders, apostles and the entire church at the Jerusalem Council could reach a decision to accept the uncircumcised Gentiles in the church because they dealt with the matter christocentrically, that is they understood:

- God's plan of redemption;
- the promise of God to save the Gentiles in Christ;
- James's use of Amos 9:11-12 out of its OT context and applying it in the new context without changing the intention of the text; and
- how the words and the works of Christ in relation to the Gentiles have influenced the decision.

The study concludes with the review of the problem, objectives, findings and significance and recommendations.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BDAG	W Bauer and FW Danker, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature
ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
n.	Footnote
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TSKS	Granville Sharp's Rule of Greek Exegesis
UBS4	United Bible Society 4 <sup>th</sup> Edition
v.	Verse
vv.	Verses
YLT	Young's Literal Translation

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Title: **Biblical Interpretation and the Christocentric Principle: The Interpretation of Acts 15:1-35**

### 1.2. Research Objective and Questions

#### 1.2.1. *Research Objective*

The objective of this research is to understand and apply the Christocentric Principle within the framework of a commitment to the historical-grammatical approach to exegesis.

#### 1.2.2. *Research Questions*

- 1.2.2.1. How has christocentricity been understood and applied in the history of hermeneutics?
- 1.2.2.2. How should we understand and apply christocentricity within the framework of evangelical exegesis today?
- 1.2.2.3. What would the application of our understanding of christocentricity within the framework of evangelical exegesis produce when tested with the interpretation of Acts 15:1-35?

### 1.3. Literature Review

Throughout the course of church history, the church has witnessed a plethora of biblical interpretation. The approaches ranged from an allegorical method, to a grammatical-historical method, to typology, to subjective approach, etcetera (Zuck 1991:27). Christocentricity was often tacked to these approaches. By a Christocentric Principle is meant a hermeneutical approach that seeks to interpret the entire Bible, both OT and NT, in light of the life, death and resurrection of Christ (Lk 24:27, 44-46; Jn 5:39-40). This is often called Christ-centred hermeneutic (Chapell 2005; Goldsworthy 2000; Greidanus 1999). Christ is said to be the compass by which the scriptures should be navigated.

The two main approaches, the allegorical and grammatical-historical methods, represented by the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools respectively, were christocentric in their own right. The allegorical method of the Alexandrian school was mainly deployed to preach Christ from the OT (Greidanus 1999:83). The Antiochene school tried to limit its christocentric approach to the passages that explicitly and/or implicitly pointed to Christ within the historical-grammatical framework (pp. 96-97).

The reformation era to some extent held to a grammatical-historical and denounced an allegorical method. Some of the reformers, such as Martin Luther, however, promoted, together with grammatical-historical approach, a typological approach. Luther's literal sense was often blurred by his typological approach to the OT with a quest to find Christ in every passage (Zuck 1991:45). However, Luther often saw Christ in places where he was not present. His christocentric approach to scripture led him to conclude that the OT exists to support the teaching of the NT. Thus, his christocentricity affected his view of biblical books. He spent little time in a book where he could not find a typology or a direct testimony to Christ (Johnston 1996:166).

Closer to our time, the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the neo-orthodoxy was acclaimed to be Christocentric. A leading Bible interpreter and theologian of this era was Karl Barth. Although all eras of Bible interpretation were Christocentric in their own right, Karl Barth's Christocentric hermeneutic became famous and alarming. Led by Karl Barth, neo-orthodoxy saw Christ, and not the Bible, as the basis of faith. This approach led to repudiating the propositional truth and inspiration of the Bible. For Barth and his followers, unless the Bible is interpreted christocentrically, that is, unless it is understood in light of the enfleshed Christ, it is not authoritative. Thus a Christocentric Principle became a key to interpreting scripture and theology.

Literature review, however, reveals that the Christocentric Principle is multifaceted. What the early church and the reformers meant by christocentrism is different from what neo-orthodox theologians meant, and what contemporary scholars mean. Therefore, a distinction needs to be made (Muller 2006:254). Muller (p. 255) noted three basic distinct forms of Christocentric teaching, namely, soteriological, prototypical and principial christocentrism. This frustration of terms led Muller to call for the abolition of the use of christocentrism in reformation studies.

Some conservative scholars dogmatically state that to avoid misinterpretation of scripture, a literal-grammatical-historical approach is to be espoused over other methods. In 2002a, Robert L. Thomas published a book through Kregel titled *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old*. He observes that “Changes in hermeneutics have coincided with changes in evangelicalism” (Thomas 2002:19). His main contention is that the new evangelical hermeneutics is dominantly subjective in nature. He attributes this change to the deviation from a traditional grammatical-historical interpretation (p. 21). In his last chapter (ch. 17), Thomas calls evangelicals back to the traditional grammatical-historical principles.

Wadholm (2005:35) quips that “Christ-centred interpretation finds Jesus at the centre of everything in the Bible, but this often changes from Christ-centred to Christ-bloated.” He goes on to say “What the Bible actually has to say often suffers at the hands of interpreters who see Jesus in every jot and tittle..., ignoring what the Bible has to say for itself” (p. 35).

Most recently, Peppler (2012) and Smith (2012) each wrote an article on a Christocentric Principle. Peppler (2012:120) argues for a hermeneutic that is Jesus-centred. He explains, “...the Christocentric Principle is an approach to biblical interpretation that seeks to understand all parts of scripture from a Jesus-perspective....it is a way of *interpreting scripture primarily from the perspective of what Jesus taught and modelled, and from what he revealed concerning the nature, character, values, principles, and priorities of the Godhead*” (emphasis original). Peppler associates his Christocentric Principle with that of Barth and Chapell. But unlike Barth, Peppler (2012:124) holds a high view of inspiration and authority of Scripture. Smith (2012:157) concedes that a Christocentric Principle “holds much promise as an interpretive tool for all branches of theology”, but highlights “two potential pitfalls” and proposes a solution. Smith’s response indicates that a Christocentric Principle is multifaceted.

Although Smith’s (2012) pitfalls are limited to Peppler’s (2012) article, literature review, however, reveals that there is more to deal with. There is no clear-cut definition for the Christocentric Principle. The principle portends to be subjective and not objective. The principle has a potential to override the principle of single-meaning. Although all these are problems, it is my opinion, however, that these

problems and many others stem from a lack of set boundaries and a workable process within which and by which the principle should be applied.

#### **1.4. Research Design**

This study falls within the field of Biblical Greek with a specific focus on Biblical interpretation. In order to solve the main problem, the study will require four main steps. The first step will review history of research, the second step will exegete the main texts by which the Christocentric Principle is underpinned (i.e. Matt 5:17-19; Jn 5:39-40 & Lk 24:27, 44) and use them to set boundaries and suggests the process of applying the Christocentric Principle. The third step will test the boundaries and the process through the interpretation of Acts 15:1-35, which is deemed to be highly Christocentric. The final step will conclude with the significance of the research and suggestions for further study.

The study will solely take a literary approach. Chapter 2 of the thesis will interact with existing literature on the Christocentric Principle seeking to gain the scholars's understanding of the principle. Chapter 3 will seek to understand christocentricity within the framework of an evangelical exegesis (i.e. a historical-grammatical method of interpretation). Thus the exegesis of Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40 and Luke 24:27, 44-46 by which christocentricity is underpinned, will be carried out. From this exegesis a framework within which christocentricity should be applied will be established. The findings of chapter 3 will be applied in chapter 4, where our understanding of christocentricity will be tested against the interpretation of Acts 15:1-35. The study will conclude with chapter 5 where the significance of the study and suggestions for further study will be highlighted.

A summarised outline of the study is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 2: How christocentricity has been understood and applied in the history of hermeneutics.

Chapter 3: Understanding and Applying christocentricity within the framework of a commitment to evangelical exegesis.

Chapter 4: Testing our understanding of christocentricity within the framework of a commitment to evangelical exegesis: an interpretation of Acts 15:1-35.

Chapter 5: The Significance of christocentricity within the framework of a commitment to evangelical exegesis.

## **1.5. Research Methodology**

The study will use a literature review and an exegetical-hermeneutical method to solve the problem. Chapter 2 requires a review of literature on Biblical interpretation, especially the Christocentric approach. Since a Christocentric Principle is based on Biblical texts, chapter 3 will exegete relevant texts, primarily Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40 and Luke 24:27, 44-47.

Helpful sources for the understanding of the Christocentric Principle and its promoters or critics are Peppler (2012), Smith (2012), Chapell (2005), Porter and Malcom (eds) (2013), Muller (2006), Dockery (1994), Kantzer (1959), Gunn (n.d.), Essex (2015), Blaising (2015) and Bock (2015). Hermeneutics texts such as those of Thomas (2002a), Beale (2012), Porter and Malcom (eds) (2013), Zuck (1991), and Kaiser Jr. and Silva (2007) will be consulted to shed light on the process of interpretation and how some approaches could be adapted or integrated with the Christocentric Principle in order to define how this principle could be navigated.

For the exegesis of Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40 and Luke 24:27, 44 (ch. 3), the following resources will be helpful: Hendriksen (1973), Marshall (1978), Carson (1984; 1991), Nolland (1993; 2005), Liefeld (1994), Bock (1996), Wiersbe (1996), Green (1997), Köstenberger (2004), France (2007), Turner (2008) and Michaels (2010).

The practical part of this study (ch. 4) will focus on Acts 15:1-35. This exegetical task will extensively engage the original language. The primary resources will include the United Bible Society's (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) Greek New Testament (UBS4). Where textual criticism will be necessary, Metzger's (1971) textual commentary on the Greek New Testament, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, will be used. Secondary sources here will include Lexicons, the main ones being BDAG (2000), Thayer (1976), and Louw and Nida (1989). For the grammar I will use Wallace (1996), Robertson (1919), Mounce (2009), Fanning (1990) and Moulton (1908). Helpful commentaries on Acts 15 will include Longman III and Garland (eds) (2007), Marshall (1980), Lenski (1961), Bruce (1988), Kistemaker (1990), MacArthur (1996) and Calvin (1999). Meek's (2008) book *'The Gentile*

*Mission in Old Testament Citations in Acts: Text, Hermeneutic, and Purpose* and Woods's (2015) article titled '*Does Acts 15:9 Refute Intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile Distinction?*' found in volume 19 of *conspectus* will be very helpful.

## Chapter 2

# How christocentricity has been understood and applied in the history of hermeneutics

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the history of research concerning christocentricity. It seeks to gain an understanding on how christocentricity has been understood and applied by scholars in the field of hermeneutics.

Kunhiyop (2012:33) avers that “If we are to take Scripture as our authority, it is vital that we understand what it means. We thus need to know something about hermeneutics....” He goes on to assert that “Over the centuries, Christians have adopted several approaches to interpreting Scripture”. Zuck (1991:27) mentions some of these various approaches as “literal, allegorical, traditional, rationalistic, and subjective.” In talking about three guiding principles that form a hermeneutic triad, first being *rational-biblical* hermeneutics, second being *exhaustive reference*, Pepler (2013:167) observes that “From the earliest church times, but particularly since the reformation, scholars have added *christocentricity* as a third principle...” The aim of this chapter is to gain an understanding of how christocentricity was understood and applied by Bible interpreters throughout the centuries.

In order to elucidate the information reviewed and the theoretical nature of the topic, this review will be organised “by school of thought” (Mouton 2001:92). Three approaches to biblical interpretation, namely, allegorical, typological and historical-grammatical will be reviewed. The key question to be answered will be ‘How did the proponents of each of these approaches understand christocentricity?’

### **2.1. Allegorical Interpretation and Christocentricity**

“Allegorizing is searching for a hidden or a secret meaning underlying but remote from and unrelated in reality to the more obvious meaning of the text” (Zuck

1991:29). In the second century AD, the Alexandrian school championed this method of interpretation.

Philo, whose allegorical interpretation influenced Alexandria, “believed that the literal and historical references of the Hebrew Scriptures were of the least important” (Olson 1999:202). The two leading church fathers of the Alexandrian school were Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and Origen (185-254). Clement was influenced by Philo’s allegory which he later on passed to Origen.

Young (2003:336) concedes that “Allegory was...encouraged by the “oracular” approach to Scripture, which, from the earliest days of Christianity, had treated texts as riddles pointing to Christ,...Origen took up traditional “types” and Messianic interpretations into his spiritual sense”. Origen believed that “the truth of Scripture came through the veil, and the key to unlock the hidden mysteries was Christ” (2003:336). “Origen’s allegory had always had an arbitrary feel about it because of the multiplicity of meanings he was prepared to give a particular passage...” (Young 2003:338). He believed that the inspiration of scripture implied that they contain mystery. Therefore, he taught that this mystery could be understood through allegorical interpretation (Peppler 2013:99). Augustine is considered to have lived at the end of the church fathers era. According to Gundry (1969:235), Augustine’s work led to allegorism becoming a most dominant method of interpretation in the West.

It should be noted that, to some extent, the allegorical method was adopted by the church fathers to defend the Christian character of the OT against its opponents, such as non-Jewish, who denied Christ as the fulfilment of the OT and Marcionites who considered OT inferior and non-Christian (Greidanus 1999:70).

### ***2.1.1. Its Method of Finding Christ in the Scriptures***

Besides defending the OT against those who rejected it as non-Christian and inferior, an allegorical method was used to find Christ in the OT. “Numerous early Christian scholars felt that the Old Testament would be relevant only if it spoke *directly* of Christ” (Duvall and Hays 2012:208, emphasis added). They initially understood the OT scriptures to predict or allude to Jesus Christ. But this approach had restrictions to the understanding of the OT as a whole. This led to a different approach, allegory. The advantage of allegory over prophecy was that all texts could be interpreted christocentrically (Peppler 2013:101).

Greidanus's (1999:83) quotation of Dockery that "the allegorical approach was an extension of the church's Christological interpretation, for the deeper meaning that Origen sought was Christocentric" confirms the early church fathers' quest to interpret scripture christocentrically. A taste of Origen's allegory is felt in the following example. He taught that Noah's ark is a picture of the church and that Noah represented Christ (Zuck 1991:36).

Although the Alexandrian fathers should be commended for their desire to be Christ-centred, their method is not commendable. It violates the principle of one meaning to scripture. It distorts the authorial intention. Since it is based on subjective imaginations, it violates the objective truth of scripture; it violates the literal meaning of words.

Is there a way of preaching Christ from the story of Noah without allegorising it? A careful reading of the NT shows that it abounds with passages that point back to Noah. In most cases when Noah is referred to, it is in connection with God's judgment of the world through the flood and Noah's salvation through the ark (see Matt 24:36-39; Lk 17:26-27; Heb 11:7; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:4-5 & 3:5-6). The only other time Noah is mentioned in the NT is in the genealogy of Jesus (Lk 3:36). It is not clear whether Origen considered these facts, which in my opinion would be a better way of bridging the gap between Noah and Christ.

Instead of an allegorical typology, Noah's discourse should be seen as a prototype of the judgment that Jesus will bring upon the wicked world. Also the fact that Noah appears in the genealogy of Jesus presents a better opportunity of tying Noah with Jesus. Intuitively, this works better than seeing Noah as Christ's representative. However, as Greidanus (1999:71) points out, "the easiest way to demonstrate the presence of Christ in the Old Testament is the allegorical method." Dockery agrees. He noted that "the allegorical approach was an extension of the church's Christological interpretation, for the deeper meaning that Origen sought was Christocentric. For Origen, Christ was the centre of history and the key to understanding the Old Testament" (quoted by Greidanus 1999:83).

This seems to be the reason why the Alexandrian fathers espoused allegorical meaning, especially in their defence against the heretics of their day. One thing needs to be made clear though, that is, unlike the neo-orthodoxy that questioned the

inspiration of scripture, “The Church Fathers did not adopt this [allegorical] method of interpretation because of a lack of belief in the inspiration of scripture” (Peppler 2013:101). However, as Greidanus warns, since allegory is not confined to the intent of the author, it is open to arbitrary and subjective interpretations (1999:90).

Clement of Alexandria conceived that the text may have multiple meanings, namely, historical, doctrinal, prophetic, philosophical and mystical (Zuck 1991:35-37). Origen espoused a threefold meaning, namely, literal, moral and allegorical (p. 37).

Clement’s philosophical and mystical meaning took an allegorical form. Although Origen did not overlook the literal meaning altogether, he avowed that not all scripture has a literal meaning, but all has a spiritual meaning (Zuck 1991:36). The church fathers did not concentrate much of their energies on the historical context of the text, for that was not its primary purpose. They viewed an exegetical work incomplete until the text in some way pointed to Christ (Elowsky 2006:65).

## **2.2. *Typological Interpretation and Christocentricity***

Typological interpretation is premised upon the fact that the Bible is a unity and it spoke to Christ in prophecy and type (Gundry 1969:234). The OT events are foreshadows and point to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Although both the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools disagreed on other methods, they were united on typology as a means of seeing the unity and the witness of scripture to Christ. But since the Alexandrian school preferred allegory and the Antiochene school preferred the literal sense, their methods and rules of typologising were different. This poses a problem for a typology method.

Beale (2012:14) avers that typology includes both analogy and prophetic elements.

He understands typology as:

the study of analogical correspondences among revealed truths about persons, events, institutions, and other things within the historical framework of God’s special revelation, which from a retrospective view, are of a prophetic nature and are escalated in their meaning.

From this definition, five characteristics of a type are deduced:

- a. There should be an analogical correspondence.
- b. The correspondence should be studied within its historical framework.

- c. The correspondence should legitimately point forward or foreshadow the antitype.
- d. The meaning of the type is escalated or heightened in relation to the type.
- e. The NT writers read the OT in retrospect, understanding some OT passages to be prophetic (e.g. Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15).

### **2.2.1. Its Method of Finding Christ in the Scriptures**

“Numerous passages in the Old Testament describe things that *point to* or *foreshadows* what Christ ultimately fulfils” (Duvall et al. 2012:215) (emphasis original).

The concept of foreshadowing suggests general connections and does not speculate on the minute details. Most of the foreshadowing of Christ in the OT is identified in the NT. The NT should serve as a guide to determine the foreshadowing passages in the OT. “The Old Testament flows into the New Testament as part of a continuous salvation-history story. What is promised in the Old is fulfilled in the New. *Typology* is part of the promise-fulfilment scheme that connects the two testaments together” (Duvall et al., p. 216).

Greidanus (1999:91) says, “The difference between typological and allegorical interpretation is the way redemptive history functions in interpretation.” He quotes Woolcombe who states the difference as follows: “Typological exegesis is the search for linkages between events, persons or things *within the historical framework of revelation*, whereas allegorism is the search for a secondary and hidden meaning underlying the primary and obvious meaning of a narrative” (emphasis original). The allegorical method ignores the historical meaning, whereas typological method values it (Peppler 2013:101). There are therefore potential dangers with this method. Gundry outlines some of the dangers:

- a. Whenever typology is used to show the Christocentric unity of the Bible, it is all too easy to impose an artificial unity.
- b. Types come to be created rather than discovered, thus drifting into allegorism.
- c. Secondary meanings are sought, thus superseding the original meaning.

In dealing with dangers like these, our predecessors looked for a criteria. Greidanus (1999:94) provides John Breck’s distillation of Theodore of Mopsuetia’s understanding of typology. Three criteria are discerned: 1) There should be a

resemblance between a type and antitype; 2) the relationship between a type and antitype must be in the order of promise and fulfilment; and 3) the transcendent reality of the type must actually participate in the type, thereby transforming the historical event into a vehicle of revelation.

The NT understood some OT scriptures typologically (e.g. Ps 22 in Matt 27:46; Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15). Reading Psalm 22 and Hosea 11:1 in their context will reveal that these passages have real historical connections with David and Israel. They were understood and should still be understood within that context. However, what happened to both David and Israel identifies with what Jesus experienced. Thus their experiences are a type of Jesus' experiences.

However, typology has its shortcomings. Like allegory, typology could be imaginative if the identification is not in the Bible. Typology can be overly extended. Although Greidanus (1999:98) thinks that Theodore's suggestion that the messianic types should be limited to the NT citations is too restrictive, the suggestion should be a starting point in employing typology. This will eliminate allegorical typology.

### ***2.3. Historical-grammatical Interpretation and Christocentricity***

#### ***Represented by the School of Antioch***

Antioch was known for its literal and historical method of interpretation. The leading church fathers of Antioch were Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) and John Chrysostom (347-407). "Theodore...challenged many traditional messianic interpretations, setting the message of the prophets in the context of their own time" (Young 2003:342). The school of Antioch insisted on the historical reality of the biblical revelation. They were unwilling to lose it in a world of symbols and shadows...." (Quote from Grant and Tracy by Young 2003:342). Concerning Paul's allegory in Galatians 4:24, Theodore argues that "Paul does not do away with the *historia* of Sarah and Hagar; rather he draws out a correspondence, a similarity" (Young 2003:347).

#### ***Represented by Martin Luther***

Martin Luther (1483-1546) is regarded as the father of protestant interpretation. His 1521 hermeneutical principles acknowledged the final authority of scripture, the

sufficiency of scripture, historical/literal sense of scripture, denial of allegorical interpretation and the perspicuity of scripture (Dockery 1983:190). In 1528, he regarded, among others, the knowledge of grammar, the historical context and the Christ-centredness of all scripture as rules of Biblical interpretation (p. 191).

Luther came to the Scriptures with one quest, to find Christ. He regarded Christ as the heart of the Bible (Dockery 1983:191). Thus the Christocentric Principle was at the helm in Luther's biblical interpretation. Luther saw no difference between the Christological Principle and the grammatical-historical principle. Unfortunately, Luther's interpretation was not always within the bounds of grammatical-historical interpretation which he espoused. He often forced Christ into the scriptures.

### ***2.3.1. Its Method of Finding Christ in the Scriptures***

Theodore admitted that there are parallels between the OT and NT events and characters. The use of Jonah's sign by Christ in Matthew 12 illustrates this correspondence. To Theodore this was an acceptable typology (Young 2003:347). In commenting on Psalms 22 and 69, Theodore argued that though these psalms are quoted in the gospels, they could not refer to Christ. He argued for the original aim or intent of the writer. Hence the context of the psalm should be retained. He thus admitted "secondary" application to Christ (p. 350). "What the Antiochenes object to is a hermeneutic that misidentifies and misapplies figures of speech" (p. 348).

Luther objected to the Antiochene's rigid literalism and typology. According to Dockery (1983:193), Luther maintained that allegory destroyed the history of the OT and typology annulled the historical presence of Christ in the OT. Luther did not deny typology altogether (Gundry 1969:236). He seems to have denied a typology that ignored the presence of Christ in the OT.

Although Luther favoured a literal reading of scripture, his method of finding Christ in the OT was, however, not always within the bounds of a grammatical-historical method. Luther read the NT meaning into the OT texts. He often practised eisegesis instead of exegesis. This is seen in his reading of the NT gospel into the OT, especially the psalms (Dockery 1983:200). The example of this is seen on his Christocentric interpretation of Psalm 117. It is undeniable that Psalm 117 invites the nations of the world to praise the God of Israel (Terrien 2003:779). But it seems that its literal meaning would see Israel as the instrument of reaching out to the nations

even before the coming of Christ. So the psalm was to Israel and not to Christ. Luther, however, divided this psalm into four parts. The first two parts, prophecy and revelation, sees this psalm as a promise of the gospel and of the kingdom of Christ (prophecy) and concerns the spiritual and heavenly kingdom of Christ (revelation) (Dockery 1983:199).

Martin Luther seems to have been quick to apply *the Christocentric Principle* without thorough consideration of the historical setting of the text. His contention, which is used by our contemporary scholars, was that the NT is the part of the larger historical context of the OT. Greidanus (1999:51) represents our contemporary scholars on this. His words are "...the two Testaments are not two books but one...this conclusion...leads to the equally fundamental hermeneutical conclusion that *the Old Testament must be interpreted not only in its own context but also in the context of the New Testament*" (emphasis original). His premise is that this conclusion applies the principle of context.

Since the literary context of the Old Testament in the Christian canon is the New Testament, this means that the Old Testament must be understood in the context of the New Testament. And since the heart of the New Testament is Jesus Christ, this means that every message from the Old Testament must be seen in the light of Jesus Christ (Greidanus 1999:51).

Greidanus's words above resonates with Surburg's statements about Luther: "When Luther finds Christ in the Old Testament he is not allegorizing...but merely reading the Old Testament in the light of the New. In doing this he finds the deeper meaning than an exegete who ignores the New Testament" (quoted by Dockery 1983:202).

## **2.4. Contemporary Understanding: Definition**

How has the understanding of christocentricity discussed above influence contemporary understanding of christocentricity? A look at definitions by different christocentricists will help with the answer.

Muller (2006:254) raises a legitimate concern when he observes that:

What has been lacking in much of the extant discussion of the existence and virtues of christocentric theologies is clear definition...and distinction of the various meanings and applications of "christocentrism" and various terms as they have been applied...in the history of Christian thought.

Beale (2012:9) asks, “But does a christocentric presupposition necessitate a misreading of the OT? ... The answer to the question depends to a large degree on how one defines what is a christocentric hermeneutic.” Pepler (2012:118) shares the same sentiment that “The term ‘christocentric’ means different things to different people, applied to the theologies of past scholars”.

Although there are diverse definitions of christocentricity, there is, however, a common biblical ground by which the Christocentric Principle is underpinned, that is, Luke 24:25-27, 44-45. In these verses Christ indicts the disciples travelling to Emmaus with these words:

“O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary of the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

From this passage and others (e.g. Jn 5:39-40; 14:8-12; Col 1:15-20; 2:9; Heb 1:1-3), scholars agree that scriptures are to be interpreted in light of Jesus Christ (see Pepler 2012; 2013; Smith 2012; 2013; Greidanus 1999; Dockery 1994; *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy* 1982). Some of these passages will be exegetically studied in chapter 3. For now one question remains crucial: ‘What does it mean to interpret scriptures in light of Jesus Christ?’

#### **2.4.1. Neo-orthodox Christocentrism**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a movement was founded which came to be known as neo-orthodox. The prominent figure of this movement was a Swiss-born, Karl Barth. Led by Karl Barth, neo-orthodoxy made Christology its central focus. For Barth, “theology is Christocentric” (Bender 2005:2). He maintained that “every Christian doctrine must be determined and shaped by God’s revelation in Jesus Christ” (p. 3). No doctrine must be viewed independent of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptural quotations are from the NASB 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.

Neo-orthodoxy came to emphasise Jesus Christ as God's Word. The understanding that neo-orthodoxy came to share about the Bible sets them against the liberal Protestant and Fundamentalism of their day. "Neo-orthodoxy rejects liberal theology's natural theology and rational or experiential approach to knowledge of God" (Olson 1999:571). It also rejected a literalistic hermeneutic propounded by the fundamentalists (pp. 570, 572).

Neo-orthodoxy maintained that Jesus, and not the Bible, is God's Word (Kantzer 1959:18). This hypothesis led the neo-orthodox scholars, especially Barth, to reject the Bible as propositional truth (Kantzer 1959:20). According to this movement, the Bible *became* God's word only when it leads a person to a saving encounter with God (Olson 1999:571). To Barth and his followers, the Bible was an ordinary instrument that gave witness to *the* Word, Jesus Christ. Barth rejected biblical inerrancy and held that the Bible can be wrong at any point (p. 581; Stoll 1962:29).

Barth treated the Bible in this manner because he wanted to elevate Jesus Christ. Thus he came to understand Jesus Christ as the locus of biblical and theological interpretation. It is worth noting here that neo-orthodoxy accepted biblical criticism as an approach to biblical interpretation because of a presupposition that the Bible contains error (Stoll 1962:29).

From this elevation of Jesus as the centre of the Bible and theology was coined christocentrism. Karl Barth:

attempt[ed] to understand every doctrine from a centre in God's Self-revelation in Jesus Christ; i.e. from a centre in God's act of veiling and unveiling in Christ... 'Christocentrism', for him, was a methodological rule...in accordance with which one presupposes a particular understanding of God's Self-revelation in reflecting upon each and every other doctrinal topic, and seeks to interpret those topics in the light of what is already known of Jesus Christ (Peppler 2012:118-119, as quoted by Cortez 2007).

#### **2.4.2. International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (1982): Definition**

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) held its first summit in 1978 where it affirmed the doctrine of the inerrancy of scripture. In 1982 the second summit was held where the council produced '*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*'. Article III of the statement reads: "We affirm that *the Person and work* of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible. We deny that any method of

interpretation which rejects or obscures the Christ-centeredness of Scripture is correct” (emphasis added). ICBI wrote stimulus paragraphs which they later revised in light of ‘*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*’. Under the paragraph on “The Authority of Scripture”, the exposition affirms God as the source of scripture and “Jesus Christ as its centre of reference and main subject matter.” The paragraph subtitled “The Centrality of Jesus Christ in the Biblical Message” is no doubt Christocentric. It acknowledges 1) that in Christ are the central themes of the Bible; 2) that the OT and NT bear witness to Christ; and that 3) the NT interpretation of the OT consistently points to Christ. This paragraph closes with a statement akin to an anathema: “Any way of interpreting Scripture which misses its consistent Christ-centeredness must be judged erroneous.”

### **2.4.3. Poythress’s (1991) Definition**

Early in his book, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, Poythress (1991:5) states that “The whole Old Testament finds its focus in Jesus Christ, His death, and His resurrection.” He presupposes that Old Testament promises are ‘Yes’ in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). He views Christ as the key that unlocks the OT and its focus as well. “He is the One to whom it points forward, about whom it speaks, and whom it prefigures in symbols” (p. 5). Poythress argues that “Since the New Testament completes the story begun in the Old, Christ is also the center about which the Old Testament begins to speak in its preliminary way, and to which the Old Testament points forward” (p. 8).

Having laid a premise, later in the book Poythress concludes and gives his understanding of christocentricity:

“Our interpretation of the Old Testament and the New is to be Christocentric,.... That is, we are to understand that the purposes and will of God as revealed in the whole Bible come to focus in the person of Christ and in His triumphant accomplishment of salvation in the crucifixion and resurrection” (1991:284).

Poythress warns that to be Christ-centred in interpretation is not to be Christomonistic. He understands God’s revelation through Christ to be the revelation of the triune God (p. 285) and that the Christocentric reading of the Bible is acknowledging that the OT was designed to witness, foreshadow, anticipate and promise salvation which was fulfilled by the triune God in Christ.

#### **2.4.4. Greidanus's (1988; 1999) Definition**

Sidney Greidanus has written quite extensively on christocentrism. His main focus is on preaching Christ, especially from the OT. His argument for a *Christocentric Interpretation* is prefaced thus: "The New Testament teaches throughout that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of Old Testament history, promises, and prophecies (Greidanus 1988:119)." Subsequently, he gives the implications this statement has in reading OT. "It means that we must now move beyond strictly historical interpretation and interpret the Old Testament in the light of its fulfilment in the New Testament." This argument is grounded on the literary and historical standpoints. Literarily speaking, Greidanus has it that since the whole canon furnishes a literary context, the OT should be read within this context. Historical argument according to Greidanus necessitates that the previous OT revelation be interpreted in light of the later NT revelation. "Consequently Christocentric interpretation moves from the fullness of revelation in the New Testament to a new understanding of God's revelation in the Old Testament."

In 1999, Greidanus published another book through Eerdmans, titled *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*. In this book Greidanus (1999:4) builds his Christocentric definition around the background of the New Testament church's preaching of Christ. His observation is that "The New Testament church preached the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfilment of God's old covenant promises, his presence today in the Spirit, and his imminent return." From this observation he concludes that "'preaching Christ' meant preaching Christ incarnate in the context of the full sweep of redemptive history." Thus his definition of preaching Christ is as follows: "...we can define 'preaching Christ' as preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God's revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament" (p. 10) (emphasis original).

I find Greidanus's (1999:32) explanation of how Jesus related and treated the OT very sobering. He explains: "For Jesus not only taught that the Old Testament witnessed for him, but in his life he also lived out of, fulfilled and taught the

scriptures.” Hence forced interpretation of Christ in the OT reads Christ, as we know him from the NT, back into the OT text (p. 37).

#### **2.4.5. Chapell’s (2005) Definition**

According to Pepler (2012:119), Bryan Chapell’s christocentricity was influenced by Sidney Greidanus. Chapell wrote a book, *Christ-centred preaching*, which came to be lauded as a homiletical classic. The title of the book alone gives an indication that the book is about christocentricity. Chapell maintains that “the entire Bible is Christ-centred because his redemptive work in all of its incarnational, atoning, arising, interceding, and reigning dimensions is the capstone of all of God’s revelation of his dealing with his people” (2005:276). Having said this, Chapell clarifies that “Christ-centred preaching rightly understood does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every text but to disclose where every text stands in relation to Christ” (p. 279). On page 282, Chapell provides four redemptive foci; a passage may possess one or more of them. He observes that the text may be 1) predictive of the work of Christ; 2) preparatory for the work of Christ; 3) reflective of the work of Christ; and/or 4) resultant of the work of Christ. Chapell’s argument is that since Luke 24:27 and John 5:39, 46 connote that every passage in its context reveals the nature and necessity of Christ, failing to relate a passage to Christ is neglecting what Christ said the passage is about.

#### **2.4.6. Pepler’s (2012) Definition**

Pepler aligns his understanding of christocentricity with that of Barth and Chapell (2012:120). But unlike Barth, as noted above, he holds a high view of inspiration and authority of Scripture (p. 124). According to Pepler, “the Christocentric Principle is an approach to biblical interpretation that seeks to understand all parts of scripture from a Jesus-perspective.” It is a hermeneutic approach that understands Christ as the revealer of the nature of the Godhead and interpreter of scripture. Pepler elaborates that “it [Christocentric principle] is a way of *interpreting scripture primarily from the perspective of what Jesus taught and modelled, and from what he revealed concerning the nature, character, values, principles, and priorities of the Godhead*” (emphasis original). Pepler’s christocentrism could be summarised by two actions of Jesus’ earthly ministry: his words and works. The main point of Pepler’s christocentrism is found in his repetition of “the nature, character, values, principles, and priorities of the Godhead” as revealed in Christ.

#### **2.4.7. Smith's (2012; 2013) Definition**

Smith (2012; 2013) adopts the same definition as Pepler (2012). In his book *Integrated Theology: Discerning God's Will in our World*, Smith (2013:109) maintains that "The Lord Jesus Christ is the climactic revelation of God. His words and works are the most concrete, clear, and complete unveiling of the nature, will, and purposes of God." He then clarifies that "This does not mean everything that God has revealed about himself is seen in Christ, since some aspects of God's nature are more clearly revealed in the Old Testament than in the gospel."

Smith's (2013:109) christocentricity is based on two facts about Jesus Christ: 1) He is a "unifying theme of scripture"; and 2) "all the promises and purposes of God find their ultimate fulfilment in and through him." Hence his words and works reveal God, his nature, will and purposes.

#### **2.5. Summary**

The Christocentric definitions mentioned above could be summarised thus:

- a. Scholars agree that christocentricity focuses on the Person and works of the incarnate Christ.
- b. Jesus Christ fulfils the OT and thus the OT and the NT should be interpreted in light of the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, words and exaltation of the incarnate Jesus.
- c. Jesus Christ as the central and/or main subject of all of scripture. The emphases from these scholars is on the nature of Christ that should be explained from all of scripture and how Christ revealed the nature, character, values, principles and priorities of the Godhead.
- d. Biblical revelation is climaxed in the incarnate Christ.
- e. The OT revelation is to be interpreted in light of the NT revelation.
- f. Every text of the Bible should be perused to see how it relates to Christ.

Therefore, according to these syntheses, christocentricity could be defined as a method of interpreting both the Old and New Testament scriptures in light of the Person (i.e. words) and works (especially the death and resurrection) of Christ who in his incarnation revealed the nature, will and purposes of God (Jn 1:18; 14:9; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3).

But the question that needs to be answered is how can one apply a Christocentric principle without violating the authorial intent? That is, how should a Christocentric hermeneutic be applied within the framework of grammatical-historical interpretation without resorting to allegory and subjectivism? The next chapter seeks to answer these kinds of questions.

## Chapter 3

# Understanding and applying christocentricity within the framework of a commitment to evangelical exegesis

### Introduction

Literature review in chapter 2 has revealed that the Christocentric Principle is underpinned by Biblical texts. Pepler (2012) identifies some of these texts as Matthew 5:17, John 5:39-40; 14:8-12, Luke 24:27, Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9, and Hebrews 1:1-3. To verify the claim of christocentricity, exegesis is needed. I will not exegete all of the passages there are on the Christocentric subject, since the goal is not to prove the validity of christocentricity. Chapter 2 has shown that this principle was deemed valid by scholars of different eras.

The aim of the exegesis of the following three passages is to demonstrate that christocentricity is not far-fetched, but that a proper interpretation of these passages indicate that Jesus meant that the Scriptures are to be interpreted christocentrically. The meaning of these passages will also shed an understanding on how to handle the Christocentric Principle within the bounds of Scripture. The three NT passages that will be studied are Matthew 5:17-19, John 5:39-40 and Luke 24:27, 44-47.

### 3.1. Matthew 5:17-19

#### 3.1.1. *Background of Matthew 5:17-19*

Toussaint (1980:13) observes two methods that are prevalent in studying the gospels: a doctrinal and harmonisation approach. Although both these methods have vitally contributed to the understanding of the gospels, Toussaint argues that these were not a primary purpose of the gospel writers. Their primary purpose was to prove a point. They wrote to set forth an argument. Elwell and Yarbrough (2013:67) see one major purpose of Matthew's gospel to be 'Jesus the fulfilment of God's intention'. "Matthew emphasizes that the coming of Jesus cannot be understood as just another event in history. It is the *supreme* event in history, planned and prophesied by God centuries before it occurred. Virtually every circumstance surrounding the birth, life,

teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus is seen as the fulfilment of prophecy...” (emphasis original).

“The central personality of OT prophecy is the coming great King who will rule in God’s promised kingdom. The full identity and nature of the predicted King are initially presented and explained in the gospels, of which Matthew is the first. The message of the gospel of Matthew centres on the theme of Jesus’ kingship. The sermon on the mount is the manifesto of the King” (MacArthur 1985: ix, x, xii).

The formula, καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοὺς λόγους τούτους, marks the structure of the gospel of Matthew (Matt 7:28-29; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1) (Carson & Moo 2005:135). This formula marks five discourses: the Sermon on the Mount (5-7); Missionary discourse (10); Parable discourse (13); Church discourse (18); and Eschatological discourse (24-25) (Guthrie 1990:40). Chapters 1 and 2 are taken as a prologue and chapters 26 to 28 as a climactic point of the gospel (Carson & Moo 2005:136). Matthew 5:17-19 falls within a first discourse, the Sermon on the Mount. “The great body of the sermon runs from 5:17 to 7:12, beginning and ending with the way in which the kingdom is related to the Old Testament Scriptures, ‘the Law and the Prophets’” (p. 136).

### 3.1.2. Translation of Matthew 5:17-19

Greek Text: UBS4	Researcher’s Translation
<p><b>17</b> Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας· οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι. <b>18</b> ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν· ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ, ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου, ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται. <b>19</b> ὃς ἐὰν οὖν λύσῃ μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων καὶ διδάξῃ οὕτως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν· ὃς δ’ ἂν ποιήσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ, οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.</p>	<p><b>17</b> Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the prophets. I came not to abolish but to fulfil. <b>18</b> For truly I say to you; until the heaven and the earth pass away, never will one iota or one projection pass away from the Law, until all takes place. <b>19</b> Therefore, whoever abolishes one of these least commandments and thus teaches people (to do the same), will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps and teaches (these least commandments), this one will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.</p>

### **3.1.3. Exegetical Commentary of Matthew 5:17-19**

#### ***The meaning of Μὴ νομίσητε***

Matthew 5:17 begins with a prohibitive subjunctive μὴ νομίσητε. The prohibitive subjunctive carries the same force as the imperative after μὴ (Wallace 1996:469). The negated subjunctive verb is usually used to forbid the occurrence of an action.

It is not clear from the passage what led to this prohibition. The answer is speculative. This prohibition could have been used because people (i.e., crowds and disciples Matt 5:1) were already thinking that part of Jesus' mission is to repeal the Law and the prophets and bring new teaching. Grammatically, the prohibitive subjunctive has a future aspect and prohibits the action that has not begun (Moulton 1908:122; Wallace 1996:469). Or it could be that Jesus anticipated such questions (Poythress 1991:264). Another possibility is to take μὴ νομίσητε as a teaching device to draw attention to what Jesus is about to say regarding the Law (France 2007:181; Carson 1984:141).

Based on events such as found in Mark 2:1-13, 27-28; 3:1-6 and 7:1-21 it seems the rumour was circulating that Jesus neglected the Law.

#### ***The meaning of ἦλθον***

Twice in Matthew 5:17-19 Jesus used the verb ἦλθον. Morris (1992:107) remarks that this expression is not normally used by a person in reference to himself. It is uniquely used by Jesus to assert his mission in coming into the world from God. Toussaint (1980:99) views ἦλθον as a Messianic term. Jesus' mission as he negatively (ἦλθον + καταλῦσαι) and positively (ἦλθον + πληρῶσαι) states it, was not to abolish the Law but to fulfil it. Key words here are καταλῦσαι (to abolish) and πληρῶσαι (to fulfil). These infinitives give the purpose of ἦλθον. The object of both infinitives are τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας. Finding out what τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας means will help to understand the relationship of Jesus to the Law and prophets.

#### ***The meaning of τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας***

The phrase τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας translates the Law or the prophets. The Law and the prophets are often used to refer to the entire Old Testament (cf. Matt 7:12; 22:40; Acts 24:14; 28:23; Rom 3:21) (France 2007:181). In Jesus' statement the two

nouns, the Law and the prophets, are not connected with a καὶ as one would expect but are connected with a disjunctive ἢ. This choice could be influenced by the treatment the Law and the prophets were given, holding the Law as more important than the prophets as was a practice among the Sadducees. But Jesus fulfils both (Morris 1992:107, n.58). Or most likely the disjunctive has an ascensive force which would read ‘the Law or [even] the prophets’, drawing attention to the fact that Jesus has not come to destroy any part of the OT.

The Law is often divided into three categories, namely, ceremonial law, civil law and moral law. In trying to ascertain what Jesus meant by τὸν νόμον, scholars are divided. Some take τὸν νόμον in Matthew 5:17-19 to refer only to the moral law (Price 1998:100). This interpretation is based on the emphasis of righteousness in verse 20 and the antitheses in verses 21-48. Others take it to refer to the law in its entirety and questions the categorisation of the Law (Turner 2008:163).

### ***The meaning of καταλῦσαι***

That the meaning of καταλῦσαι is strong is seen in its literal use in Matthew 24:2; 26:61 and 27:40 in reference to the destruction of the temple. “With reference to an authoritative text it means to declare that it is no longer valid, to repeal or annul” (France 2007:182).

### ***The meaning of πληρῶσαι***

BDAG (s.v. 1, 2, 3, 4) gives possible meanings of πληρόω depending on context. It can mean to make full, fill in reference to content (Matt 13:48) or control as in Ephesians 5:18. It can mean to complete a period of time (Mk 1:15; Jn 7:8). It can mean to bring to completion what has already been started, to finish (Rom 15:19; 2 Thess 1:11). It can mean to bring to a designed end, to fulfil (Matt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17 etc.). These possible meanings intimate the difficulty of interpreting the infinitive form of πληρόω in Matthew 5:17.

Syntactically, the infinitive καταλῦσαι (to abolish) is antithetical to πληρῶσαι (to fulfil). To determine the meaning of πληρῶσαι, Nolland (2005:218) says it must be taken in a manner that allows it to be an appropriate counterpart to καταλῦσαι. Nolland sets a premise that leads to his interpretation and dismisses other interpretations of πληρῶσαι. His premise is, since Jesus is functioning as the teacher (see Matt 5:2) in

this sermon, the meaning one chooses for 'fulfil' should illuminate what follows in 5:21-48. "So 'to fulfil' must focus primarily on what Jesus offers as a teacher." Nolland quips that this framework dismisses as the meaning of 'fulfil' meanings such as adding to the Law; replacing the old Law with the New; confirming the validity of the Law; perfectly living out the requirements of the Law; and fulfilling the prophetic content of the Law and the prophets (p. 218). He perceives Matthew 5:17 to refer to "the practical implementation of the directives of the Law (and the prophets). Hence fulfil means 'the enablement of God's people to live out the Law more effectively'" (p. 219).

France (2007:182) disagrees with Nolland's (2005:218) interpretation of πληρῶσαι. He is not convinced that when Jesus contrasts 'abolish' with 'fulfil', he is referring simply to obeying the requirements of the Law and prophets. The obedience of the Law does not answer the anticipated charge against abolishing the Law or the prophets. France draws attention to the use of the term πληρῶ, which is frequently used in Matthew in "the formula quotations where it denotes the coming into being of that which Scripture pointed forward" (2007:182). Carson (1984:143) is in agreement. He supports the view that 'fulfil' denotes that the Law and the prophets point to Jesus who is their fulfilment. Like France (2007), Carson's argument is that "the antithesis is not between 'abolish' and 'keep', but between 'abolish' and 'fulfil' (1984:143). So he concludes that πληρῶ should be given the same meaning as in the formula quotations (Matt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). In the same vein, Turner (2008:162) advises that the meaning of πληρῶ must be examined in light of the formula quotations. Inevitably this interpretation has Christological implications. It assumes that Jesus is the goal of the OT and its interpreter (Carson 1984:144; Turner 2008:162). "In Matthew's usage, that verb (to fulfil) presupposes that even the law itself enjoys a teleological, prophetic function" (Carson & Moo 2005:164). I intuitively concur with Carson (1984), France (2007) and Turner (2008) than with Nolland (2005). Interpreting πληρῶ Christologically, pointing to Christ as the fulfilment of the OT, is in line with Matthew's purpose of writing the gospel.

Matthew writes to his fellow Jews...to show, amongst other things, that all that the Old Testament Scriptures anticipated of the Messiah was actually fulfilled in Christ. In the opening three and a half chapters, he writes seven times to the effect, 'All this took place to fulfil what was said through the prophet...' (see 1:22; 2:5; 2:15; 2:23; 3:3; 4:14). Similar statements recur through the book, in which

specific events in the life of Jesus are related to detailed prophetic utterances contained in the existing Scriptures of the Old Testament, explaining these took place, 'to fulfil what was said through the prophet...' (see 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56 and 27:9) (Prince 1998:14-15).

Matthew 5:17 fits well within this purpose. Verses 18-20 of Matthew 5 affirm and explain verse 17 (Turner 2008:163). With the preface ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν in verse 18 Jesus solemnly assures his listeners that Moses' Law will not be abrogated. This is further seen in the contingency he sets in this verse: ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ, ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου, ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται (until the heaven and the earth pass away, never will one iota or one dot pass away from the Law, until all takes place). Twice in verse 18 Jesus used the conjunction ἕως, which denotes the end of a period of time. When it is used with an aorist subjunctive, ἕως denotes that the commencement of an event is dependent on circumstances (BDAG s.v. 1β). οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ, which functions like an apodosis in the conditional sentence is contingent on the temporal clause introduced by ἕως. οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ is an emphatic negation subjunctive. The double negation, οὐ μὴ, is used as strongest negation in Greek. With the subjunctive, this strong negation is used to deny a potentiality and it rules out the idea as being a possibility (Wallace 1996:468). Thus Jesus' words could be paraphrased as follows: as long as the universe still stands, be sure that not a tiniest iota or a slightest dot will pass away from the Law. Surely Jesus used a hyperbolic language to make a point that even the tiniest Law that may seem insignificant will not pass away (Nolland 2005:220). The second ἕως clause (ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται) in verse 18 gives further contingency to ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου. Grammatically, the antecedent of the plural pronoun πάντα, which serves as a subject of the aorist subjunctive verb γένηται, is ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία. This is the near context. Generally this pronoun could refer to all that is written in the OT. Hence Jesus affirms again that "The divine purpose in Scripture will be fully worked out" (Morris 1992:110). Since these words affirm Matthew 5:17, the conclusion is that Jesus came to fulfil every detail in the OT that points to him. No detail will pass away without being fulfilled in Christ.

Verse 19 draws a conclusion with an inferential conjunction οὖν. Verse 19 has some synonymous parallels with verses 17 and 18. καταλῦσαι parallels λύση, and μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων parallels ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία, which is the content of τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας. The adversative conjunction δὲ gives an antithetical

parallel between those who abolish the commandments and those who keep the commandments. There are consequences to abolishing and keeping the Law. The seriousness of these consequences are seen in the use of two cause-effect conditional sentences in a third class condition.

The inference could be summarised as follows: 'if Jesus did not come to abolish the OT but to fulfil it, for every detail of the OT will never pass away until the heaven and earth pass away and until all written in the OT about Jesus is accomplished, then whoever contradicts Jesus and abolish one of these least commandments and in the same way teaches people to abolish them, he will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps and teaches these least commandments as fulfilled in Jesus, this one will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'

So far there is no question that Jesus recognised the continuity and necessity of the OT. Since Matthew writes this gospel to the Christian church, it is clear that the OT is the NT church's Scripture. But it is also clear that the OT was pointing to Christ, since he is its fulfilment. So how are we to understand the OT in light of Matthew 5:17-19? Poythress (1991:269) reasons that:

Since Jesus commands us to practice and teach even the "least of these commandments" of the law (5:19), we are bound to do so. But we do so as disciples who have learned how to discern the function of the law of Moses as a pointer to the realities of Jesus Christ our Lord. The way in which each law is fulfilled in Christ determines the way in which it is to be observed now.

This application, however, should take into cognisance that not all of the OT was fulfilled as Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount. Some parts like the incarnation had already been fulfilled. Other parts were being fulfilled as he taught (Matt 5:21-48). Still others such as the crucifixion, the burial and the resurrection were to be fulfilled soon and the ascension was to be fulfilled later and others at Pentecost and after Pentecost through the Church, and the final fulfilment will occur at Christ's return and in glory (Hendriksen 1973:291-292). This caution should take into consideration that in our Christocentric interpretation of the OT, we are limited and should not read as fulfilled something that is not fulfilled.

We move now to the next Christocentric passage.

## **3.2. John 5:39-40**

### **3.2.1. Background of John 5:39-40**

We follow Toussaint's (1980:13) observation again that the gospel writers wrote to prove a point. The point of John's gospel is clearly stated in John 20:30-31:

"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (NASB).

There are three key words in this purpose statement that provide a clue to the theme and structure of this gospel: signs<sup>2</sup>, believe<sup>3</sup> and life<sup>4</sup>. The signs in the gospel of John point to Jesus and reveal his glory. It is observed that each sign in the gospel of John is tied to a discourse.

The turning of water into wine in John 2 is tied to the new birth discourse in John 3. The healing of the official's son in John 4:46-54 is tied to the Samaritan woman discourse in John 4:1-42. The healing of the paralytic man at Bethesda in John 5:1-17 is tied to the witness to Jesus discourse in John 5:18-46. The feeding of the 5000 in John 6:1-14 is tied to the bread of life discourse in John 6:22-71. The healing of the blind man in John 9 is tied to the light-of-the-world discourse in John 8:12-20. The raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 11 is tied to the resurrection-and-life discourse in John 11:17-27. The resurrection of Jesus in John 20 is tied to the farewell discourse in John 13-16 (Essex 2015).

John 5:39-40 is part of the witness discourse tied to the healing of the paralytic man at Bethesda. Jesus healed this paralytic man on the Sabbath (5:9) and the Jews were persecuting him for this reason (v. 16). In their encounter with Jesus, he called God his Father (v. 17). The Jews sought all the more to kill him, not only for breaking the Sabbath, but for calling God his own Father, which they rightly understood as making Himself equal with God (v. 18). This conversation with the Jews allowed Jesus to reveal who he was. He calls upon different witnesses beginning from verse

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<sup>2</sup> Repeated 17 times in John's gospel

<sup>3</sup> Repeated roughly 100 times

<sup>4</sup> Repeated roughly 40 times as a verb or noun

31: John the Baptist (v. 33), the works of Christ (v. 36), the Father (v. 37) and the Scriptures (v. 39). This thesis is concerned about the witness of Scripture.

### 3.2.2. Translation of John 5:39-40

UBS4	Researcher's Translation
<p><b>39</b> ἐραυνᾶτε τὰς γραφάς, ὅτι ὑμεῖς δοκεῖτε ἐν αὐταῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔχειν· καὶ ἐκεῖναί εἰσιν αἱ μαρτυροῦσαι περὶ ἐμοῦ·  <b>40</b> καὶ οὐ θέλετε ἐλθεῖν πρὸς με ἵνα ζωὴν ἔχητε.</p>	<p><b>39</b> You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life. But these are the ones testifying about me. <b>40</b> Yet you do not want to come to Me in order that you may have life.</p>

### 3.2.3. Exegetical Commentary of John 5:39-40

John 5:39 begins with the statement ἐραυνᾶτε τὰς γραφάς. The mood of the present tense verb ἐραυνᾶτε could be either indicative or imperative. The choice of the indicative mood would mean that these Jews were searching the Scriptures. It was a fact that Jesus had observed. The imperative mood would mean that Jesus is commanding or challenging them to search the Scriptures. The following causal clause ‘ὅτι ὑμεῖς δοκεῖτε ἐν αὐταῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔχειν’ leans more towards the indicative than the imperative mood for ἐραυνᾶτε. Carson (1991:263) and Michaels (2010:331) agree with the indicative choice. The argument is that if they thought that in the Scriptures they have eternal life, then the search was automatic. They did not need to be commanded to do so. ἐραυνᾶτε has the force of a customary present suggesting that it was the habit of the Jews to search the Scriptures (τὰς γραφάς). The intensity of this search is captured by Hughes’ (1999:170) comment that “The word used in a phrase ‘You diligently *study* the Scriptures’ in verse 39 is a technical word for scribes like those who labored at Qumran with such concentration and obsession” (emphasis original).

Now, what Scriptures did they search? A quick search of the use of the forms of γραφή in the gospel of John (see 2:22; 7:38, 42; 10:35; 13:18; 17:12; 19:24, 28, 36, 37) reveals diverse application of the term. BDAG (s.v. γραφή, 2αβ, β) observes that γραφή in a singular form could refer either to an individual passage or to Scripture as a whole. In its plural form it refers to Scripture as a collective. The gospel of John has used γραφή in this manner. John 2:22 (they believed the Scripture); 7:38, 42 (as the Scripture said); and 10:35 (Scripture cannot be broken) in

singular form refer to Scripture as a whole. John 13:18 (Scripture may be fulfilled); 17:12 (Scripture would be fulfilled); 19:24, 28, 36 (fulfil Scripture) and 19:37 (another Scripture says) in a singular form refer to an individual (particular) passage. This leaves us with John 5:39 which has the plural form of γραφή, the only occurrence of the plural in John's gospel. Using BDAG's observation, "Scriptures" in this verse refers to the entirety of Scripture. But since our Bible constitutes the Old and the New Testaments, we still need to know what John referred to. From the verses above which use γραφή, it is seen that they look back to the OT Scriptures. When Jesus spoke the words in John 5:39 the New Testament was not yet written. So it is right to conclude that the Scriptures his Jewish audience were searching were the OT Scriptures. Furthermore, it seems that these Jews came from the Pharisees sect rather than from the Sadducees. They did not oppose Jesus' teaching on the resurrection of the dead (Jn 5:20, 25). If this observation is right, intuitively we could conclude that the Scriptures referred not only to the Torah but to the entire Hebrew Bible, since unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees recognised the entire OT. Jesus in John 10:35; 13:18; 17:12 and 19:24, 28 quotes from the psalms. In John 19:36 he quotes the Torah which, according to the words of Jesus in John 5:45-46, these Jews spend much time searching. In John 19:37 he quotes the prophet. Therefore, τὰς γραφάς in John 5:39 means all of the OT.

Jesus goes on to give a reason why they search the Scriptures: ὅτι ὑμεῖς δοκεῖτε ἐν αὐταῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔχειν. This causal clause is what motivated the Jews to search the Scriptures. The present tense δοκεῖτε can be construed to have an iterative force. If this is preferred, it would mean that they repeatedly thought this. But more likely it should be construed as a gnomic present, indicating that they had this as their settled mindset or paradigm. δοκεῖτε has an infinitive ἔχειν that functions more like a direct object. However, Wallace (1996:603) quotes Boyer who observed that "When an infinitive stands as the object of a verb of mental perception or communication and expresses the content or the substance of the thought or of the communication it is classified as being in indirect discourse." Wallace notes that in the indirect discourse like this, δοκεῖτε...ἔχειν, the infinitive functions as a main verb. Thus the main reason is not the thinking but the certainty that the Scriptures have eternal life. This would mean that they believed that the Scriptures contain the message that will tell them how to have eternal life. But in their quest, these Jews missed *the* main content of

the Scriptures, Jesus. Presumably the point Jesus is making in this verse is that they wrongly sought eternal life through legalistic obedience to biblical commands, failing to recognise that the real saving power of the Scriptures lay in pointing them to a living relationship with the Saviour, God in Christ. This is seen in the next contrastive statement: καὶ ἐκεῖναί εἰσιν αἱ μαρτυροῦσαι περὶ ἐμοῦ. καὶ in this context and in verse 40 emphasises a fact as surprising or unexpected or noteworthy. Its nuances are: *and yet, and in spite of that, nevertheless* (BDAG s.v. καί, 1bη). Surprisingly, in their search for life in the Scriptures, the Jews failed to see *the* Life the Scriptures keep on testifying about. Michaels (2010:332) quips that “The Scriptures do give life, not directly but indirectly, by pointing to Jesus.” Carson (1991:263) adds that “By contrast, Jesus insists that there is nothing intrinsically life-giving about studying the Scriptures, if one fails to discern their true content and purpose.” He then makes this Christocentric point: “What is at stake is a comprehensive hermeneutical key. By predictive prophecy, by type, by revelatory event and by anticipatory statute, what we call the Old Testament Scripture is understood to point to Christ, his ministry, his teaching, his death and resurrection.” The tragedy is that although the Scriptures continually testify about Jesus, these Jews “did not want to come to Me in order that they may have life” (v. 40). And Köstenberger (2004:193) says: “their refusal is deliberate.”

Applying this tragedy to our day, Carson (1991:264) notes that “Jews are far from being the only people who have read Scripture and supposed that its life-transforming power depends on much study but not particularly on Jesus.” Then he adds what seems to be his plea to Bible interpreters: “Moreover, the firm judgment against Jesus’ interlocutors in these verses is no reflection of racial bias but of hermeneutical values (cf. Lk 24:27, 45).” Carson implies that unless we value the Christocentric Principle as a hermeneutic, that is, reading the Scriptures christocentrically, we will miss Jesus who is the heart of all Scripture. This is a tragedy that the Jews in John 5 experienced. And it is the truth that was hidden from the disciples who were very close to Jesus. This follows in Luke 24:27, 44-47.

### **3.3. Luke 24:27, 44-47**

#### **3.3.1. Background of Luke 24:27, 44-47**

It does not take much effort to discover what the point of Luke's gospel is. It is stated right at the beginning of the book.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about things you have been taught (Lk 1:1-4).

Theophilus, the recipient of Luke's gospel, knew about the ministry, the teaching and the works of Jesus Christ. Luke states that "you have been taught" (1:4). Luke's purpose is to present this story with exactness.

Some scholars advise that the gospel of Luke is to be treated as a unit with the book of Acts (Bock 1994:87; Green 1997:6-10), while others, although acknowledging the affinities of the two books, advise that they are to be treated as two separate books written by the same author (e.g., Carson and Moo 2005:203). The disagreements between the two sets of advice are apparent. Both acknowledge that the preface and the recipient (Theophilus) of Luke and Acts are similar. Both books are written by the same author. The point of contention is accounting for the genre, structure and purpose of these books. Responding to the genre argument, Green (1997:7) argues: "It is worth reflecting on the near certainty that, in Luke's day, no such literary form existed, however, so that we would be amiss to think either that Luke set out to write a "Gospel" or that his readership would have understood his work within such category." Acts 1:1 makes it clear that the book of Acts is a sequel to Luke. What is not clear is whether the books were composed as one volume which was later divided into two because of its length, as Green maintains (1997:8).

Whatever the case may be, I am inclined to treat the two books as two volumes, as they appear in our Christian Scriptures, written by the same author to the same person(s), with a message focused on God's divine plan in Christ to save the world, begun in the gospel of Luke and continued in the book of Acts.

Studying Luke and Acts individually will respect their canonical status and consider their genre, structure, purpose and, to some extent, theology (Carson and Moo

2005:203), which is crucial to Biblical interpretation. The benefits of recognising the unity of the two books are captured by DeSilva (2004:310) as follows:

Without reading Luke as part of Luke-Acts, we can easily make mistaken claims about Luke and his audience. For example, on the basis of Luke alone we could observe that the author is less interested in the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy in the life of Jesus than Matthew, but if we include Acts it will be clear that Luke is as vitally concerned with anchoring the life and ministry of Jesus in the oracles of God as Matthew.

Both books show God's acts in fulfilling his promises to Israel in creating a body of believers from both Jews and Gentiles (Carson and Moo 2005:202). DeSilva (2004:310) sees this fulfilment accomplished by the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus and the life and movement of the early church. This served to help legitimate the place of Gentiles in the body. Thus, according to DeSilva, Luke contributes to the Church's Christocentric reading of the Jewish Scriptures, extending it to the early church.

Luke's Christ-centeredness is also expressed by Marshall's (1978:35) comments: "Of all the Evangelists he is the most conscious of writing as a historian, yet throughout his work the history is the vehicle of theological interpretation in which the significance of Jesus is expressed".

According to Marshall (1978:35), "He (Luke) presents the story of Jesus as being the fulfilment of prophecy and indeed as being determined throughout by the will of God revealed in prophecy." With regard to the fulfilment of prophecy in Luke, Carson and Moo (2005:219) note: 1) The central importance of God's plan, beginning with the infancy narrative set in context of OT promises (Lk 1:54-55, 68-79; 2:29-30). "The fulfilment of God's plan provides the overarching structure for Luke's gospel" (p. 219). 2) Luke's gospel focuses on the salvation of the world. "Jesus has come to rescue the lost and those who are "far away" by providing for the forgiveness of sins (e.g., 1:77; 5:17-26; 7:48-50; 19:1-10; 24:46-47)" (p. 220). 3) Luke emphasises Gentiles as the ultimate recipients of God's salvation. Gentiles like the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian (4:25-27), the centurion (7:1-10) and the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:30-37) are hints of God's extension of grace and the inclusion of the Gentiles in his people (pp. 220-221). 4) Luke reveals Jesus' concern for the marginalised people, the poor, the sinners (esp. tax collectors), and the women.

The climax of Luke’s account is the resurrection of Christ (ch. 24). And it is within this context that we find what is deemed to be the most Christocentric passage. Particularly upon verses 27 and 44, commentators like Wiersbe (2001:279) hyperbolically state that “*The key to understanding the Bible is to see Christ on every page*” (emphasis original). Scholars understand Jesus’ words in these verses to serve as a hermeneutic by which all of Scripture should be interpreted. Nolland says “The text reflects an early Christian conviction that the Scriptures witness pervasively to the Christ...such a view...involves a particular hermeneutical approach” (1993:1205). Bock (1996:1918) agrees. In the same vein, Green (1997:848) comments in passing that “it is here that Jesus’ hermeneutical innovation best surfaces.”

It is this hermeneutical approach this chapter seeks to understand and apply within the framework of evangelical exegesis. As I did with Matthew 5:17-19 and John 5:39-40, I will exegete this passage within its context and henceforth synthesise its meaning with that of Matthew 5:17-19 and John 5:39-40 with a goal of understanding how to apply the Christocentric Principle.

### 3.3.2. Translation of Luke 24:27, 44-48

UBS4	Researcher’s Translation
<p><b>27</b> καὶ ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν προφητῶν διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ.</p>	<p>27 And he began from Moses and from all the prophets and he explained to them in all the Scriptures things concerning himself.</p>
<p><b>44</b> Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς, Οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι μου οὓς ἐλάλησα πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔτι ὦν σὺν ὑμῖν, ὅτι δεῖ πληρωθῆναι πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ νόμῳ Μωϋσέως καὶ τοῖς προφήταις καὶ ψαλμοῖς περὶ ἐμοῦ.  <b>45</b> τότε διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφάς· <b>46</b> καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι Οὕτως γέγραπται παθεῖν τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, <b>47</b> καὶ κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν εἰς ἅφεςιν ἁμαρτιῶν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ <b>48</b> ὑμεῖς μάρτυρες τούτων.</p>	<p>44 But he said to them, these are my words which I spoke to you when I was still with you, that all that have been written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled. 45 Then he opened their mind in order to understand the Scriptures. 46 And he said to them; thus it is written that Christ must suffer and raise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance should be preached in his name for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.</p>

### **3.3.3. Exegetical Commentary**

Luke 24:27, 44-48 is found within the resurrection narrative. Luke 24 could be divided into four post-resurrection events. Hendriksen (1978:1050) gives the following outline:

- 1) 24:1-12: Christ's Resurrection Revealed to Women Disciples.
- 2) 24:13-35: The Appearance of the Risen Christ to Cleopas and His Companion.
- 3) 24:36-49: The Appearance of the Risen Christ to the Apostles, etc.
- 4) 24:50-53: Christ's Ascension.

Most of the narrative contents occurred on the first day of the week (vv. 1, 13, 21, 22). That not all of the narrative happens on the same day is evidenced by Luke's words in Acts 1:3 that Jesus remained forty days before his ascension.

In the first pericope, the eleven apostles and other disciples (v. 9) disbelieved the women (v. 11). The words of the women were treated by the disciples as nonsense (Gk. λήρος). They were not worth entertaining. This disbelief was indirectly a disbelief of Jesus' words, since he told them that these would happen (vv. 6-9). Peter wanted to verify the women's report by finding out for himself. But an empty tomb sent him home wondering (Gk. θαυμάζων) (v. 12). The word θαυμάζων connotes that Peter wished to know what happened to the body of Jesus. However, in his wondering he does not seem to have entertained the thought of a resurrection.

The second pericope happens in the afternoon. Cleopas and another disciple were travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus, about seven miles (v. 13). They were troubled by Jesus' death (vv. 19-21) and the women's report (vv. 22-24). These two did not believe as well (see v. 25). Jesus captured their unbelief in two words: dullness (Gk. ἀνόητοι) and slow (Gk. βραδεῖς) of heart when said: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (vv. 25-26) Jesus appeals to the Scriptures to cure their disbelief (vv. 27, 44).

Luke 24:27: καὶ ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν προφητῶν διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ.

ἀρξάμενος is an attendant circumstance participle. Its action is coordinate with the action of the verb διερμήνευσεν. It ‘piggy-backs’ on its mood (Wallace 1996:640). In this regard, the translation would be ‘And he began from...and explained to them....’ Following ἀρξάμενος are two genitive prepositional phrases ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν προφητῶν. The preposition ἀπὸ in both phrases marks the beginning point (BDAG s.v. ἀπό, 2). Jesus began from Moses. This undoubtedly refers to the Pentateuch. The ambiguity is on what πάντων τῶν προφητῶν means. The order of our Christian Scriptures betrays the understanding of the prophets. Our Bible views Isaiah to Malachi as the prophets. However, this is not the case with the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible has three divisions: Moses, the Prophets and the Writings. The books of Moses are ordered as we have them in our Scriptures today. The Prophets were ordered as follows: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the book of the twelve (our 12 Minor Prophets). The order of the writings: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. Ruth is prefixed to Psalms (Beckwith 2008:2577).

It is probable that with πάντων τῶν προφητῶν Luke refers to them in the order of the Hebrew Canon. From Moses and the Prophets Jesus explained (διερμήνευσεν) to them....

The aorist verb διερμήνευσεν could be translated as explained (NAS, NASB, NIV & NJB) or interpreted (ASV, ESV, NAB, NET, NRS & RSV). Other translations chose expounded (KJV, NKJV & YLT). In one context διερμηνεύω could refer to a translation of one language to another or, as it is in this context, it could mean to clarify something so as to make it understandable (BDAG s.v. 1 & 2). That διερμηνεύω has a connotation of understanding is seen in a synonymous word συνιέναι (from συνίημι) used in verse 45. Jesus wanted his audience to understand the Scriptures (ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς). The Scriptures (ταῖς γραφαῖς) specifically refers to Moses, all the Prophets (v. 27) and the Psalms (v. 44). It is debatable whether ψαλμοῖς (v. 44) refers to the book of Psalms or to the Writings (Marshall 1978:905). Bock (1996:1937) concedes that “It may simply refer to the Book of Psalms as a key contributor to the themes.” MacArthur (2014:442) limits its meaning to the wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon). There is no doubt that the three divisions of the Hebrew canon are represented (cf.

Hendriksen 1978:1075; Gunn n.d.:8). Thus it is plausible to understand the adjective πάσαις (v. 27) to refer to the entire OT. All of the OT Scriptures contain things about Jesus (τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ).

According to Luke 24:44, Jesus spoke to his disciples before his death about his suffering and resurrection (cf. v. 46). In verse 44 he uses the πληρώ language (ὅτι δεῖ πληρωθῆναι). In Luke πληρώ refers to something anticipated in God's design that has come to pass (1:20; 4:21; 9:31; 21:24; 22:16) (Bock 1996:1936). In the context of Luke 24, what God has designed was the death and resurrection of Christ, which the disciples failed to understand. That Christ's death and resurrection was a divine necessity is seen in the clause δεῖ πληρωθῆναι. Another clause that strengthens this divine necessity is οὕτως γέγραπται (v. 46). "The force of οὕτως is uncertain. It may refer forward to the content of what has been written: 'This is what Scripture says: The Messiah must suffer...' (TNT); cf. 19:31; Acts 7:6. Or it may refer backwards to v.24: 'Thus (i.e. because the Scriptures about me must be fulfilled), it is written that the Messiah must suffer...' (cf. JB)" (Marshall 1978:905). Verse 24 is far in context. Thus the backward reference may not be in view. The forward reference is near in context and is in accordance with the γέγραπται formula used frequently in the NT. The Old Testament according to Jesus, anticipated at least three major events of his life: his death, resurrection and the preaching of repentance in his name for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations (vv. 46-47). So according to verse 47, not only is Christ's death and resurrection a divine necessity, but also the salvation of all nations. This anticipated truth of including all the nations into God's plan of redemption is the main focus of both the Old and the New Testament. The preaching was to begin in Jerusalem (with the Jews) and the disciples were to be witnesses (cf. Ac 1:8). But "To preach the gospel to them (Jews), the disciples would have to convince them from the Old Testament both that Jesus was the Messiah and that the Messiah had to die" (MacArthur 2014:441). Since evangelism is to be biblically based, the disciples needed a clear understanding of the Scriptures related to Christ (p. 442). These words of Jesus are fulfilled and are recorded in the book of Acts, which is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. In the next chapter I will focus on this book, particularly chapter 15:1-35 in order to apply our understanding of christocentricity deduced from Matthew 5:1-19; John 5:39-40; and Luke 24:27, 44-47. But before

then, a synthesis of Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40; and Luke 24:27, 44-47 is to be done.

### 3.4. Synthesis of Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40 and Luke 24:27, 44-47

- All passages studied here apply the term γραφή in its different declensions to the entire OT Scriptures.
- All affirm Christ as the fulfilment of the OT Scriptures.
- None of these passages dismiss the Old Testament’s significance to the NT church.
- All divisions of the OT (i.e. the Law, the Prophets and the Writings) contain things concerning the Christ.
- All passages intimate that every detail concerning Christ will ultimately be fulfilled.
- In all of them the audience is stimulated to see Jesus in the OT Scriptures. Scriptures are to be read with Christ in mind.
- All show the tragedy of missing Christ in the OT Scriptures.
- Implicitly, since all three passages were written to the NT church, the twenty-seven books of the NT, together with the thirty-nine OT books, constitute a complete canon in which Christ is the central figure. Kaiser (2007:96) avers that “There are quotations or allusions to the OT in every NT book except the smaller books of Philemon and 2 and 3 John!” The following chart from *the Fundamentals of the Faith* by Grace Community Church (2009:11) encapsulates the centrality of Christ in all sixty-six books of the Bible.

5 Law	12 History	5 Poetry	17 Prophecy	4 Gospels	1 History	21 Letters	1 Prophecy
<i>Promises of Christ</i>	<i>Anticipation of Christ: Types, Experiences, and Prophecies</i>			<i>Manifestation of Christ</i>	<i>The Church of Christ</i>		<i>Coronation of Christ</i>

### 3.5. How to Apply Christocentricity within the Evangelical Framework

Now, it is clear from the synthesis of the three passages above that all Scriptures are to be approached christocentrically. But “what puzzles scholars is not that New

Testament writers frequently use the Old Testament but *how* they use it” (Greidanus 1999:185) (emphasis original). So, it is important to discuss legitimate ways of reading, interpreting and applying Scriptures christocentrically. Following are some suggestions that are aligned with the meaning of Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40; and Luke 24:27, 44-47.

### **3.5.1. Inspired Sensus Plenior Application (ISPA)**

In interpreting the OT and NT in light of a single grammatical-historical meaning of a passage, two kinds of NT uses of the OT surface: 1) There is an instance where the NT writer observes the grammatical-historical sense of an OT passage. 2) There is an instance where the NT writer goes beyond the grammatical-historical sense in his use of an OT passage. The ISPA designates the second use (Thomas 2002b:79). Thomas concedes that “it is ‘*sensus plenior*’ in that it gives an additional or fuller sense than the passage had in its OT setting.” “The Old Testament authors did not exhaustively understand the meaning, implications, and possible applications of all that they wrote” (Gentry and Welhum 2012:85). It is an ‘application’ because it does not eradicate the literal meaning of the OT passage, but simply applies the OT wording to a new setting” (p. 80). The NT interpretation of the OT becomes definitive. It helps us with the interpretation of the OT by giving us its fuller meaning (Gentry and Welhum (2012:85).

“NT writers took words from the OT and applied them to situations different from what was envisioned in corresponding OT contexts” (Thomas 2002b:82-83). By doing this the NT writers showed us how the OT is brought to fulfilment in Christ (Gentry and Welhum 2012:86).

But this was the methodology of the NT writers; contemporary interpreters should not copy it. If copied, the current interpreters will violate the rule of grammatical-historical meaning and single meaning. They may, however, apply the OT passages to different situations, albeit their applications are not inspired. The difference between the NT writers and current interpreters is that the former were inspired (2 Pet 1:20-21) and the latter are not.

### **3.5.2. Authorial Intent**

The ISPA and the Christocentric Principle should consider the passage’s context. “Every OT passage must receive its own grammatical-historical meaning regardless

of how an NT writer may use it” (Thomas 2002b:79). This would mean that there should not be multiple meanings read into the OT through the NT eyes (p. 80). This approach is based on the presupposition that the original OT readers were not oblivious to the meaning of the text. This truth should be borne in mind when we use the NT to interpret the OT in order to avoid the violation of the grammatical-historical meaning. In the same vein, an OT passage applied in the NT in a nonliteral sense by an NT writer should be understood within the NT context (Thomas 2002b:87).

### **3.6. Application: How to Find Christ in the OT**

Now, how do we get to Christ in the OT? Because “How we get there is as important as getting there” (Kaiser 2007:76). Commenting on Luke 24:27, Hendriksen (1978:1065) says, “It is reasonable to believe that our Lord, in interpreting in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself, showed how the entire Old Testament, in various ways, pointed to himself.” Many ways are suggested by scholars, the following ways in section 3.6.1–3.6.4 I deem to be important (see Greidanus 1999:203, 206, 212 for more).

#### **3.6.1. Redemptive-historical Progression**

This way focuses on how history has progressed from God’s perfect creation to the fall of man, and looks at how God redeemed mankind which is climaxed in Christ leading to the new creation.

#### **3.6.2. Promise-fulfilment**

This way looks back at the OT promises and observes how they were fulfilled in Christ. ‘Fulfilment’ in the New Testament, as observed in the gospels studied in this chapter, could be applied to both promises and types.

James (2008:105) would add that legitimate connections to Christ are to be made from the main point of an OT story—focus on the fact that Christ is the true solution to sin, the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises, the ultimate Davidic King, and so on.

#### **3.6.3. Typology**

From Kaiser (2007:103) typology can be summarised as follows: Typology refers to an illustration, example or a pattern of God’s activity in history. It is not the same thing as exegesis of the passage which has only one meaning. A type should be

indicated by the original author or text. Its hallmark is history. It deals in relationships of persons, events and institutions.

James (2008:105) advises that an interpreter should limit himself primarily, if not exclusively, to those types of Christ that the NT identifies as God intended.

### **3.6.4. Words and Works of Christ**

Peppler (2012:120) defines the Christocentric Principle as “a way of *interpreting scripture primarily from the perspective of what Jesus taught and modelled, and from what he revealed concerning the nature, character, values, principles, and priorities of the Godhead*” (emphasis original). Peppler’s definition fits well in the application part of the grammatical-historical interpretation. Since Jesus does not only fulfil the Scriptures but interprets God as well (see Jn 1:18; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), it is crucial that one learn God’s character as revealed by and in Jesus. But Christ’s words especially are valuable in helping us to handle some of the OT teachings. The example of this is in Matthew 5:21-48. When one reads about adultery in the OT, quickly Christ’s words in Matthew 5:27-28 shed light on how to view adultery through Jesus’ lens.

### **3.7. Summary**

This chapter sought to understand and apply the Christocentric Principle within the Evangelical framework. After conducting an exegesis of Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40; and Luke 24:27, 44-47, I have concluded:

1. That Jesus saw himself as the fulfilment of the OT Scriptures.
2. That NT writers used both a literal and non-literal approach in their application of the OT in the NT. An interpreter needs to pay attention to this application when interpreting the NT Scriptures.
3. That the authorial intent is vital both in the OT and NT. The text in the OT should be read within its OT context and the NT text (alluded, applied or directly quoted) is to be understood within the NT context.
4. Among many suggestions, three ways have been noted that serve as a legitimate bridge to Christ. They are redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfilment and typology.
5. The works and words of Jesus are crucial in seeing how he directly or indirectly interpreted or applied the OT. His words help us to move from reading the Law as a dead letter to reading as Jesus understood it.

Now that the understanding and application of christocentricity within the Evangelical framework is found to be clearly underpinned by Scripture, in the next chapter, I will use the findings in this chapter to interpret Acts 15:1-35.

## Chapter 4

# Testing our understanding of christocentricity within the framework of a commitment to evangelical exegesis: an interpretation of Acts 15:1-35

### Introduction

The emphasis of literature review in chapter 2 and the quest to understand and apply christocentricity in chapter 3 has revealed that it is possible to keep the Christocentric Principle within the bounds of the literal-historical interpretation, referred to as evangelical exegesis in this thesis. This approach has the potential to prevent the interpreter from reading *into* the text (eisegesis) and from allegorising the text as was the case of some schools of Biblical Interpretation studied in chapter 1. Such approaches, as noted in chapter 1, often misinterpret the text and open a door to multiple meanings of Scripture.

In order to interpret the Scripture christocentrically without tampering with its meaning, five methods were observed in chapter 3 as a result of exegeting three Christocentric passages: Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40; and Luke 24:27, 44-47. Let us review these five methods before applying them in this chapter:

1. Jesus saw himself as the fulfilment of the OT Scriptures.
2. The NT writers used both literal and non-literal approach in their application of the OT in the NT (a.k.a, ISPA in ch. 2). An interpreter needs to pay attention to this application when interpreting the NT Scriptures.
3. The authorial intent is vital both in the OT and NT. The text in the OT should be read within its OT context, and the NT text (alluded, applied or directly quoted) is to be understood within the NT context.
4. Three ways have been noted that serve as a legitimate bridge to Christ: a redemptive-historical progression, a promise-fulfilment and a typology.

5. The works and words of Jesus are crucial in seeing how he directly or indirectly interpreted or applied the OT. His words help us to move from reading the Law as a dead letter to reading it as Jesus understood it.

These Christocentric methods will be tested against the interpretation of Acts 15:1-35, within the evangelical exegesis.

## **4.1. Background of Acts 15:1-35**

### **4.1.1. Authorship**

Almost all of church history is unanimous in ascribing Luke-Acts to Luke as the author (Couch 1999:12). This tradition was unchallenged until the end of the eighteenth century (Carson and Moo 2005:291). The following facts support this tradition. Both Luke and Acts address the same audience (see Lk 1:3; Ac 1:1). The author was a companion of Paul as implied in the 'we' sections found in Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). These sections imply that the author was with Paul from Troas to Philippi. When Paul and Silas went to prison, the 'we' language fades away until it is picked up again when he joins Paul to Miletus, and from Miletus to Jerusalem. The author travelled with Paul to Rome (Carson and Moo 2005:290-291).

Such an interpretation of the we-sections is also suggested by the use of the first person singular in the introduction to both the books (Lk 1:1-4; Acts 1:1), and it is certainly most natural to suggest that the author intended his readers to assume that he was himself present during the events recorded in these sections (Guthrie 1990:117).

The traditional conjecture is strengthened by Paul's mention of Luke by name in two of his prison epistles (Col 4:14; Philemon 24).

### **4.1.2. Literary Context**

With the presupposition that Acts was a sequel to Luke's gospel (Duvall and Hays 2012:292), "An accurate statement of the purpose of Acts should therefore connect with the purpose of Luke's Gospel" (Strauss 2012:444). According to Acts 1:1, the first account, Luke's gospel, was "about all that Jesus began to do and teach". In the gospel of Luke, Jesus is presented as the promised OT Messiah. As the Messiah, Jesus focuses on the OT promises concerning the salvation of all people, Jews and non-Jews (Strauss 2012:444-445). Acts picks up from where Luke ends. Luke ends with the following words of Jesus to his disciples before his ascension:

Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (24:46-49).

Luke relates these words in the prologue of Acts 1:4. In response to the disciples' question regarding the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, Luke adds more of Jesus' words, specifically in Acts 1:8: "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Immediately we observe the mission of Jesus from his words. His mission was to bring salvation through his death and resurrection to all nations. I concur with Strauss (2012:448) that "Acts 1:8 is not merely an outline of Acts; more specifically 'it is a prediction of the way the divine plan will be fulfilled through the witness of the apostles.'" Marshall observes something of a Christocentric concept as he captures part of Acts' purpose thus: "Luke's purpose was to show...that the rise of the church and spread of salvation to the Gentiles fulfilled the prophecies<sup>5</sup> in the Old Testament and the promises of Jesus" (1980:20). To this agrees Kistemaker (1990:34), who succinctly captures Luke's purpose as follows:

Upon completing the Gospel, he (Luke) composes Acts and dedicates it also to Theophilus. Luke wants to tell him that the message of the gospel cannot be restricted to the nation Israel, for the gospel which Jesus proclaimed to the Jews must be proclaimed to the entire world. The purpose of Acts then is to convince Theophilus that no one is able to hinder the victorious march of Christ's gospel.... He does this in harmony with the Great Commission which Jesus gave his followers (Matt 28:19).

#### **4.1.3. Geographical Context**

Scholars such as Scott (1997) and Strauss (2012) note that in Acts emphasis is placed on the geographic and ethnic expansion. This would mean a transition which would not be readily accepted by the Jews. This transition is encapsulated by Scott's (1997) outline: Acts 1-5, the earliest days of primitive Christianity; Acts 6-7, the Jewish Christian Hellenists; Acts 8, the inclusion of groups with traditional associations with Judaism (Samaritans and Ethiopian eunuch); Acts 9:32-34,

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<sup>5</sup> Note that not all OT prophecies were fulfilled and that some were partially fulfilled or applied in the NT.

proclamation to Jews in the coastal plain area of the land of Israel (in contact with Gentiles); Acts 10:1-11:18, Cornelius, an exceptionally “good” Gentile; Acts 11:19-26, the inclusion of more Gentiles in Antioch; Acts 13-14, the first missionary journey (to Jews and Gentiles); Acts 15, opposition from the Jerusalem community (they wanted Gentiles to become Jews before becoming Christians).

#### **4.1.4. Chronological Context**

The book of Acts covers approximately 27 years of church history. It begins with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus which happened in AD 30/33 and ends with Paul’s first Roman imprisonment in AD 61. The Jerusalem Council is estimated to have taken place in AD 49. By this time the church was still in its teenage years. It was only 16/19 years old. The transition was in progress. It was not easy for the Jews to accept it.

Acts 6 records the first cultural divide between the Hebrews and the Hellenists. By chapter 11 the gospel had reached the Gentiles and the Jews did not like this shift. By chapter 15 some Jews took it upon themselves to curb this growing misnomer.

The Jews cannot be quickly faulted for this move. As noted, this was not a normal thing. Paul elsewhere calls the coming together of the Jews and Gentiles a mystery (Eph 3:6). This union was hidden from the Jews. They have always held to the Mosaic Law as a way of life. Whoever was to be part of them was to be first proselytised. Hence they did not understand why the Gentiles were admitted into the church without keeping the Mosaic Law. That this change was not readily accepted is evidenced by the need for the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15.

#### **4.2. Translation of Acts 15:1-35**

In addition to the background, there are two important steps a Bible interpreter should not bypass if he or she were to accurately interpret the Scriptures: identifying a good translation and genre.

In commenting on the choice of a translation, Fee and Stuart (1993:28) rightly note that “the very fact that you are reading God’s Word in translation means that you are already involved in interpretation”. The person who reads the Bible from a translation is at the mercy of the translators since they had to make choices on what they perceived the original language (in the case of the NT, Greek) to mean. It is therefore

important, where possible, that a Bible exegete translate the original text in order to know why the translators made the choices they made. This is the first step I am taking toward the interpretation of Acts 15:1-35.

Here follows my translation divided into six sections. The theory of translation I am following is formal equivalent, also known as literal translation. It translates the text word for word, and only deviates from this theory where the original language is idiomatic and word for word would make no sense in English. In the exegetical analysis, I will motivate the choice of a translation where necessary and compare my choices with some of the modern Standard English translations.

### Trip to Jerusalem

UBS4	Researcher's Translation
<p><b>1</b> Καί τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐδίδασκον τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὅτι Ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως, οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι. <b>2</b> γενομένης δὲ στάσεως καὶ ζητήσεως οὐκ ὀλίγης τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Βαρναβᾶ πρὸς αὐτοὺς, ἔταξαν ἀναβαίνειν Παῦλον καὶ Βαρναβάν καὶ τινὰς ἄλλους ἐξ αὐτῶν πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ περὶ τοῦ ζητήματος τούτου. <b>3</b> Οἱ μὲν οὖν προπεμφθέντες ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας διήρχοντο τὴν τε Φοινίκην καὶ Σαμάρειαν ἐκδιηγούμενοι τὴν ἐπιστροφὴν τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ ἔποιουν χαρὰν μεγάλην πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς. <b>4</b> παραγενόμενοι δὲ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ παρεδέχθησαν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ἀνήγγειλάν τε ὅσα ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησεν μετ' αὐτῶν. <b>5</b> ἐξανέστησαν δὲ τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἵρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες λέγοντες ὅτι δεῖ περιτέμνειν αὐτοὺς παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως. <b>6</b> Συνήχθησάν τε οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἰδεῖν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου.</p>	<p><b>1</b> And some men came from Judea and were teaching the brothers: 'that unless you are circumcised according to the custom, that of Moses, you are not able to be saved. <b>2</b> And after no little dissension and debate took place by Paul and Barnabas against them, they appointed Paul and Barnabas and some other men from them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this question. <b>3</b> Therefore the ones who were sent on their way by the church were passing through Phoenicia and Samaria reporting the conversion of the Gentiles and they were bringing great joy to all the brothers. <b>4</b> When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders. They reported all that God had done with them. <b>5</b> But some from the party of the Pharisees who have believed stood up and said that it is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the Law of Moses. <b>6</b> The apostles and the elders gathered together to consider this matter.</p>

## Peter's speech

UBS4	Researcher's Translation
<p><b>7</b> πολλῆς δὲ ζητήσεως γενομένης ἀναστὰς Πέτρος εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ὑμεῖς ἐπίστασθε ὅτι ἀφ' ἡμερῶν ἀρχαίων ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς διὰ τοῦ στόματός μου ἀκοῦσαι τὰ ἔθνη τὸν λόγον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ πιστεῦσαι. <b>8</b> καὶ ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς ἐμαρτύρησεν αὐτοῖς δοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν <b>9</b> καὶ οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν τῇ πίστει καθάρισας τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν. <b>10</b> νῦν οὖν τί πειράζετε τὸν θεὸν ἐπιθεῖναι ζυγὸν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον τῶν μαθητῶν ὃν οὔτε οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν οὔτε ἡμεῖς ἰσχύσαμεν βαστάσαι; <b>11</b> ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ πιστεύομεν σωθῆναι καθ' ὃν τρόπον κάκεῖνοι.</p>	<p><b>7</b> After much debate took place, Peter stood up and said to them, men, brothers, you know that from the early days God chose among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. <b>8</b> God who knows the hearts testified by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as (he did) also to us <b>9</b> and he made no distinction between us and them by cleansing their heart by faith. <b>10</b> Therefore, why do you now test God by placing a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we are able to bear? <b>11</b> But through the grace of the Lord Jesus we believe that we were saved in the same way as them.</p>

## Paul and Barnabas' confirmation of Peter's speech

UBS4	Researcher's Translation
<p><b>12</b> Ἐσίγησεν δὲ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ ἤκουον Βαρναβᾶ καὶ Παύλου ἐξηγουμένων ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν δι' αὐτῶν.</p>	<p><b>12</b> Now the whole community of believers became silent and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they reported all the signs and wonders that God had done among the Gentiles through them.</p>

## James' speech

UBS4	Researcher's Translation
<p><b>13</b> Μετὰ δὲ τὸ σιγῆσαι αὐτούς ἀπεκρίθη Ἰάκωβος λέγων, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ἀκούσατέ μου. <b>14</b> Συμεὼν ἐξηγήσατο καθὼς πρῶτον ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἔθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ. <b>15</b> καὶ τούτῳ συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν καθὼς γέγραπται, <b>16 Μετὰ ταῦτα ἀναστρέψω καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀνοικοδομήσω καὶ ἀνορθώσω αὐτήν, <b>17</b> ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐφ' οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ'</b></p>	<p><b>13</b> Now after they became silent, James replied and said, 'Men, brothers, Listen to me! <b>14</b> Simeon reported how God first concerned himself in order to receive from among the Gentiles people for his name. <b>15</b> The words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written, <b>16</b> 'after these things I will return and build up again the tent of David which has fallen and I will build up again what has been torn down of it and I will restore it, <b>17</b> so that the remaining of humanity will seek for the Lord, even the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord</p>

<p><b>αὐτούς, λέγει κύριος ποιῶν ταῦτα 18</b> γνωστὰ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος. <b>19</b> διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω μὴ παρενοχλεῖν τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, <b>20</b> ἀλλὰ ἐπιστεῖλαι αὐτοῖς τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς πορνείας καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἵματος. <b>21</b> Μωϋσῆς γὰρ ἐκ γενεῶν ἀρχαίων κατὰ πόλιν τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτὸν ἔχει ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς κατὰ πᾶν σάββατον ἀναγινωσκόμενος.</p>	<p><b>who makes these things 18</b> known from the past. <b>19</b> Therefore, I decide not to cause unnecessary trouble to those from the Gentiles who are turning to God, <b>20</b> but to inform them by letter to abstain from things polluted by idols and from sexual immorality and from strangled (animals) and from blood. <b>21</b> For from ancient generations in every city, Moses has those who are preaching him, since he is read in the synagogues during every Sabbath.</p>
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## The letter from the Jerusalem Council

UBS4	Researcher’s Translation
<p><b>22</b> Τότε ἔδοξε τοῖς ἀποστόλοις καὶ τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐκλεξαμένους ἄνδρας ἐξ αὐτῶν πέμψαι εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν σὺν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ Βαρναβᾶ, Ἰούδαν τὸν καλούμενον Βαρσαββᾶν καὶ Σιλᾶν, ἄνδρας ἡγουμένους ἐν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς, <b>23</b> γράψαντες διὰ χειρὸς αὐτῶν, Οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοὶ τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν καὶ Συρίαν καὶ Κιλικίαν ἀδελφοῖς τοῖς ἐξ ἐθνῶν χαίρειν. <b>24</b> Ἐπειδὴ ἠκούσαμεν ὅτι τινὲς ἐξ ἡμῶν [ἐξεληθόντες] ἐτάραξαν ὑμᾶς λόγοις ἀνασκευάζοντες τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν οἷς οὐ διεστείλαμεθα, <b>25</b> ἔδοξεν ἡμῖν γενομένοις ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐκλεξαμένοις ἄνδρας πέμψαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς σὺν τοῖς ἀγαπητοῖς ἡμῶν Βαρναβᾶ καὶ Παύλῳ, <b>26</b> ἀνθρώποις παραδεδωκόσι τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. <b>27</b> ἀπεστάλακαμεν οὖν Ἰούδαν καὶ Σιλᾶν καὶ αὐτούς διὰ λόγου ἀπαγγέλλοντας τὰ αὐτά. <b>28</b> ἔδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν μηδὲν πλέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βᾶρος πλὴν τούτων τῶν ἐπάναγκες, <b>29</b> ἀπέχεσθαι εἰδωλοθύτων καὶ αἵματος καὶ πνικτῶν καὶ πορνείας, ἐξ ὧν διατηροῦντες ἑαυτοὺς εὖ πράξετε. Ἐρρωσθε.</p>	<p><b>22</b> Then it seemed best to the apostles and to the elders together with the whole church to select men from among them, Judas who is called Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brothers, to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. <b>23</b> They wrote with their hand: ‘the apostles and the elders, brothers to those in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia to those brothers from the Gentiles. Greetings! <b>24</b> Since we heard that some from among us came and unsettled you with words, upsetting your souls, to whom we did not give orders, <b>25</b> it seemed best to us, after becoming one mind, to choose men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <b>26</b> men who have committed their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <b>27</b> Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas who shall also report these things by word (of mouth). <b>28</b> For it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us not to place a greater burden on you except these necessary ones: <b>29</b> to abstain from food sacrificed to idols and from blood and from strangled animals and from sexual immorality, from which if you keep yourselves, you will do well. Farewell!</p>

## The Joy caused by the letter's encouragement

UBS4	Researcher's Translation
<p><b>30</b> Οἱ μὲν οὖν ἀπολυθέντες κατήλθον εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν, καὶ συναγαγόντες τὸ πλῆθος ἐπέδωκαν τὴν ἐπιστολήν. <b>31</b> ἀναγνόντες δὲ ἐχάρησαν ἐπὶ τῇ παρακλήσει. <b>32</b> Ἰούδας τε καὶ Σιλᾶς καὶ αὐτοὶ προφήται ὄντες διὰ λόγου πολλοῦ παρεκάλεσαν τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ ἐπεστήριξαν, <b>33</b> ποιήσαντες δὲ χρόνον ἀπελύθησαν μετ' εἰρήνης ἀπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστείλαντας αὐτούς. <b>35</b> Παῦλος δὲ καὶ Βαρναβᾶς διέτριβον ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ διδάσκοντες καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι μετὰ καὶ ἑτέρων πολλῶν τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου.</p>	<p><b>30</b> So those who were sent away came down to Antioch, and after gathering the community (of believers), they gave them the letter. Now after reading (it) aloud, they rejoiced because of the encouragement. <b>32</b> Judas and Silas, who were prophets themselves, also exhorted and strengthened the brothers through many words. <b>33</b> Now when they had spent time (there), they were dismissed with peace from the brothers to those who sent them. <b>35</b> But Paul and Barnabas stayed on in Antioch to teach and to proclaim the word of the Lord, with many others also.</p>

### 4.3. Literary Genre

The second important step that an exegete is to take in order to interpret the Scriptures accurately is to distinguish its genre (Zuck 1991:126).

Duvall and Hays (2012:293) call Acts a Theological History. Stott (1994:29-30) agrees that Luke was both a historian and a theologian. As a historian, Luke wrote Acts in a narrative form. A narrative has a plot or story line. A plot normally includes a peaceful situation, a problem or tension, a solution to the problem, and ends with a resolution returning to a peaceful situation (James 2008:83). This plot will be traced in the analysis of Acts 15:1-35.

### 4.4. Grammatical and Exegetical Analysis of Acts 15:1-35

#### 4.4.1. The Peaceful Situation: Context

Ministry to the Gentiles began with Peter's preaching in Cornelius' house (Ac 10). Although those who were circumcised took issue with Peter for going to the Gentiles (Ac 11:2), Peter pacified the situation by relating God's vision to them with a clear message that God is opening a door to the Gentiles also. Peter summarised his defence with the argument: "If God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (v. 17) This argument led to a peaceful situation and the acknowledgement that "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (v. 18).

This was the beginning of the ministry to the Gentiles. Except for the household of Cornelius, more Gentiles heard the Lord Jesus preached and a large number of Greeks believed and turned to the Lord (Ac 11:20-21). The church at Jerusalem heard about these conversions. They did not oppose, instead they sent one of their leaders, Barnabas, to Antioch. Upon his arrival he witnessed the grace of God and he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord (v. 23). Luke notes that “considerable numbers were brought to the Lord” (v. 24b). Barnabas went and brought another Jew by the name of Saul to Antioch (v. 25). Both stayed in Antioch for an entire year, meeting and teaching the church. It was at this time that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (v. 26). Couch (1999:287) estimates these events to have taken place around AD 35.

By this time the church in Antioch was well established and was ready to continue without Barnabas’ and Saul’s leadership. The Holy Spirit told the church to set these two apart “for the work to which I have called them” (Ac 13:2). This would mark the beginning of Paul’s first missionary journey which took place around AD 46-48. These three years of ministry by Paul and his companions saw many Jews and Gentiles alike responding to the message of Christ (Ac 13:12, 42). But with the Jews’ rejection of the word of God, Paul and his companions turned to the Gentiles (v. 46). Many of the Gentiles who were appointed to eternal life believed (v. 48). Churches were established around places such as Iconium, Derbe and Lystra with elders appointed (Ac 14:19-23).

When Paul and Barnabas accomplished their work (Ac 14:26), they returned to Antioch, their sending church. “When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (v. 27). “And they spent a long time with the disciples” (v. 28). This long time is estimated to be about one year.

So far in the history of the church there is harmony. The conversion of the Gentiles is not strongly questioned since Peter’s apologetic in Acts 11. But this peaceful situation does not suggest that everyone in the church has accepted the salvation of the Gentiles. This is evident in Acts 15. The time is around AD 49, the event is known as the Jerusalem Council.

## Trip to Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-7a)

### 4.4.2. The Problem

(v.1) Καί τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐδίδασκον τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὅτι Ἐὰν μὴ περιμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως, οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι.

Wallace (1996:671) says, if indicated by context, the conjunction καί can function as a contrast. This seems to be the case in the context of Acts 15:1 (cf. ESV, RSV). Other translations leave καί untranslated (cf. NASB, NIV). Others translate it as a coordinate ‘and’ (cf. ASV, KJV, NAS, NKJV, YLT). Yet others translate it as a transitional conjunction ‘now’ (cf. NET) or ‘then’ (cf. NJB, NRS).

This conjunction coordinates Acts 15 with 14:26-28. After at least a year of peace after the report of Gentiles’ conversions, some men came down from Judea.

τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας. The aorist, active participle, nominative, plural, masculine κατελθόντες is versatile. It could be construed adverbially as a temporal participle (YLT), adjectivally modifying τινες (KJV, NAB) or as an attendant circumstance acting as a finite verb that ‘piggy-backs’ on the mood of the finite verb ἐδίδασκον (ASV, ESV, NASB, NET, NJB, NKJV, NRS). Although all of the above choices are plausible, the attendant circumstance is opted for in my translation. This choice is validated by Wallace’s (1996:642) observations that an attendant circumstance occurs frequently in the narrative literature and that it is often used to introduce a new action or a shift in the narrative. The participle serves as a prerequisite to the action of the finite verb, ἐδίδασκον. These men first came and then taught.

ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας. This prepositional phrase relates the men’s local origin. Ἰουδαία “as the name of the country is primarily adjectival (Mk 1:5). More narrowly it denotes Judea (cf. Mt 3:5; 19:1), but it may also be used for all Palestine (cf. Rom 15:31; 2 Cor 1:16)” (TDNT 1985:375). James’ words in Acts 15:24 (τινὲς ἐξ ἡμῶν) implies a narrow interpretation of the word. Judea is a region in which Jerusalem was located (cf. Ac 1:8). It is “the southern part of Palestine in contrast to Samaria, Galilee, Perea and Idumea” (BDAG s.v. Ἰουδαία, 1). These men were Jews from a Jewish region.

The mission of these men is expressed in the imperfect active indicative, third person, plural verb, ἐδίδασκον. The force of the imperfect could be either ingressive

or progressive. The progressive imperfect would emphasise the continuity of the teaching without necessarily focusing on its commencement (Wallace 1996:543), whereas the ingressive would emphasise the beginning point with the implication of a continuing action (p. 544). The emphasis on the entry point of these men and the contrasts between the missionaries' report and their teaching suggests that their teaching was necessitated by the growing number of Gentiles, who were coming to faith without observing the Mosaic Law. Thus the ingressive force captures the tenacity with which these Judean men taught. They *began* to teach. There is also no doubt that the teaching progressed for a while. This force is attested by the debate between Paul and Barnabas against these men (γενομένης δὲ στάσεως καὶ ζητήσεως οὐκ ὀλίγης τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Βαρναβᾶ πρὸς αὐτούς).

The direct object of ἐδίδασκον is τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς. τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς in its different declensions is repeated eight times in Acts 15:1-35 (see vv. 1, 7, 13, 22, 23 x 2, 32, 33). In verses 1, 32 and 33 the term 'brothers' refers to the Gentiles. It is used by the narrator and not necessarily by the Jews. Twice it is used where Gentiles are direct objects of the Jews' teaching (vv. 1, 32), and once when the Gentiles sent off Judas and Silas (v. 33). In verses 7, 13 and 22, the term refers to the Jews. It is used by the Jews in addressing each other. Twice it is used as a direct address (vv. 7, 13) and once with a spatial force, identifying Judas and Silas as Jews among the Jews (v. 22). The two uses of the term in verse 23 refer to a relationship between Jews and Gentiles. After reaching a consensus, the Jews addressed the Gentiles as brothers, a very unusual expression.

ὅτι Ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως, οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι. The content conjunction ὅτι introduces a direct object. Its clause presents **the main problem** of the narrative. The problem is packaged in a conditional clause: Ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως. The use of the third class condition, that is, the construction of the particle Ἐὰν plus the subjunctive μὴ περιτμηθῆτε, argues that the apodosis οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι is contingent upon the protasis. But the apodosis is not conditional hence it is in the indicative mood. The argument was that the Gentiles were not saved. Their salvation is contingent upon circumcision in accordance with the custom of Moses (τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως) (cf. Lev 12:1-3).

Although this contingency affects cultural and social status as seen elsewhere (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11), the main problem here is religious or theological. It is a question that the church, since its inception, has not given serious attention to. The main question is: “Could they (Gentiles) enter the kingdom of God directly, without coming through the vestibule of Judaism?” (MacArthur 1996:61). In other words, what role does the Mosaic Law have in the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles? “The real struggle lay in varying views of the Christian way of salvation and its relation to Judaism” (Scott 1997:205).

The Jews believed that Gentiles were to first become Jewish proselytes in order to become Christians (cf. Galatians). They saw Christianity as the culmination of Judaism. The Gentiles’ entry into the church without keeping the Law seemed unfair to the Jews who had devoted their lives to the Mosaic Law. They also feared that the Jewish culture, traditions and influence would be lost in a predominantly Gentile church (MacArthur 1996:61).

Besides the above concerns, circumcision was given by God to Abraham as a sign of the covenant (Gen 17:11). The LORD repeated this instruction to Moses in Leviticus 12:1-3. Circumcision came to be known as a vital part of the Mosaic Law. Thus the men from Judea argued that the Gentiles were to be circumcised according to the custom of Moses (τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως). τῷ ἔθει is dative of manner and it syntactically functions as an adverb modifying the subjunctive verb περιτμηθῆτε. The idea is not that of a method, but of compliance. τῷ Μωϋσέως is also in a dative case. The dative here has a possessive force. It speaks of the custom belonging to Moses.

The condition set seems to go beyond circumcision to the requirements of the Law as a whole (see Ac 15:5). The negative apodosis, οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι, with the passive force implies that the way in which the Gentiles were saved was not sufficient according to these Jews. It needed to be complemented with the Mosaic Law (Milne 2010: 313-314). We note here already that these men are promoting legalism. They were teaching salvation by works.

#### **4.4.3. The Crisis**

These questions led to the debate in verse 2: γενομένης δὲ στάσεως καὶ ζητήσεως οὐκ ὀλίγης τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Βαρναβᾶ πρὸς αὐτούς.

Verse 2 begins with a genitive absolute γενομένης δὲ στάσεως καὶ ζητήσεως οὐκ ὀλίγης. Semantically, the genitive absolute acts adverbially and temporally as is the case here. It informs the reader when ἔταξαν ἀναβαίνειν happened. Structurally, στάσεως καὶ ζητήσεως in the genitive case functions as a compound subject of the genitive participle γενομένης. It translates: ‘after dissension and debate took place’.

The noun στάσεως from στάσις in this context means “lack of agreement respecting policy, [thus,] *strife, discord, disunion*” (BDAG s.v. 3). And ζητήσεως from ζήτησις means “engagement in a controversial discussion, [thus,] *discussion, debate, argument*” (BDAG s.v. 3). ὀλίγης from ὀλίγος means “relatively low on a scale of extent or existing only to a small degree, [thus,] *little, slight*” (BDAG s.v. 3). A negation οὐκ gives the degree of the matter and thus its urgency to be resolved. This adverb, οὐκ ὀλίγης, gives the extent of the controversial debate. It was not a small matter to be ignored. Hughes’ (1996:191-192) postulation that “There was a passionate argument, perhaps even some shouting” may not be an exaggeration at all. The words used suggest a very tense situation.

What makes matters worse is that the disunity and debate was not between irreligious people, but between professing believers, that is: τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Βαρναβᾶ πρὸς αὐτούς. One can say with certainty that Paul and Barnabas were true believers given their understanding of the gospel throughout the book of Acts. But the soteriology of the men from Judea is a cause to question their salvation. We know that they were affiliated with the church in Jerusalem (Ac 15:24). Based on this, we can postulate that they believed in Jesus, albeit they did not completely divorce their Judaism. In reality they were the ones in need of help, more so than the Gentiles they taught.

The two groups were at loggerheads with each other. This is seen in the use of an accusative preposition πρὸς, which is a marker of relationship in this context. It marks a hostile relationship, hence it is translated as ‘against’ (BDAG s.v. πρὸς, 3d).

This soteriological question was getting out of hand and Paul, Barnabas, the men from Judea and the church at Antioch could not resolve it. Intervention from Jerusalem, where these men came and where the (Jewish) church started, was to be sought.

The next step was to appoint a team to send to Jerusalem (ἔταξαν ἀναβαίνειν). The implied subject of the verb ἔταξαν is ambiguous. Although some variants<sup>6</sup> suggest that the men from Judea (or Jerusalem) are the subject of ἔταξαν (Metzger 1971:426, cf. Kistemaker 1990: 539), other evangelical commentators construe the subject to be the church at Antioch (Bruce 1988:286, n.20; Milne 2010:314). The NASB adds the brethren and the NET adds the church as the subject. Verse 3 clearly shows that the agent that appointed them was the church (ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας).

The team that was sent included Paul, Barnabas and some other men from them. ἐξ αὐτῶν has a partitive force. The assumption is that they were part of the Gentiles, since Antioch was predominantly a Gentile church. Scholars who take the visit of Galatians 2:1 to be the same as the visit in Acts 15 includes Titus as part of this group from the Gentiles (see MacArthur 1996:63; Alexander 1963:72).

By this action, the church at Antioch acknowledged its interdependence with the church in Jerusalem. Unity between the two churches was to be pursued. The team from Antioch was specifically sent to: τοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους. τοὺς ἀποστόλους refers to the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus (Ac 1:13) plus Matthias (Ac 1:26), less Judas Iscariot who committed suicide (Ac 1:18) and James the brother of John who was killed by Herod in AD 44 (Ac 12:2). The apostles were known for their ministry of teaching in the Jerusalem church (Ac 2:42; 6:4). When the Jerusalem church was scattered as a result of Saul's persecution, the apostles remained in Jerusalem (Ac 8:1). Since they were the ones commissioned by Christ, they could speak into the matter with authority. Πρεσβυτέρους could be speaking of a totally separate group from the apostles or it could include the apostles. The disciples from Antioch sent a contribution for relief to the elders (Ac 11:30). The elders became leaders of the church with the apostles (Ac 16:4), and later it seems a transition from the apostles to elders took place (cf. Ac 14:23; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17; Tit 1:5-9; Js 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1, 5).

However, at this point "It is essential to note that the decision to go to Jerusalem was a voluntary decision.... There is no biblical evidence to suggest that there was an established supreme court in Jerusalem to which all Christian churches were answerable" (Strauch 1995:126). But in order to be united on this fundamental

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<sup>6</sup> D it<sup>g</sup> syr<sup>hmg</sup> cop<sup>G67</sup>

doctrine, Jerusalem's answer on this controversial question (τοῦ ζητήματος) was to be heard.

On their way to Jerusalem, Luke tells us that Paul, Barnabas and those with them from Antioch passed through Phoenicia and Samaria. So far in the history of the church the gospel has reached Samaria through Philip (Ac 8:1-25) and Phoenicia through those scattered after Stephen's death (Ac 11:19).

#### **4.4.4. The Climax**

παραγενόμενοι (v. 4) is a temporal participle. It tells us when the team was welcomed (παρεδέχθησαν). The prepositional phrase ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων designates the agents of the passive verb παρεδέχθησαν. Usually the preposition ὑπὸ is used to indicate agency. But BDAG (s.v. ἀπό, 5eβ) explains that sometimes ἀπό replaces ὑπὸ when connected to verbs in the passive voice or with a passive meaning. Thus ἀπό is translated as 'by'. In verse 2, the church sent their emissaries to the apostles and the elders. Verse 4 tells us they were received by the church, the apostles and the elders. When they had been received, the Antiochene emissaries reported all that God had done with them (ἀνήγγειλάν τε ὅσα ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησεν μετ' αὐτῶν).

ἀνήγγειλάν (they reported) is an aorist, active, indicative, third person, plural verb from ἀναγγέλλω. According to Louw and Nida (1989:410) ἀναγγέλλω has a connotation of providing information, with the possible implication of considerable detail. Paul and Barnabas were used to such detailed reports (cf. Ac 14:27).

ἀνήγγειλάν is also a constative aorist. The force of the constative aorist "places the stress on the fact of the occurrence, not its nature" (Wallace 1996:557). Luke is not concerned about the duration of the report other than that Paul, Barnabas and those with them did report. That this report was detailed is not only attested by the verb used, but also by the contents of the direct object clause: τε ὅσα ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησεν μετ' αὐτῶν (all that God had done with them). Of great interest here is the agent, God. This and other verses acknowledge that the inclusion of Gentiles in the church was divinely initiated (Story 2011:101).

- Verse 4: ὅσα ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησεν μετ' αὐτῶν
- Verse 7: ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς
- Verse 8: ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς ἐμαρτύρησεν

- Verse 8: [God] δούς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον
- Verse 9: οὐθὲν διέκρινεν
- Verse 9: καθάρισας τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν
- Verse 12: ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν
- Verse 14: ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν
- Verses 16-17: The subject of the verbs from Amos 9:11-12 quotation is God. ἀναστρέψω καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω, ἀνοικοδομήσω καὶ ἀνορθώσω.

The preposition μετα used with the genitive αὐτῶν (v. 4) has a meaning of accompaniment or association. Paul and Barnabas rightly acknowledged that they were co-workers with God in the salvation of the Gentiles (cf. Mk 16:20; 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1).

Regardless of a detailed report on what God had done, the team met with dissatisfied believing Pharisees (Ac 15:5). The main thought of verse 5 is as follows: ἐξανέστησαν δὲ τινες... λέγοντες. λέγοντες is an attendant circumstance participle functioning as a finite verb although it is still dependent on ἐξανέστησαν. The subject of these two verbs is τινες. The indefinite τινες is described by the article τῶν followed by a prepositional phrase ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων. Wallace (1996:236) says the article used with the prepositional phrase nominalises a prepositional phrase. This produces a translation: ‘some from the party of the Pharisees’. ‘From the party of the Pharisees’ directly describes τινες. τῶν Φαρισαίων is a partitive genitive. The Jews had different sects, the two main ones which were also rivals were the Pharisees and the Sadducees (cf. Act 23:6). These two groups were theologically divided. Acts 23:8 explains: ‘For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledged them all.’ From this verse we can see that the:

Pharisees, as believers in the doctrine of the resurrection, could become Christians without relinquishing their distinctive beliefs: to what they already believed they could add the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead and was thus divinely proclaimed to be Lord and Messiah (Bruce 1988:288).

In Acts 15:5 these Pharisees are described as πεπιστευκότες. The use of the perfect tense denotes that they have believed in the past and the results of their faith are still felt in the present.

Their response to the report reveals their doctrine of salvation. They agreed with the men from Judea in Acts 15:1 that it is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles, and they added παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως. This problem was not anywhere near to being resolved. The reason for this struggle is well hypothesised by Ogilvie as quoted by Hughes (1996:192). He says:

Think of the stability of the Pharisee's training and Hebraism, his immersion in the Mosaic Law and tradition, his pride in being part of the chosen people of God. Live in his shoes as we relive the steps of his rigorous education and joyous participation in Israel's customs. Feel the loving arms of parents and family as he is circumcised on the eighth day; catch the awe and wonder he felt sitting at the feet of the elder Pharisees studying the Scripture; identify with the pride he felt when he became a son of the Law at his bar mitzvah. Become one with him as he grew to full manhood and earned the revered status of a Pharisee, and consider how he must have burst with satisfaction as he put on the dignified robes of a leader of Israel.

This imagination helps us see why there was a need for the council to convene, in order to get a solution that will unite all parties represented. The quest to get a solution begins in verse 6: Συνήχθησάν τε οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἰδεῖν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου.

Συνήχθησάν is an aorist, passive, indicative verb. The nominatives, οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι, function as its subject. In verse 4, the team from Antioch gave a report to the church, the apostles and elders. In verse 6, Luke says the apostles and elders gathered together. Fernando (1998:415; cf. Longenecker 1981:444; Polhill 1992:326) remarks that "We cannot be sure whether the whole church was present at this meeting (cf. vv. 12, 22). If so, the deliberation and decision rested with the leaders." The purpose of this gathering is found in the infinitive phrase ἰδεῖν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου (to consider this matter). περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου points back to the question of Gentiles' salvation.

As noted above, this matter was not anywhere near to the end. Besides the intense debate and dissension in verse 2 and the insistence by the believing Pharisees in verse 5, the apostles and elders and company debated this issue as well (v. 7a) Luke qualifies the debate (ζητήσεως, lit. controversial discussion) with the adjective πολλῆς (much). The language is synonymous to 'no little dissension' in verse 2.

## Peter's speech (Acts 15:7b-11)

### 4.4.5. Towards the Solution

It was after the occurrence (γενομένης) of this debate that Peter stood up and addressed the congregation (ἀναστὰς Πέτρος εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς). Peter's argument for the Gentiles' salvation is centred on the divine initiative of God. His argument begins with an appeal to what the group know (ὕμεῖς ἐπίστασθε, verb, present, middle/deponent, indicative). ἐπίστασθε from ἐπίσταμαι means "to acquire information about something, *know, be acquainted with*" (BDAG s.v. 2). Louw and Nida (1989:334) avers that "the possession of such a knowledge has the implication of an understanding of the significance of such information."

So when Peter emphatically says you know, he means that they understood well the earlier conversions of the Gentiles which happened in Acts 10. This event serves as a prototype for the Gentiles' salvation in Antioch. Peter used the same verb ἐπίστασθε in Acts 10:28 as he addressed the Gentiles. These Gentiles understood the implications of a Jewish man mingling with Gentiles. But in both verses, Acts 10:28 and 15:7, Peter points his audience to God as the initiator of the Gentiles' salvation. To the Jews in Jerusalem Peter said: ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς διὰ τοῦ στόματός μου.... With regard to the ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς variant, Metzger (1971:428) says "The change to the first pronoun (D Ψ 326 614 629 2412 it<sup>67</sup> vg<sup>ww</sup>) seems to reflect the consideration that it was more in accord with ecclesiastical propriety for Peter to describe God's choice as made from "us [the apostles]" than from "you [the whole church]."

The genitive preposition διὰ introducing the phrase διὰ τοῦ στόματός μου is instrumental. God chose to use Peter's mouth (τοῦ στόματός μου) as his instrument to communicate to the Gentiles. The purpose of God's communication through Peter is expressed by the infinitive ἀκοῦσαι. ἀκοῦσαι has as its object τὸν λόγον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. τοῦ εὐαγγελίου is a genitive of apposition. It clarifies what is meant by τὸν λόγον. Hence it could be translated 'the word, which is the gospel'. The contents of the gospel may be summarised from Peter's speech in Acts 10:39-40 as: Christ's death and resurrection. This became the message of the early church (see Ac 2:23-24; 3:15; 5:30; 13:28-30, etc.). The next infinitive, πιστεῦσαι, in Acts 15:7 is the infinitive of result. It looks forward to the outcome of ἀκοῦσαι. There is a sequence

here. First the gospel should be heard (through the preaching) and consequently follows faith (cf. Rom 10:14, 17). Peter argues that even in the early days, Gentiles were not saved by man's will. It was solely God's intention to save the Gentiles, Peter's mouth was just an instrument to accomplish his purpose.

Peter adds (vv. 8-9): καὶ ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς ἐμαρτύρησεν αὐτοῖς δοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν καὶ οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν τῇ πίστει καθάρσας τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν.

ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς (God who knows the heart) could be construed as antithetical to the Jews' judgement. The Jews judged the Gentiles on the basis of their external purity (i.e., uncircumcised), whereas God judged them according to the internal purity (καθάρσας τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν). However, God testified (ἐμαρτύρησεν) in favour of the Gentiles' salvation. As a constative aorist, ἐμαρτύρησεν gives a summary of the testimony, stressing its occurrence. The antecedent of the indirect object pronoun αὐτοῖς is the Gentiles. The participle δοὺς gives the means by which the testimony was given. Its object is τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. By giving the Holy Spirit, God testified to the Gentiles that their salvation is genuine apart from keeping the Mosaic Law.

Peter draws from this testimony of God and compares the Gentiles' experience with the Jews' Pentecostal experience (καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν). It seems Peter is arguing that if circumcision was a prerequisite for salvation, the Gentiles would not have received the Holy Spirit until they were circumcised. But the fact that they received Him without circumcision, and that they experienced this gift *just* as the circumcised experienced it, then the Mosaic Law plays no part in salvation, whether for a Jew or Gentile (cf. Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-16; Col 3:11).

The next argument Peter raised is expressed thus: καὶ οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν. The meaning of οὐθὲν διέκρινεν is ambiguous. Διέκρινεν is an aorist, active, indicative, third person, singular verb. The implied subject is ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς. Διέκρινεν is negated by the accusative adjective οὐθὲν, which could also be translated as 'in no respect' or 'in no way' (BDAG s.v. οὐδεῖς, οὐδεμία, οὐδέν, 2by).

Is Peter here referring to racial/religious distinction or to the way in which both groups were saved?

Woods (2015) argues for a Jewish particularity. He argues that “none of Peter’s words suggest the undoing of Jewish particularity in general” (p. 73). According to Woods, faith in Jesus does not cancel Jewish observance (p. 74). His central argument is that Jews were still obligated to keep the Torah even after their salvation (p. 77). His position is that “Peter’s words do not suggest in any way that the Law no longer applied to the Jews, not that all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles had been erased” (p. 77).

Although Woods (2015) is correct in pointing out that (some of) the believing Jews continued to keep the Mosaic Law (cf. Acts 21:22-26), the context, however, seems to emphasise that this distinction is not necessary in the church. It should be established that *διέκρινεν* does not refer to racial distinction. Racially, Jews remained Jews and Gentiles remained Gentiles (cf. Rom 1:16; Gal 2:15). There is a distinction in this regard. But when it comes to religion, which was the reason for the council convening, there is no distinction. The distinction was cancelled when he cleansed their hearts (cf. Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-16; Col 3:11). I interpret the participle *καθαρίσας* as a temporal participle. This is motivated by the fact that Peter relives ten years of the past, when God saved Cornelius and those in his house. The means of cleansing is expressed by the dative of means ‘*τῇ πίστει*’. *τῇ πίστει* is in contrast to the Mosaic Law.

This is the beginning of the theological message of Acts 15. If the reader misses this point, he or she has missed the important part of Peter’s speech and of the entire chapter. Peter’s point is not only that Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith, but that there are consequences to this new-found faith. There should be a divorcing of certain practices. In the case of the Jews, the application of the Mosaic Law should be reviewed, particularly as far as circumcision is concerned. The apostle Paul elsewhere vigorously condemned this Jewish practice in relation to salvation. He called those who placed their confidence on circumcision ‘the false circumcision’ (Phil 3:2). He himself regarded this confidence in the flesh ‘as a loss’ and ‘rubbish’ in order to gain Christ (vv. 7-9). Paul regarded himself as dead to ‘the Law’ (Gal 2:19). He did not nullify the Law (Gal 3:21), but he understood that the Law was a tutor leading to Christ (Gal 3:24). “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (v. 25). The Law was a shadow, but the substance belongs to Christ (Col 2:17). This was also the understanding of Christ in Matthew 5:17-19. Christ came to fulfil the

Law. The believing Jews are no longer obligated to keep the Mosaic Law, especially with regard to circumcision (cf. 1Cor 7:18-20). Paul pointedly explained: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). True circumcision is done in the heart by the Spirit (cf. Rom 2:29; Col 2:11). Peter’s argument in Acts 15:7, that all needed, for the Jews and Gentiles to be saved, is faith alone, is congruent to other NT passages.

Having argued that based on God’s witness of giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles in the exact same way he gave Him to the Jews, and having argued that God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles when he cleansed the Gentiles’ hearts by faith, Peter draws a conclusion with both the transitional and inferential conjunctions: *vũv oũv*. These two conjunctions together can be rendered as ‘so now’, ‘as things stand’, ‘since this is so’ (BDAG s.v. *vũv*, 2a). Peter’s conclusion is rhetorical. He packs his conclusion in a question form to elicit a thoughtful response. The question starts with the implications the imposition of the Law will have on God: *τί πειράζετε τὸν θεὸν...* Imposition of the Law according to Peter is tantamount to testing God or putting God on trial. To this Polhill (1992:327) warns that “To demand more would be to put God to the test, to act against God’s declared will, to see if God really meant what he had already shown in accepting Gentiles apart from the law”. Peter’s question came as a warning to the Jews. The manner of the test is expressed by the infinitive phrase *ἐπιθεῖναι ζυγὸν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον τῶν μαθητῶν*. *ζυγὸν* (yoke) refers to the Mosaic Law. Why does Peter call the Law a yoke? The answer is found in the relative clause *ὃν οὐτε οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν οὐτε ἡμεῖς ἰσχύσαμεν βαστάσαι*. The aorist verb *ἰσχύσαμεν* seems to fit the gnomic aorist, used to present a timeless general fact (Wallace 1996:562). Peter looks back to the time of the fathers in the OT, moving to his time and concludes that the (legalistic) demands of the Law are unbearable. The gnomic aorist is also translated like a simple present tense. Its implication was that even as he spoke, none of the Jews were able to bear the yoke of the Law.

As he moves on in his speech, Peter draws a contrast (*ἀλλὰ*) between the burden caused by the Law and the freedom that comes through grace (*διὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ*) (v. 11). There are two possible choices for the translation of the infinitive *σωθῆναι*. It can be translated with a past tense (we were saved) or with the future tense (we will be saved). Since Peter’s argument has been to relate the past experience so far, it is plausible to choose the past tense force. Marshall (1980:250)

takes σωθῆναι as the purpose of πιστεύομεν and gives the expression that the Jews have to *believe* in order to be saved through the grace of God. His interpretation is similar to the GNB translation, which has the rendering ‘we believe and are saved....’ He views the rendering of the RSV, which reads ‘we believe that we shall be saved’ to be misleading. Grammatically, I disagree with Marshall. Since the verb πιστεύομεν is a verb of perception, it seems better to take σωθῆναι as the indirect discourse (cf. Wallace 1996:603, 604). Hence the rendering ‘we believe that we were saved by the grace’ seems to fit the grammar and context better.

What’s puzzling in verse 11 is the reversal found in the phrase καθ’ ὃν τρόπον κἀκεῖνοι. Usually the Jews would use themselves as a gauge to measure the Gentiles’ salvation (see Ac 10:47; 11:15; 15:8). Story (2011:102) sees this reversal to be a new paradigm where the Gentiles’ salvific experience becomes the gauge of measuring the Jewish Christians.

To summarise, Peter’s argument for the Gentiles’ salvation without the Law is based on: 1) God’s witness to the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he gave the Holy Spirit to the Jews (this makes them equal before God); 2) God’s indiscrimination in that he cleansed the hearts of both groups in the same way, by faith; and 3) God saves the Jews in the same manner he saves the Gentiles, that is, through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

### **Barnabas’ and Paul’s Confirmation of Peter’s speech (Acts 15:12)**

Acts 15:12 begins with the postpositive conjunction δὲ, which has a transitional force. It chronologically transitions from Peter’s speech to the silence of the entire community of believers to Barnabas’ and Paul’s speech. That Peter’s speech was persuasive is seen in the whole community of believers (πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος) becoming silent (Ἐσίγησεν). It can be inferred that the silence was due to the fact that there was nothing to dispute in Peter’s speech. Paul and Barnabas used this opportunity to confirm what Peter has said. There is a contrast between verse 12 and verses 4-6. The disputes have abated, and the congregation is now ready to listen to Paul and Barnabas (ἤκουον Βαρναβᾶ καὶ Παύλου) as they gave a report (ἐξηγουμένων). Kistemaker observes two choices in construing the case of the adverbial participle ἐξηγουμένων. It “is in a genitive case because (1) it follows the verb ἀκούω (I hear); or (2) it is part of a genitive absolute construction (with the genitive nouns *Barnabas*

and *Paul*)” (emphasis original). Most likely this is a genitive absolute. It is temporal and its time is contemporaneous to the time of ἤκουον.

The report that Barnabas and Paul gave has similarities with Peter’s speech. They both acknowledged God’s divine work among the Gentiles (ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν). They both regarded the missionaries as God’s instruments (δι’ αὐτῶν).

What is the significance of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα in resolving the problem of Gentiles’ salvation without the Mosaic Law? Kistemaker (1990:549) answers: “By mentioning these miracles, they testify to the fact that God himself had approved their ministry among the Gentiles” (cf. MacArthur 1996:68). In the same vein, with a slight shift from the missionaries to the Gentiles, Milne (2010:317) avers that Paul and Barnabas bore witness to God’s supernatural attestation of Gentiles’ acceptance. So not only were signs and wonders authenticating the messengers and their message, but they also authenticated the Gentiles’ acceptance by God.

### **James’s speech (Acts 15:13-21)**

Once Peter, Paul and Barnabas have spoken, “one voice remained to be heard” (Bruce 1988:292), namely that of James (Gk. Ἰάκωβος). His speech starts in verse 13 of Acts 15. The Greek text starts this verse with an infinitive construction ‘Μετὰ...τὸ σιγῆσαι αὐτοῦς’. Mounce (2009:303) says “When the articular infinitive is preceded by a preposition, there are specific rules of translation.” He states that “This is perhaps the most difficult use of the infinitive; it certainly is the most idiomatic.” Μετὰ + τὸ σιγῆσαι is temporal, indicating time (p. 305). Wallace (1996:611) indicates that this construction represents an antecedent time. The accusative pronoun αὐτοῦς acts as if it were the subject of the infinitive (Mounce 2009:301). A smooth translation would be ‘after they (Barnabas and Paul) became silent’. The time of the temporal clause is antecedent to the time of ἀπεκρίθη. James waited for Barnabas and Paul to finish speaking before he could reply. James uses two nominative of vocative nouns Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί in his direct address of the community of believers. To further gain their attention, James used the aorist, active, imperative verb ἀκούσατέ μου. Kistemaker (1990:550) says that “The command *listen to me* occurs nowhere else in the entire New Testament. It reveals that James has respect and authority in the church and that apostles, elders, and delegates to the council value his leadership.”

That there is no doubt James was a respected figure in Jerusalem is not only seen in his final word in this council, but he is elsewhere called a pillar together with Peter and John (Gal 2:9). His name is used to identify those who came from the church in Jerusalem (v. 12). He is specified, whereas other leaders are mentioned collectively in Acts 12:17 and 21:18.

James begins his speech by reiterating what Peter or Συμεών (Simeon), as he called him, has said. The name Συμεών, in reference to Peter, is used only here and in 2 Peter 1:1 in the NT. Given the setting, this name was appropriate (Toussaint 1983:394). Of great importance, as was in the foregoing speeches, is the acknowledgement of God's work among the Gentiles. The words James used to summarise Peter's report are telling.

James reports on: 'καθώς πρῶτον ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο...' BDAG (s.v. καθώς, 5) says after verb of saying (in this case ἐξηγήσατο) καθώς introduces an indirect discourse. James indirectly reports what Peter said. The adverb πρῶτον would therefore look back to Acts 10's record of the conversion of the Gentiles. "The phrase at first is crucial because it affirmed that Paul and Barnabas were not the first to go to the Gentiles" (Toussaint 1985:394).

The next important words in this indirect discourse are ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο. The aorist, middle/deponent verb ἐπεσκέψατο is used differently in different contexts. "It is used in divine intervention, whether in salvation or judgement" (Marshall 1980:251). Its lexical meaning according to Friberg, Friberg and Miller (s.v. ἐπισκέπτομαι) has the following nuances: (1) as looking after the sick *visit, go to help, look after* (Matt 25:36); (2) as responsible ministry to someone *seek out, visit*, (Ac 15:36); (3) as finding a suitable person for an official position *choose, select, look for* (Ac 6:3); and (4) of God's gracious oversight of his people *visit, come to help* (Luk 1:68); *be concerned about, show care for* (Ac 15:14). The fourth choice fits the context of James' words (cf. BDAG s.v. 3).

ἐπεσκέψατο is followed by an infinitive of purpose, λαβεῖν. God's purpose was to take from among the Gentiles (ἐξ ἐθνῶν) the people (λαὸν) for his name (τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ). James here agrees with Peter that the salvation of the Gentiles without the Mosaic Law is in God's plan. The terms ἐθνῶν and λαὸν are paradoxical. This is because the term λαὸν was usually used for the Jews in contrast to the Gentiles (cf.

Deut 14:2, LXX) (Marshall 1980:251; Bruce 1988:293). James in this verse does not use ἔθνῶν and λαὸν in contrast to each other, but affirms that God's λαὸν includes the Gentiles. Since the term λαὸν was understood to refer to God's covenant people, God's visit to receive the Gentiles for his name implies that Gentiles become covenant people 'by faith' (Ac 15:8) and 'by grace' (v. 11).

In order to solidify God's initiative in saving the Gentiles, James uses Scripture as his authority. He looks back to Amos 9:11-12. He chose his words carefully in verse 15 when he said: 'καὶ τοῦτω συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν καθὼς γέγραπται.' The dative demonstrative τοῦτω points back to the salvation of the Gentiles. The lexical form of συμφωνοῦσιν is συμφωνέω. It means "to fit (in) with, to match with, to agree with" (BDAG s.v. 1a). The subject of συμφωνοῦσιν is the phrase οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν. Since οἱ λόγοι is a verbal noun, τῶν προφητῶν is construed as a subjective genitive (see Wallace 1996:113). Both οἱ λόγοι and τῶν προφητῶν are plural nouns. It is possible that James uses these words not only to refer to Amos 9:11-12, but also to all of the OT prophets (Kistemaker 1990:552). The comparative clause καθὼς γέγραπται introducing the quotation is adverbial and it modifies συμφωνοῦσιν. This phrase compares the agreement there is between that which the prophets spoke and is recorded (written) with what God was doing among the Gentiles. Here James appeals to the authority of the written word. Fernando (1998:418) succinctly summarises the authority inherent in the three speeches as follows:

In arguing for the full inclusion of Gentiles into the church Peter appealed to direct guidance and intervention from God, and Barnabas and Paul appealed to God's confirmation of their work through signs and wonders. James appeals to Scripture, showing that 'the words of the prophets are in agreement with [*symphonousin*]' what has happened (v. 15).

Before we look at the quotation from Amos 9:11-12, we first need to establish that the statement συμφωνοῦσιν ... καθὼς γέγραπται is not akin to 'it is fulfilled' (Toussaint 1985:394; Cooper 2011:403). The main purpose of this quotation is *to illustrate* that the salvation of the Gentiles without the Law does not contradict the Scriptures. Aldrich (1954:318-319) coherently prevents the denial of the literal future fulfilment of the quotation and the danger of taking it to have been fulfilled in the church age by showing that the force of this quotation is not lost, although its fulfilment still lies in

the future. He shows that the main point of the quotation is that “God has it in his heart to save Gentiles”. Thus the present salvation of the Gentiles is in harmony with his future plan.

James’ quotation of Amos 9:11-12 also fits well with the Inspired *Sensus Plenior* Application (ISPA) noted in chapter three of this thesis. By the ISPA it is meant that the NT writers/speakers often observe the OT context and other times go beyond it. It is ‘the going beyond the context’ that is termed the ISPA. In this regard, the author applies the OT words to the new setting without necessarily claiming their fulfilment. Akin to the ISPA understanding of James’ quotation of Amos 9:11-12 are MacArthur’s (1996:69) comments. He maintains that the fact that James’ quotation of Amos 9:11-12 differs from the Masoretic Text and is not exactly as the Septuagint is because “*the inspired* James is certainly giving *the sense* of the passage as God intended it to be understood, as New Testament writers often do with the Old Testament texts” (Emphasis added).

This knowledge should guide the interpreter as he/she exegetes the quotation within its NT context.

The quotation begins with the prepositional phrase μετὰ ταῦτα (after these [things]) (v. 16). Toussaint quips that this phrase is not in the Masoretic Text nor in the LXX (1985:394). The LXX has ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ. Aldrich (1954:321) takes the phrase ‘after these things’ to be inserted by James instead of the normal ‘in that day’ to correlate the quotation with the first (πρῶτον) visit mentioned (Ac 15:14). Therefore the future fulfilment of Amos’ prophecy will constitute a second visit. Aldrich’s argument is convincing and it allows for a literal interpretation of the predictions embedded in the quotation from Amos. In the scope of Gentiles saved by faith and by grace without keeping the Law, Cornelius and his household were first in the line. But the word ‘first’ as Aldrich indicates, covers a broader scope. Applying the ISPA, this would mean that James applies the text to the present salvation of the Gentiles, but its consummation is yet to come, where the OT’s authorial intent of Amos will be fulfilled. In both cases, as will be noted, Christ is central to the salvation of the Gentiles.

Four actions will be carried out ‘after these things’: 1) ἀναστρέψω. Thayer (s.v. ἀναστρέψω) comments that ἀναστρέψω “does not have the force of an adverb,

*again*, but God in the Messiah's advent returns to his people, whom he is conceived of as having previously abandoned." This interpretation is confirmed by the next action: 2) ἀνοικοδομήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν. The question is what is the meaning of τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ which will be rebuilt? It should be noted that the literal interpretation of the text does not allow for this to be the present-age church as Bruce (1988:294) suggests. To interpret τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ to refer to the present-age church is to deny God's programme for Israel as a nation. The literal interpretation of ἀναστρέψω that predicts the return of Christ also suggests that τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ does not speak of the present age. Thus I concur with Toussaint (1985:394) that:

Since God's Son has not yet returned bodily, this rebuilding has not taken place. Christ's present ministry in heaven is not associated with the Davidic throne elsewhere in the New Testament. He is now seated at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). When He returns He will sit on David's throne (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:4; Matt. 19:28; 25:31).

The context of Amos 9:11-12, which is about the judgement of Israel as a nation, shows that after judgement God will rebuild Israel as a nation, and together with the Gentiles they will seek the Lord (Ac 15:17). Therefore, it is plausible to interpret τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ to mean the nation of Israel (Toussaint 1985:394; Cooper 2011:407). The last two actions relating to Israel as a nation, which will take place after God's judgement are emphasis of the first two: 3) ἀνοικοδομήσω (I will build up again) and 4); καὶ ἀνορθώσω (I will restore) αὐτήν. In these verses we again see the divine God at work. The implied subject of the four future predictive singular verbs mentioned above is God. His divine plan is to bring the Jews and the Gentiles together, not only in the present age but in the future as well.

The purpose of God's future restoration of the nation of Israel is expressed in verses 17-18: ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐφ' οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ' αὐτούς, λέγει κύριος ποιῶν ταῦτα γνωστὰ ἀπ' αἰῶνος.

His purpose is that the remaining people or the remnant of the people (οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων) will seek the Lord. The meaning of οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων is ambiguous. What makes it ambiguous is the force of the conjunction καὶ connecting οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων and πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. Is the force of καὶ expegetic or coordinate? As Braun (1977:118) has noted, the interpretation of this conjunction has

theological implications. If construed epexegetically, καὶ is used to equate πάντα τὰ ἔθνη with οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων. This interpretation would suggest that οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων and πάντα τὰ ἔθνη are one group. But if it is construed as a coordinate, καὶ would function to separate the two groups, Jews and Gentiles.

In support for the latter, Braun (1977:119-120) presents at least eight arguments: 1) The word 'remnant' implies those remaining. 2) A word implies an isolated body of people extracted from a larger group. 3) In the OT, remnant has a strict national connotations. 4) Soteriologically, remnant is restricted to Israel. 5) When the word is applied to Gentiles, it is for judgement (Is 14:22; 15:9; 16:4). 6) When used to compare Jews and Gentiles, a distinction is made (Is 27:7). 7) Historical records outside the Bible support that the Jews held a self-concept as a remnant. 8) James' use of Amos 9:11-12 is clarified by the remnant concept in early Jewish Christianity. Based on these arguments, Braun (1997:120) concludes that two distinct groups will seek the Lord. Meek (2008:84) responds to Braun's argument, particularly number 4 above. Meek quips that "Even if this is so (that the term remnant is a technical term never applied to Gentiles in any soteriological or eschatological sense), it is up to Braun to make the case that the term must be seen in this technical sense here." To this Meek gives his opinion: "It is, of course, also possible that this text marks a dramatic theological development, as in Isa. 9.25, where other terms normally reserved to Israel are applied to Gentiles." Meek sees the difficulty in construing 'the rest of mankind' as a reference to ethnic Jews. Meek is right that Braun seeks to protect the dispensational reading of the text. After all, Braun warned of a theological difficulty in the interpretation of this quote.

But besides the arguments Braun gave above, his grammatical argument is convincing. Braun agrees that καὶ could function epexegetically here. "But if this is so, then the Gentiles are not included in the remnant—they *are* the remnant" (1977:120) (emphasis original). Marshall (1980:252) prefers this (i.e., Gentiles are remnant) interpretation and thus allegorises David's tabernacle to refer to the church (see also DeSilva 2004:316). But this seems not to be James' purpose and the manner of the quotation. His purpose was that if in the future millennial kingdom (when God restores Israel) the Gentiles will be saved without the Mosaic Law, they should be saved in the present age without the same (Toussaint 1985:395; MacArthur 1996:69). Emphasis is on the Gentiles becoming part of the covenant people.

Therefore the force of καὶ can even be ascensive, making the Gentiles a point of focus (see Wallace 1996:670) and still keep a distinction between the two groups.

#### **4.4.6. The Resolution**

Acts 15:19 draws a conclusion not only based on James' speech, but on the first two as well. The conclusion is introduced by the inferential conjunction διὸ, which can be translated as 'therefore' or 'for this reason' (BDAG s.v. διό). On the basis that God at first chose to save the Gentiles without the Mosaic Law, by faith and by grace; and on the basis that God did not make a distinction when he cleansed the Gentiles by the Holy Spirit in the same way he cleansed the Jews; and on the basis that the Gentiles witnessed God's signs and wonders as a proof of their acceptance to God; and on the basis that the OT Scriptures agree with the Gentile salvation without the Law, James made a decision in Acts 15:19.

James' decision is two-pronged and reciprocal. It seeks to create harmony between the two groups coming together as one new man (cf Eph 2:15). The first part of the decision is on how Jews, as represented by James, should relate to the believing Gentiles. James concludes ἐγὼ κρίνω μὴ παρενοχλεῖν. The verb κρίνω fits an instantaneous present usage in Wallace (1996:517). In James' mind this decision was completed at the moment of his utterance. The content of the decision is expressed by the negated present, active, infinitive μὴ παρενοχλεῖν translated 'not to cause unnecessary trouble'. This ruling resonates with Peter's protest against placing a yoke upon the neck of the disciples (Ac 15:10; Bruce 1988:295). The Jews were to stop troubling the Gentiles by trying to impose the Mosaic Law on them as a condition for their acceptance in the church. The second part of the decision entails the Gentiles' relationship to the Jews.

The strong adversative pronoun ἀλλὰ contrasts the two indirect discourse infinitives, namely, μὴ παρενοχλεῖν and ἐπιστεῖλαι. The first addressed what the Jews should not do to the Gentiles and the second addresses what Gentiles are to do to be considerate to the Jews. ἐπιστεῖλαι from the verb ἐπιστέλλω means to "communicate with someone by means of a letter" (Louw and Nida 1989:394), hence 'to inform by letter' or 'to write a letter'. The genitive articular infinitive τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι indicates the purpose of ἐπιστεῖλαι. They were to write a letter in order to instruct them to abstain. τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι is also in the middle voice. Its force is that the Gentiles were to

willingly abstain themselves without coercion. This could well fall under a causative middle (Wallace 1996:423). James pointed four things from which the Gentiles were to abstain. All four substantives are genitive of separation and are translated with the key word ‘from’ or ‘away from’: 1) τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων (from [things] polluted by idols); 2) τῆς πορνείας (from sexual immorality); 3) τοῦ πνικτοῦ (from strangled animals); and 4) τοῦ αἵματος (from blood).

Whether James presents these four prohibitions from a ceremonial or ethical point of view is not agreed upon among the scholars. According to Savelle (2004:457) different sources and nature of these prohibitions are suggested. Sources suggested are the Rabbinic literature, Noahic precepts (Gen 9:4-6) and Leviticus 17-18. Savelle mentions the strengths and weaknesses of these views and concludes that a hybrid of sources is to be preferred (2004:461). The suggested nature of the prohibitions ranges from ethical view to societal to cultic to combination of views (p. 462).

The reason for probing the sources and the nature of these prohibitions stems from the meaning of substantives used by Luke in Acts 15:20, 29 and 21:25. In the three verses noted above, the order of 15:20 is not the same as that of 15:29 and 21:25, which follow the same order. The following table presents the order:

Acts 15:20: Order	Acts 15:29; 21:25: Order
Things polluted by idols	Things polluted by Animals
Sexual Immorality	Blood
Strangled Animals	Strangled Animals
Blood	Sexual Immorality

Savelle (2004:451) maintains that “the difference in order is not significant though the rationale is not readily apparent”.

Looking at the meaning of the substantives will help the reader see a rationale for this particular selection by the council and the Holy Spirit (see Ac 15:28).

1. τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων (from things polluted by idols): Since evangelical exegesis espouse that scripture interprets scripture, it is best to compare Acts 15:20, 29 and 21:25 to know what the council meant by the phrase τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων. In Acts 15:29 and 21:25 the wording moves from τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων to the adjective εἰδωλοθύτων. Savelle (2004:452) notes that this substitution relates to cultic defilement associated with idolatry.

εἰδωλοθύτων here and in 1 Corinthians 8; 10:19 and Revelation 2:14, 20 speaks of something offered to a cultic image/idol.

2. τῆς πορνείας (from sexual immorality): πορνεία according to BDAG (s.v. 1) connotes 'unlawful sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, fornication'. Metzger (1971:430) and Savelle (2004:450) note that some variants such as the p<sup>45</sup> omit τῆς πορνείας. They both observe that the emendation could be due to the incompatibility of πορνεία with other dietary or ritual prohibitions. The close proximity of πορνεία with εἰδωλόθυτος here and in Revelation 2:20-21 could imply a close relationship as in the examples of 1 Corinthians 10:7-8.
3. τοῦ πνικτοῦ (from strangled animals): This prohibition is linked to the Mosaic prohibition of eating animals that had not had their blood drained properly (Lev 17:13-14; Deut 12:16, 23). Metzger says this prohibition is omitted in the Western Text (1971:430).
4. τοῦ αἵματος (from blood): Savelle (2004:453), based on BDAG (s.v. αἷμα, 1a & b, 2a & b, 3) summarises three basic meanings of αἷμα: 1) Basic blood of an organism, either of people or animals; 2) the life of an individual; and 3) metaphorically referring to red colour in an apocalyptic judgement language. Hence αἷμα is often taken by some as a metonymy for murder (Savelle 2004:455). Given the context and the abstinence language, the prohibition should be linked to the Mosaic food laws which forbid the eating of animals not properly drained of blood (Lev 17:10-14).

What is the rationale for this list? Albeit there is the Mosaic Law intonation in the list, James' selection does not seem to be ceremonially motivated. He seems to be giving a moral concession for the Gentiles not to trouble the Jews with their lifestyle (Metzger 1971:430; Toussaint 1985:395-396). The moral view allows for all fourfold prohibitions to be taken as original without having to classify them. A ceremonial view will not answer well to the inclusion of 'sexual immorality' without forcing its meaning to fit the Mosaic Law. But given the Mosaic Law intonation in the prohibitions, the other three, less 'sexual immorality', were repulsive to Jews (Marshall 1980:253) and thus were to be prohibited although not sinful (cf. 1 Cor 8:8). The selection of these specific items implies that these were a common practice among the Gentiles and had potential to cause disharmony in the multicultural church.

James closed his speech with a sentence that is difficult to interpret (Ac 15:21). “The problem arises, not from the statement itself...but with the ‘for’ at the beginning of the verse. That conjunction indicates that v. 21 somehow explains v. 20, but yet the relationship between the two is left unstated” (Gaventa 2003:223). The explanatory γὰρ can either be taken to give reason for the infinitive μὴ παρενοχλεῖν, thus pointing out that the decision does not abrogate the teaching of the Law of Moses as Moses will continue to be taught, or it can be taken to modify the infinitive phrase ἐπιστεῖλαι...τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι, thus showing the Gentiles why they need to be sensitive to the Jews because they still preach Moses. Or it could also be that James is saying that Gentiles have ample opportunity to learn the Law of Moses since he continues to be preached in the synagogues every Sabbath (Marshall 1980: 254; Bruce 1988:296; Milne 2010:219).

### **The letter from the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:22-29)**

Τότε (v. 22) is a temporal conjunction that introduces that which follows in time. The council has reached an agreement. This agreement needs to be communicated to the church in Antioch. Unanimously, the apostles, the elders, together with the whole church, selected from among them men in order to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. This action is similar to that taken by the church in Antioch in verse 2. Two new characters are singled out for this task, namely Judas (aka Barsabbas) and Silas. They were leading men. The authority of the letter sent by the hands of Judas and Silas lies in those who sent it: οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοὶ (v. 23). ἀδελφοὶ is nominative in simple apposition. It is in apposition to both οἱ ἀπόστολοι and οἱ πρεσβύτεροι. The addressees are specified: τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν καὶ Συρίαν καὶ Κιλικίαν ἀδελφοῖς τοῖς ἐξ ἔθνῶν χαίρειν. The definite article τοῖς followed by the prepositional phrase κατὰ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν καὶ Συρίαν καὶ Κιλικίαν is used to nominalise the prepositional phrase. It is also dative of recipient used in a salutation of the letter. It is used to indicate the recipients of the letter (Wallace 1996:148). The recipients are those in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. “Prior to A.D. 72 Antioch served as the capital of Syria and the eastern part of Cilicia” (Kistemaker 1990:561). These recipients are also affectionately addressed as ἀδελφοῖς by the Jews. This is an evidence that the Jerusalem church accepted the Gentiles’ salvation as genuine without circumcision.

The letter opens up with a reason why it was written, introduced by the causal clause Ἐπειδὴ ἠκούσαμεν. The letter also points out clearly that the men in verse 1 were not ordered by the Jerusalem church (οὐ διεστείλαμεθα). That the teaching of the men from Judea in verse 1 was destructive is attested by the verb ἐτάραξαν and the participle ἀνασκευάζοντες. ἐτάραξαν from ταρασσω means “to cause inward turmoil, stir up, disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion” (BDAG s.v. 2). It refers here to “mental confusion caused by false teachings”. ἀνασκευάζοντες is a participle of result. It presents the outcome of the Judean men’s words. Thus the clarification that these men were not instructed by the church was necessary.

ἔδοξεν (v. 25) serves as the main verb upon which the causal clause in verse 24 depends. It is a repetition of verse 22. The temporal participial phrase ‘γενομένοις ὁμοθυμαδὸν’ speaks of when the decision to choose to send the men was reached. It was not until the church was united around the doctrine of salvation that they chose men to go and repair the damage caused by the Jews with legalistic soteriology (vv. 26-27).

Verse 28 repeats the verb ἔδοξεν again (cf. vv. 22 & 25). This becomes a key term in this chapter (Milne 2010:322). In verse 22 the decisionmakers mentioned are the apostles, the elders and the whole church. Verse 25 just says ‘to us’, referring back to the groups in verse 22. Here in verse 28 the divine decisionmaker is added together with the human decisionmakers: τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν. The mention of the Holy Spirit as a decisionmaker resonates the words of Jesus in John 16:12-14:

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.

This presents to us an opportunity to interpret the decision made christocentrically. The Holy Spirit disclosed to the council members the mind of Jesus regarding the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit disclosed that the Gentiles are not to carry a legalistic burden (μηδὲν πλέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βάρος). The burden (βάρος) is tantamount to the ‘yoke’ in verse 10 and ‘unnecessary trouble’ in verse 19. The exceptions, however, were necessary for the promotion of ethics and unity in the church. Verses 28-29 summarise well the decision reached by the council, including both Jews and

Gentiles, and both theological and practical living. Longenecker (1981:451) succinctly summarises them as follows:

On the fundamental matter of the theological necessity of circumcision and a Jewish lifestyle for Gentile Christians, the letter rebukes the Judaizers for going beyond their authority and assures the churches that there are no such requirements for salvation. On the practical issues of fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers in the churches and of preventing needless offense to Jews throughout the empire, the letter asks Gentile Christians to abstain from “idolatry” (*eidōlothytōn*), “blood” (*haimatos*), “things strangled” (*pniktōn*), and “sexual immorality” (*porneias*)....

## **The Joy caused by the letter’s encouragement (Acts 15:30-35)**

### **4.4.7. Return to a Peaceful Situation**

James (2008:83) observes that stories starts with a peaceful situation into which a problem is introduced. A solution to the problem is sought and the resolution is made leading to the peaceful situation again. Acts 15:30-35 records a return to a peaceful situation.

In verse 30, almost all of the Standard English translations translate the nominative plural participle ἀπολυθέντες as a temporal participle (e.g., ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NET, NKJV, RSV). The reason for this choice could be because they take οἱ μὲν as a combination and οὖν as an inference. But it is also possible to take the article οἱ with the participle ἀπολυθέντες, thus making it an adjectival participle. In this case μὲν οὖν is combined, denoting continuation (cf. BDAG s.v. μὲν, 2e).

Luke’s report that those who were sent away came down to Antioch (κατήλθον εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν) denotes the faithfulness of the men sent. The next action after their arrival was to gather the community of believers together (καὶ συναγαγόντες τὸ πλῆθος). The participle συναγαγόντες can either be taken as an attendant circumstance or a temporal participle. Either way, this participle happens before the action of ἐπέδωκαν τὴν ἐπιστολήν. That the letter contained a resolution to the problem mentioned in verses 1 and 5 is evidenced by the joyful emotion. Luke says, ‘after they read they rejoiced’ (ἀναγνόντες δὲ ἐχάρησαν (v. 31)). The reason for this joy was not just a mere reading, but the reason is expressed in the prepositional phrase: ἐπὶ τῇ παρακλήσει. BDAG (s.v. ἐπί, 6c) indicates that after verbs which

express feelings... the preposition ἐπί has a causal force. So it was because of the encouragement the letter contained that the church at Antioch rejoiced. The Gentile church accepted the prohibitions in the letter without protest (Marshall 1980:256).

Over and above the encouragement brought about by the letter, the two men, Judas and Silas, whom Luke describes in verse 32 as αὐτοὶ προφήται ὄντες, also encouraged the church. The third person pronoun αὐτοὶ functions as an intensive pronoun giving the 'themselves' force. These prophets did two things:

παρεκάλεσαν...καὶ ἐπεστήριξαν. Both παρεκάλεσαν and ἐπεστήριξαν are constative aorist verbs with an iterative nature. Their iterative nature is supported by the adjective πολλοῦ (many) in the prepositional phrase διὰ λόγου πολλοῦ. Also assuming that παρεκάλεσαν and ἐπεστήριξαν continued the entire time Judas and Silas were with the church (v. 33), then their iterative nature is substantiated. Now that Judas and Silas have completed their mission, the church greeted them with peace and sent them back to the Jerusalem church from where they were sent.

The UBS4 does not have verse 34. It moves from verse 33 to 35. But "The later Greek text, followed by the Textus Receptus" (Metzger 1971:439) includes 'But it seemed good for Silas to stay there' or its expanded version. Both Metzger (1971:439) and Marshall (1980:256) see the insertion of this reading as an attempt to account for the apparent contradiction between the departure of Silas in verse 33 and his presence in verse 40.

Now that the situation in Antioch has normalised again, Paul and Barnabas could resume what they were doing in Acts 14:28 before the men from Judea came. Luke simply says "But Paul and Barnabas stayed on in Antioch..." (v. 35). This is in contrast to Judas and Silas who were sent off in verse 33. The imperfect tense διέτριβον implies an extended duration. Their purpose of staying on is expressed by two participles of purpose: διδάσκοντες καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου. These they did with the company of others (μετὰ καὶ ἐτέρων πολλῶν).

## **4.5. The Christocentric Interpretation of Acts 15:1-35**

### **4.5.1. Authorial Intent**

The first question towards the Christocentric interpretation of Acts 15:1-35 is what was Luke's intention in writing and placing this passage where we have it in the book of Acts? An answer to this question should consider the overall purpose of Luke's

writing. Under the literary context above, it was noted that according to Acts 1:1, Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke which is “about all that Jesus began to do and teach”. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is presented as the promised OT Messiah. As the Messiah, Jesus focuses on the OT promises concerning the salvation of all people, Jews and non-Jews. The very purpose of His death and resurrection was “that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47). Luke’s intention in Acts was to show Theophilus how this purpose of the risen Messiah was fulfilled in the church (cf. Ac 1:8).

Luke highlights the struggle the early church faced in dealing with the transition from Judaism to Christianity, particularly for the Jews who had to embrace other cultures as part of their community (see Ac 6; Ac 10 & 11; 15). But more than this, it was Luke’s intention to draw attention to Christ who is the Prophet like Moses (Ac 3:22-23 quoted from Deut 18:15 & 19 respectively). This ‘Prophet like Moses’ motif has an implication of a shift from Moses as a covenant Mediator to Christ as the New Covenant Mediator. This is evident in Stephen’s speech in Acts 7. This motif reaches its peak in Acts 15. There is a consensus among the scholars that Acts 15 is central and important to the whole book. The following five are a representation of others:

Marshall (1980:242) says “Luke’s account of the discussion regarding the relation of the Gentiles to the law of Moses forms a centre of Acts both structurally and theologically.”

Conzelmann (1987) says “It is not by chance that the Apostolic Council occupies the middle of the book. It is the great turning point, the transition from primitive church to the ‘contemporary’ church”.

Bruce (1988:282) says “The council of Jerusalem is an event to which Luke attaches the highest importance; it is as epoch-making, in his eyes...”

Savelle (2004:449) says “The book of Acts, especially chapter 15, serves as an important link between the Gospels and the epistles.”

Milne (2010:311) quotes Hanchen: “Chapter 15 is the turning point, the ‘centre-piece’ and ‘watershed’ of the book, the episode which rounds off and justifies the past developments, and makes those to come intrinsically possible.”

Luke's ultimate intention was to show Theophilus and the readers at large that salvation is divinely centred on Christ apart from the Law. We are told that "authors often tell their story and its theology by means of the words or dialogue of their characters" (James 2008:86). This is true in Acts 15. Luke quotes Peter's own words in verses 7-11 to announce the theological message of the narrative. He did the same with James' words in verses 13-21. In the words of Peter and James, Luke could lead Theophilus to see that the solution to admission of the Gentiles in the church is not found in Moses but in Christ alone (cf. Ac 4:12). This became the sole message the church proclaimed from the Council onwards. This message was however based on the OT.

#### **4.5.2. OT fulfilled in Christ**

In chapter 3 of this thesis it was established that Matthew 5:17-19 and Luke 24:44 the OT Scripture anticipated Christ and that Christ is its fulfilment. The Christocentric message of Luke, especially in resolving the Jewish-Gentile disharmony, rests on the authority of the OT. In Acts 10:43 Peter used the prophets as his authority in his peaching to Cornelius' household. In 13:47 Paul and Barnabas quoted the Servant song of Isaiah 49:6 to justify their shift to the Gentiles. The motif of 'cleansing their hearts by faith' (Ac 15:9), which is in contrast with the external cleansing of the Mosaic Law, is an indication of the true circumcision in Christ. This is connected with the Old and the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, the circumcision of flesh is required for the Jews and those joining them. But in the New Covenant, inaugurated by His blood (Lk 22:20), the internal heart circumcision is required (cf. Rom 2:29; Gal 6:15; Philp 3:3; Col 2:11-12). In Christ, with the inauguration of the New Covenant, the Old was made obsolete (Heb 8:7-13). The Law was a shadow of Christ (Heb 10:1-18). In Christ's words, "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20). These words are an admonition to those who want to be saved by the works of the Law while Christ, the fulfiller of the Law, is present.

#### **4.5.3. Redemptive-historical Progression/Promise-fulfilment**

Another motif that Luke uses to get his readers to see the salvation of the Gentiles without the Law of Moses as legitimate is God's redemptive plan. In the exegetical commentary of Acts 15:1-35 we observed the emphasis on God's initiative of the Gentiles' salvation. In his first volume, Luke records that God has always had the

Gentiles in his redemptive plan accomplished by Christ (Lk 2:14, 32; 3:6). The redemptive historical progression began in Genesis 3:15 and was preserved through Noah in Genesis 6-9. It was to be carried through Abraham's descendant and would affect all the families of the earth<sup>7</sup> (Gen 12:3; 22:18). The children of Israel were to be God's messengers in fulfilling God's plan, especially in attracting the nations to God (Ex 9:16; Is 60:3-6). It is embedded in the irrevocable covenants made with Noah (Gen 9:11-17), Abraham (Gen 12:1-3; 17:1-8; 22:15-18), David (2 Sam 7:8-16) and with Israel (Jer 31:31-34). God's progressive redemptive plan embedded in these covenants is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, who is the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), the Son of David and the inaugurator of the New Covenant (Heb 8:7-13). In Acts 3:25 Luke narrates Peter's speech where he made mention of Genesis 22:18. Peter noted that in God's redemptive plan, the Jews were to be first (Ac 3:26). But it was to extend to the Gentiles of which Acts 15 is proof and its fulfilment.

Isaiah repeatedly calls him the Servant of the Lord (see Is 42-53). Isaiah 49:6 is quoted in both Luke 2:32 and Acts 13:47 in reference to Christ and the nations. This redemptive plan no doubt encompasses to greater extent the **Promise-fulfilment** in Christ as seen in God's promise to Abraham.

#### ***4.5.4. Inspired Sensus Plenior Application***

James' quotation of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:16-18 is not a complete fulfilment of this passage. As noted in the exegesis above, the inspired James applied out of the OT context the words of Amos to prove that the OT supports the Gentiles' salvation without the Law. The context within which James applies these words connects with the phrases 'by faith' and 'through grace' which Peter emphasised and James proves. For more details on this, please see my exegesis above under James' speech.

#### ***4.5.5. The Works and Words of Christ***

Since Luke is concerned about what all that Jesus began to do and teach (Ac 1:1), it is significant to look at how the words and works of Christ has affected the interpretation of the problem faced in Acts 15:1-35. We need to answer the question: 'how did Jesus treat the Gentiles in his earthly ministry?' To answer this question, we need to identify Jesus' contacts with the Gentiles in the Gospels. In order to do this,

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<sup>7</sup> Galatians 3:8 calls this the gospel preached by God beforehand to Abraham.

Jesus' words and works related to the Gentiles, both negative and positive statements, will be assessed. Here the interpreter ought to be careful of two things:

- 1) Biased: One can be biased to look at only positive encounters and conclude that Jesus never discriminated against the Gentiles. The reverse is true. One can be so biasedly negative to conclude that Jesus always discriminated against the Gentiles.
- 2) Subjectivism: Here one has to be careful not to read unrelated statements into the meaning of Acts 15:1-35 in order to push an agenda. A balance is crucial in this approach.

**Negative statements:** When Jesus sent out the twelve, he prohibited them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6). In Matthew 15:21-28, a Canaanite woman begged Jesus to deliver her daughter from demon possession. His response was: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24). In verse 26 he said to the woman: "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

**Positive statements:** Matthew 8:5-13 records Jesus' encounter with a Centurion who implored Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus without hesitation responded: "I will come and heal him" (v. 7). The quotation in Matthew 12:18-21 in response to the healing of 'all' in verse 15 implies that Gentiles were present. The last part of verse 18 says of Jesus "And he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles". The eschatological passage of Matthew 24:14 positively promise the preaching of the gospel to the nations (Gentiles). The birth narratives are also positive in the way they refer to the Gentiles. Gentile women such as Tamar, a Canaanite (Matt 1:3); Rahab, a Canaanite from Jericho; and Ruth, a Moabite (Matt 1:5) are part of the genealogy of Jesus. The Persian Magi are also recorded worshipping the infant King, Jesus (Matt 2:2, 11). Jesus' parables mention some of the positive statements regarding the Gentiles (see Matt 22:1-14). The pinnacle of the positive words of Jesus regarding the Gentiles is the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20; Lk 24:44-49; Ac 1:8).

The two sets of statements, the negative and positive, appear to be contradictory. To ask a logical question: are these apparent or real contradictions? Scott's (1990:162) rhetorical questions see these as apparent contradictions. He asks, "Did Jesus limit his mission to Jews only? Yes. Did Jesus envision a mission including Gentiles?"

Yes.” Based on the OT promise of Gentiles’ salvation, Scott (1990:166) concludes that “the establishment of a new Israel must precede her use as the means which “all nations of the world will be blessed.” Two things are worth noting from Scott’s statements: 1) Jesus’ ministry was primarily focused on the Jews. The Jews were to hear the good news first. 2) The Gentiles were part of Jesus’ ministry, but were not a priority. God’s redemptive plan and promises included the Gentiles, but the door was not immediately opened fully to them during Jesus’ earthly ministry.

However, going back to the statements where Jesus encountered the Gentiles, there is one key motif to these encounters, namely ‘faith’. In Matthew 15:27 the woman answered Jesus “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” Jesus counted this as a great faith and granted the woman her request (v. 28). The centurion man who had his servant healed got his request because of faith (Matt 8:10; cf. Lk 7:1-10). So when Peter in Acts 15:9 said of God “He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith”, he was recalling God’s indiscriminate character revealed in Christ. After the death and resurrection of Christ, when the New Covenant was enacted, Christ fully opened the door to the Gentiles. It is his authoritative Great Commission words which began to form the early church’s theology (Matt 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; Ac 1:8).

The reason the Gospel has reached Antioch and other Gentile regions is because Christ has commissioned the church to do so. In accordance with the instruction of Christ (Lk 24:49; Ac 1:8), believers waited for the Holy Spirit who would empower them to reach *even* the Gentiles. His presence and guidance as Christ promised in John 16:12-14 is felt in the words of the council: “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Ac 15:28). The Holy Spirit testifies about Christ. Thus the decision made was Christ-centred.

#### **4.6. Summary**

In an endeavour to apply the understanding of the Christocentric Principle within the bounds of an evangelical exegesis, I used Acts 15:1-35 as my test case. The original Greek text was translated, the historical context of the text was established, and the exegetical analysis of the text was done in a commentary format which involved the motivation for the translation choices. Having considered the genre of the text as

historical/theological narrative, the plot was followed identifying the peaceful situation, the problem, the crisis, the climax and the solution/resolution. In the process, the theological message of the text was identified, which came as a response to the question of Gentiles' salvation without the Law. The five methods that help us apply christocentricity within the evangelical exegesis were applied in dealing with the question of Gentiles' salvation. It was concluded that God had always planned to save the Gentiles. His salvation would first be offered to the Jews, who were to be instrumental in bringing the Gentiles to God. Christ came as the ultimate Jew who in his earthly ministry envisioned the fully fleshed mission to the Gentiles, even though, for a while until his death, it was limited to the Jews.

The conclusion to the problem of Gentiles' salvation was solved when the council began to understand God's initiative of saving the Gentiles in Christ without the Law. It was indicated that this was Luke's purpose of compiling this history and in placing Acts 15 where he placed it.

Now, as this research is nearing the end, in the next chapter I will look at the significance of the information covered in this thesis.

## Chapter 5

# The significance of christocentricity within the framework of a commitment to evangelical exegesis

### Introduction

This concluding chapter seeks to review what the study has set out as its objective, to review the methods and findings, to provide the significance of the study and to give some recommendations.

### 5.1. The Objective of the Study

The objective of this research has been to understand and apply the Christocentric Principle within the framework of a commitment to the historical-grammatical approach to exegesis.

Three sub-questions were asked in order to solve the main problem. The findings are summarised below in section 5.3.

### 5.2. The Methods Employed

The study took a literary approach, with two main methods applied, that is, literature review and an in-depth exegesis of Bible passages working from the Greek text. Literature review was applied in chapter 2. Exegesis was applied in chapters 3 and 4.

### 5.3. The Findings

#### ***5.3.1. How has christocentricity been understood and applied in the history of hermeneutics?***

Christocentricity has been a major focus of scholars throughout the history of the church. There is a unanimous voice among scholars from different eras that Christ is the centre of all OT and NT Scriptures. It was discovered, however, that there are diverse applications of the Christocentric Principle. Three main approaches observed are allegorical, typological and historical-grammatical interpretation. Scholars either espoused all three approaches as legitimate or rejected some. The example of this is

seen in the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools. The Alexandrian school espoused allegory and to some extent rejected literal interpretation because of its limitations. The Antiochene School to a deeper extent rejected allegory and espoused literal interpretation. These two schools agreed on typology although allegory often superseded it. Alexandria and Antioch established methods of Biblical interpretation which influenced subsequent scholars to our contemporary period. Our scholars are still divided over the meaning of christocentricity and how it should be applied. Books and articles are written, and councils were convened to define what it means to interpret the Bible christocentrically.

The review was synthesised as follows:

- a. Scholars agree that christocentricity focuses on the Person and works of the incarnate Christ.
- b. Jesus Christ fulfils the OT and thus the OT and the NT should be interpreted in light of the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, words and exaltation of the incarnate Jesus.
- c. Jesus Christ as the central and/or main subject of all of scripture. The emphasis from these scholars is on the nature of Christ that should be explained from all of Scripture and how Christ revealed the nature, character, values, principles and priorities of the Godhead.
- d. Biblical revelation is climaxed in the incarnate Christ.
- e. The OT revelation is to be interpreted in light of the NT revelation.
- f. Every text of the Bible should be perused to see how it relates to Christ.

### ***5.3.2. How should we understand and apply christocentricity within the framework of evangelical exegesis today?***

Having established that christocentricity has been around the block for many centuries, the researcher sought to understand it from a Biblical standpoint. Thus, three texts, Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40; and Luke 24:27, 44-47, were exegeted within their context. The findings are tabulated as follows:

- All three passages apply the term γραφή in its different declensions to the entire OT Scriptures.
- All affirm Christ as the fulfilment of the OT Scriptures.

- None of these passages dismiss the Old Testament's significance to the NT church.
- All divisions of the OT (i.e. the Law, the Prophets and the Writings) contain things concerning the Christ.
- All passages intimate that every detail concerning Christ will ultimately be fulfilled.
- In all of them the audience is stimulated to see Jesus in the OT Scriptures. Scriptures are to be read with Christ in mind.
- All show the tragedy of missing Christ in the OT Scriptures.

From these findings it was deduced that the methods toward a Christ-centred interpretation followed by the NT writers included:

- a. The use of both literal and non-literal approach in their application of the OT in the NT called the Inspired *Sensus Plenior* Application in the thesis.
- b. The authorial intent of both the OT and NT. The text in the OT should be read within its OT context and the NT text (alluded, applied or directly quoted) is to be understood within the NT context.
- c. Among many suggestions, three ways that serve as a legitimate bridge to Christ: redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfilment and typology.
- d. The works and words: These look at how either directly or indirectly Jesus interpreted or applied the OT. His words help to move from reading the Law as a dead letter to reading it as Jesus understood it.

### **5.3.3. *What would the application of our understanding of christocentricity within the framework of evangelical exegesis produce when tested with the interpretation of Acts 15:1-35?***

Acts 15:1-35 was used as a test case for the methods recommended in chapter 3. A historical-grammatical method of interpretation was applied in the study of the narrative. The passage was translated, following a word-for-word translation theory. The historical, literary and chronological context was observed, followed by a verse-

by-verse commentary of the Greek text focusing on the grammar, syntax, ambiguities and the theological message. The structure of the study took a plot format in line with the genre of the passage. It was after this whole process that I began to apply the Christocentric methods suggested in chapter 3. These methods did not change the meaning of the text nor did they add to the meaning. They helped to deal with difficulties of interpretation, such as the understanding of James' quotation of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:15-18. It was observed that only a Christ-centred approach to the problem of Gentiles' acceptance in the church without observing the Mosaic Law is a solution not only then, but today as well. The application is strong to the church today where racial, cultural, social and theological divide is looming.

## **5.4. The Significance of the Study**

### **5.4.1. Theological Significance**

Biblical interpretation is the basis of all theological presuppositions. But how one has reached a particular interpretation depends on the methods of his or her interpretation. The hermeneutical significance of this study is to alert Biblical interpreters who want to disclose Christ from any passage of Scripture to do so within the framework of a commitment to a historical-grammatical interpretation. This is hermeneutically significant because it will help the interpreter to steer away from allegorising portions of Scripture that are not allegorical in nature. It will also help the interpreter to still preach what the author has intended and avoid reading extra meaning into the Scripture.

I personally am more convinced after this research that Christ is the centre of the entire Bible. No Bible interpreter should allow this fact to elude him or her. Every subject related to the Bible should be Christ-centred (cf. Lk 24:27, 44-47; Jn 5:39-40). Theology, be it Biblical, Systematic and Practical, should be Christ-centred. But my recommendation would be that a christocentric theology should be done within the confines of evangelical exegesis. In other words, proper exegesis and hermeneutical principles should be adhered to.

### **5.4.2. Practical Significance**

Christocentricity is not only theological but practical as well. The practical significance of christocentricity within the framework of a commitment to historical-grammatical interpretation is that difficult life problems can be dealt with from Jesus's perspective.

What he said and how he handled similar problems, either explicitly or implicitly bring a Christ-centred solution. So whether it is in preaching, whether in counselling, whether in family or marriage relationships, whether political or governmental, every subject should be centred on Christ and His cross.

Who Christ is, what he did and said becomes the motif after which the church patterns its actions, doctrine and deliberations. The example of this is seen in the problem the church faced in Acts 15:1-35 and how the centrality of Christ brought about a solution and a resolution where Jews and Gentiles stood on a common soteriological ground.

This immediately bridges the gap from the 'then' to the 'present'. The christocentric interpretation of the passage makes it clear that God's redemptive plan and promise are realised in the death and resurrection of Christ. With this fulfilment, people with diverse cultures, languages, tribes, nations, race and social status are saved in the same way and thus have an equal worth before God (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). This is just one example of how Christ-centred understanding of Scripture can deal with practical life problems. The solution to theological and practical conundrums is Christ. Christ is the unifying theme of all Scripture. He is the fulfiller (Matt 5:17-19) and the message of *all* Scripture (Lk 24:27, 44-47; Jn 5:39-40). Reading the Scripture without him on sight is a tragedy (Jn 5:39-40).

## **5.5. Recommendations**

I would recommend that Biblical interpretation, whether it is for a classroom lecture or for a counselling session or for preaching or Bible study, should incorporate<sup>8</sup> the Christocentric Principle. The value of this incorporation is that both the interpreter and the audience will be trained to see Christ as the centre of the Scriptures. However, in the process, the literal meaning of Scripture should not be distorted by illegitimate allegorising or typologising, but also its true interpreter, Christ, should not be ignored by the dogmatic historical-grammatical exegete.

Since the methods deduced in chapter 3 as a result of establishing the meaning of Matthew 5:17-19; John 5:39-40; and Luke 24:27, 44-47 and applied in chapter 4

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<sup>8</sup> By incorporation I do not mean reading a subjective meaning into the Scriptures. What I mean is that in our hermeneutical process; that is observation, interpretation and application, the Christocentric Principle should be considered. Scripture should be read with Christ in mind.

were only tested against a passage from Acts (15:1-35), of which its genre is theological-historical narrative, I would recommend that these methods be tested also with other literary genres, both in the OT and NT, to establish their credibility.

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