

14 April, Palm Sunday

28) *And when he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29) When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples 30) saying, "Go into the village opposite where on entering you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever yet sat; untie it and bring it here. 31) If any one asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this, 'The Lord has need of it.'" 32) So those who were sent went away and found it as he had told them. 33) And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34) And they said, "The Lord has need of it." 35) And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their garments on the colt they set Jesus upon it. 36) And as he rode along, they spread their garments on the road. 37) As he was now drawing near at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, 38) saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39) And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." 40) He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." Luke 19.28-40*

“And when he had said this” refers to rather strong words from the parable about the man who distributed his wealth to servants that they invest it. The third servant failed to do so but didn’t squander the one pound entrusted to him. Rather, he kept it hidden and returned it to his master upon his return. Instead of letting this servant off the hook, his master or lord (*kurios*) considers the likes of him as an enemy: “bring them here and slay them before me” as the last verse before the passage at hand begins. Such is the background which colors what follows.

A sentiment not unlike the one just depicted is at work when Jesus commands his disciples to get a colt for him to ride upon. The direct words “The Lord (*Kurios*) has need of it” must have had a penetrating effect upon both the disciples as well as the person who possessed the colt. We could say that this man was present when Jesus spoke the parable along with the disciples. So when he heard the command to hand over the colt to the *Kurios*, he did so at once, fearing to be identified with that third servant who didn’t invest what was entrusted to him.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives didn’t happen in isolation. Clearly he intended it to be public both for the people as well as for those in authority. Note that the text doesn’t speak of a crowd of any sort but Jesus’ disciples. Given the throng assembling for Passover, this group was tiny and didn’t receive much attention if any. As for the deceptive phrase “multitude of disciples,” the noun *plethos* intimates a full assembly or as here, all the disciples. In reality that wouldn’t have turned out to be many people; associates, if you will, of the original twelve disciples.

While people were streaming into Jerusalem from every which-way, the Roman occupiers who aren't mentioned were keeping a vigilant eye-out for the slightest disturbance. If it got serious, they'd notify Pontius Pilate to dispatch troops to keep order. Obviously this was difficult to do with the impending feast of Passover. When the disciples proclaimed Jesus as king, that roused Pilate's fear even more, a potential threat not just to him but to Rome itself. A similar sentiment gripped the Pharisees which is why they pleaded with Jesus to rebuke his disciples. They'd be among the first to pay with their lives.

Note the similarity of "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest" which the disciples proclaim with the angels at Jesus' birth: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased" [Lk 2.14]. *Plethos* is applied similarly to the angels [cf. Lk 2.13]. We can take that as intimating they were present along the disciples as Jesus made his way into Jerusalem. The other Gospels speak of people in general, *ochlos* being one such term which means a more of a throng compared with *plethos*.

As for the stones crying out in this praise of the Lord, consider Hab 2.11: "For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork will respond." The context of this quote is a person who procures evil gain for his house, thereby bringing shame upon it. While this might be stretching it a bit, the same could apply to the situation at hand, those assembling for the Passover.

21 April, Easter Sunday

34) And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality 35) but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36) You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), 37) the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38) how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39) And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40) but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; 41) not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42) And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43) To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10.34-43

"And Peter opened his mouth" follows on the heels of his visit to the centurion Cornelius at Joppa, man who is "well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation" [vs..... 22]. This can have two ramifications: at the beginning of the church Gentiles are accepted on equal footing

with the Jews and Peter is speaking with authority as leader of the apostles. The occasion? Those assembled “in the sight of God” at Cornelius’ house who wish to hear “all that you have been commanded by the Lord” [vs..... 33]. I.e., these are seminal beginning of the church. Further background is that Peter had a vision on the rooftop of Cornelius’ house, namely, that all things are lawful or clean to eat, signaling that it’s fine to speak of Jesus Christ with the Gentiles.

What Peter perceives (*katalambano*, to grasp, take hold of) is that no partiality exists with God, the noun being *prosopolemptes*, literally as accepting faces or persons. Obviously he had in mind his recent vision and just as importantly, Pentecost. Not to accept faces or persons, if you will, was a hallmark of Jewish religion at the time, a way of maintaining their own identity, especially vis-a-vis Rome. The universal fear and doing right (*dikaiousune*, righteousness) is the prime uniting force. Those gathered with Cornelius—they must have been Romans as well as Jews, given his high regard—certainly were stunned. Suddenly they found themselves having common ground and must have had some difficulty as well as joy in hearing this. How they worked out relationships can only be imagined.

After having recognized that the Gospel is intended for all people, Peter speaks with what’s most familiar to him as a Jew. That is to say, the word or *logos*, word-as-expression God sent to Israel, the verb being *apostello*, the root for the noun apostle. With this in mind, such apostle-ness regarding Israel applies to the new apostle-ness to the Gentiles, Jews of course included. Peter claims that Jesus is “Lord of all,” this phraseology certainly striking a sympathetic tone but at the same time somewhat difficult to accept. Reference to Jesus’ divinity is something that they have to reconcile with his words “for God was with him.” While speaking as such, Peter must have realized this, thereby compelling him to tie in Jesus as accomplishing his mission after having been anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Peter now speaks of Christ’s death and resurrection which his audience must have gotten wind of earlier. However, at the time they didn’t realize it would have a direct impact upon their lives. Peter concludes by referring to the prophets who bore witness to Jesus, the verb being *martureo* and root for the noun martyr. More specifically, these noted men of Israel are singled out as proclaiming the forgiveness of sins. Some such references are noted in the critical edition of the Greek NT:

Is 33.24: And no inhabitant will say, “I am sick;” the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.

Is 53.5-6: But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jer 31.34: And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother saying “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Dan 9.24: Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet and to anoint a most holy place.

After having spoken these verses from OT prophets, the text continues with a (lower-case) pentecost in imitation of the original Pentecost which was so recent. That is to say, while still uttering these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard this *logos* or this word-as-expression. Immediately afterwards Peter discerned that these people were ripe for baptism.

28 April, Second Sunday of Easter

12) Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13) None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor. 14) And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women 15) so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and pallets that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16) The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. Acts 5.12-16

Dia de or “now” is a shift from the dreadful incident of Ananias and Sapphira who withheld property from the apostles which caused them to suffer death, an account replete with gory details. Indeed, that was a sign and wonder or *semeion* and *teras* if there ever was one. The first noun applies to that which is indicated or something sent from God as a warning; the second is more along the lines of a portent of things to come. Obviously news of the recent tragic incident spread like wildfire. Although we have no information as to what the two actually refer, hopefully the *semeion* and *teras* spoken here don't follow that pattern.

As for Solomon's Portico, it's mentioned in 3.11 as well, this being a favorite meeting place because it was only natural for the apostles and their immediate followers to cling to the temple as much as they could. In the absence of Jesus it was the one concrete reality they could rely upon. Because of its centrality to Israel's worship of the Lord, Jesus himself visited it frequently. However, the days of the temple are numbered, and everyone had a premonition that some overwhelming disaster was not far off. Due to the death of Ananias and Sapphira at the hands of Peter plus mention of the signs and wonders, no small wonder that nobody dared to join them as vs..... 13 states. The verb *kollao* is more along the lines of clinging. Such isolation made them stand out all the more while at the same time it turned out to be an obstacle that had to be overcome. If the apostles continued that way, no one

would join them. That means their message about Jesus Christ would fade away quickly despite them being held in high honor, *megaluno* meaning to make large or expansive.

vs..... 14 says that not just believers were added to the Lord but a multitude (*plethos*) of them. In other words, some change from the apostles' relative isolation to reach out must have occurred. It was a miracle just as great if not greater than the sick being brought to them for healing. At last the isolation in light of the recent Ananias/Sapphira event was overcome. Even though some of the sick brought to Peter had his shadow fall upon them, it was a sufficient blessing for many although nothing that was the agent for curing the sick.

This excerpt concludes with a wider audience having assembled "from the towns around Jerusalem." Quickly news of the healings and miracles got out, not just of the physical kind those of a spiritual nature, unclean spirits. As for those who had come to the apostles, nothing is said of an increased number of followers. Right away the high priest got ear of these events and had the apostles thrown into prison.

5 May, Third Sunday of Easter

27) And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them 28) saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29) But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30) The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31) God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32) And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."...40) So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41) Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42) And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5.27-32; 40-41

The conjunctive "and" or *de* refers to the apostles in the temple after their miraculous escape from prison through the intercession of an angel. The captain and officers who had been dispatched to re-capture them, if you will, now bring in and set them before the council. Note the verb *histemi* (to set), indicative not just of bringing but of making sure the apostles were placed squarely and firmly before the council. No escape this time, angel or not.

The high priest was summoned which means the situation was worthy of great concern. He reminded them of having been charged strictly, *paraggello* often associated with legal

matters along with the noun *paraggelia* (an order, again judicially speaking). Use of the verb and the noun derived from it mirror the *histemi* or placing of the apostles...making sure they don't move and are subject to any proceedings that may follow.

Obviously the high priest, Caiaphas or the same one under whom Jesus had been condemned so recently, was fearful at the apostles having filled Jerusalem with their teaching. At this very early stage or shortly after Pentecost the teaching was rudimentary, fleshing out what so many people had known already about Jesus death and supposed coming back to life. Throw in the descent of the Holy Spirit, and you have a powerful mix to threaten the establishment.

Note that Peter is mentioned as separate as well as with the apostles when giving a response, he being the fearless spokesman of the group. It must have been more amazing since Peter was known to have denied association with Jesus in the court of the high priest (cf. Jn 18.15+). Now here was the same man speaking out in his name. Perhaps Caiaphas found special delight in making sport of the so-called leader of apostles who had denied his master. Peter's response by obeying God than man is the verb *peitharchoo* or to obey those in authority, a kind of retort to Caiaphas by reason of the root *archo* or beginning which applies to a head or ruler and hence intimating the high priest.

Peter (the other apostles included) elaborates upon *peitharchoo* by referring to the "God of our fathers," the same God whom Caiaphas represents in his exalted position. That puts the high priest directly responsible for Jesus' death. Despite this, God had exalted Jesus (*hupsoo*, not specifically to raise up as from the death) as both leader and savior. *Archeos* as the former is a kind of hint of the obedience...the *peitharchoo* with its root *archo*...at issue here. The reason for this? To give Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins, the former being *metanoia* often used for conversion.

Peter concludes by saying that we (first person plural or the apostles) are witnesses of these things, *rhema* fundamentally meaning a word that has been uttered and hence by God. Again the verb *peitharchoo* is used as to obey, a way to make clear his position as well as to rub it in before the high priest. This, of course, outrages everyone and sets the stage for what happens next. Unfortunately the intervention of Gamaliel is not presented next Sunday except the conclusion or vs....s. 40-41 when his advice is taken.

Upon release, the apostles went right back to what they had been doing, teaching and preaching about Jesus Christ. Note the use of temple and home used in the same breath, as though both were one and the same, a kind of foreshadowing of the Christian transference of worship from the Jerusalem temple to homes and hence churches.

12 May, Fourth Sunday of Easter

4) but they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down...43) And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. 44) The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. 45) But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy and contradicted what was spoken by Paul and reviled him. 46) And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47) For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, `I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'" 48) And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. 49) And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. 50) But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their district. 51) But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. 52) And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13.14, 43-52

The first verse is incomplete in that the previous one has Paul and his company having set sail from Paphos for Perga after John had left them. As for this passage, it's one of the most important in scripture insofar as it shows the precise between Judaism and what soon is to be called Christianity instead of the latter still being held as a branch or sect of the former.

"They" refers to Paul and his company who sat down in the local synagogue. This was customary, and they must have done it many times in other places before coming to Antioch. Actually it just very well might be their very last time in a synagogue, the way the drama is about to unfold. While doing so they must have thought of Jesus when he did the same at Nazareth as recorded in Lk 4.16+. In other words, that had become their model and pattern of behavior. Between this sitting down and the conclusion of the service nothing is recorded. The new group, welcomed not as strangers but as fellow Jews, must have taught about Jesus using examples from scripture as their master had done when in the Nazareth synagogue. At least for now they weren't driven out but encouraged to elaborate their message which resulted in a number of converts following Paul and Barnabas. However, that lasted for a mere week. Trouble lay ahead on the next sabbath.

In vs..... 43 the verb for speaking is *proslaleo*, the preposition *pros-* (signifying directness) suggests the convincing message. It's followed by another *pros-* verb, *prosmeno* or to remain-toward which, to be in the grace of God permanently and not move from it. Obviously this had an effect on other synagogue-goers, for the entire city of Antioch gathered to hear the

word (*logos*) of God from Paul, Barnabas and other companions. All this within a mere week.

Despite this enormous impression in so short a time some Jews became jealous and began to contradict Paul as well as revile him. The verb for contradict here is *antilego* which can be taken as speaking against the *logos* of God, *lego* being the verbal root. Despite this, Paul and Barnabas responded boldly, *parresiazomai* which is the verbal root for *parresia*, freedom or boldness of speech which is the prerogative of a citizen of a city-state. The *parresia* here, of course, has its roots in faith in preaching the *logos* of God (*logos*, of course, suggestive of Christ as *Logos*). However, in the words of vs..... 46 many thrust it away from themselves (*apothomai*, *apo-* as from), thereby willfully being defrauded of eternal life. With a sense of undisguised rejection, Paul and Barnabas call them as unworthy. Here is the precise point where they turn from the Jews to the Gentiles and set the church on a course that would alter it forever.

The two apostles next quote from Isaiah, possibly again having in mind that Jesus quoted from Isaiah in the synagogue which nearly got him killed. The passage is 49.6 which according to the original runs in full as “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Note the word “servant” which isn’t mentioned in the situation at hand but certainly inferred. That, of course, means Jesus Christ, and everyone realized it. We have no response from the Jews; again the incident at Nazareth may have come very close to being repeated. But with the Gentiles now fired up after hearing they were entitled to the same saving presence of God, at once they sprang to protect Paul, Barnabas and their companions.

Interestingly after this dramatic turn of events we have the rather prosaic words “the word (*logos*) of the Lord spread throughout all the region.” It should read more as “the word of the Lord exploded throughout all the region.” Actually the verb *diaphero* or to carry through (*dia-*) does a good job with the latter in mind. However, just as quickly the Jews started a persecution against Paul and Barnabas. The author is quick to note that such an incitement started at the hands of prominent women. What he’s trying to say is that at the root of this persecution is gossip instigated by rich women with plenty of time on their hands, clearly an un-PC remark to make. No problem, really, for Paul and company. Being filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, they simply made the traditional gesture of contempt and left. At this point nothing is said of the newly converted Gentiles, some if not many of whom must have accompanied them or tired to do so. That in itself must have been a new challenge Paul, Barnabas and company didn’t quite expect.

19 May, Fifth Sunday of Easter

21) When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23) And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed. 24) Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25) And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia; 26) and from there they sailed to Antioch where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. 27) And when they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28) And they remained no little time with the disciples. Acts 14.21-28

“That city” is Lystra where Jews had stoned Paul and left him for dead. Amazingly, Paul got up and returned though nothing is said of the reception he had received, if any. Apparently his disciples managed to keep him out of sight (not small task, given his character), not wanting to repeat what had just happened. Apparently some of the disciples persuaded him this wasn’t going to work, so he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

Note that the excerpt at hand uses the third person plural. Not a mention of Paul. Even though vs.... 20 says that Paul and Barnabas went to Derbe, we don’t know the identity of anyone else though most likely others accompanied the two. Also note that after having preached the Gospel in that town, they return to Lystra. Nothing is said of Paul’s reception. Perhaps even some thought he had returned from the dead and were terrified. This would be in accord with the people who earlier considered him Hermes after having cured a cripple.

Episterizo is the verb in vs.... 22 meaning literally to strengthen upon, the preposition *epi-* indicative of a certain intensification. Along with this verb the same verse has *parakaleo* or literally to summon alongside of (*para-*). Such *para-*ness takes the *epi-* of *episterizo* a step further for the purpose of having those whom the disciples are addressing to remain in the faith. The verb is *emmeno*, an intensification like *epi-* of *episterizo*, a remaining-in (*em-* or *en-*). The two verb are aimed at preparation for many tribulations before entering the kingdom of heaven.

Thlipsis or tribulation connotes a pressing in upon, a kind of squeezing. Without going into detail—those listening certainly must have Paul’s recent stoning in mind—they are a prerequisite for entry into the kingdom of heaven. Note the two uses of the preposition *eis*: one prefaced to the verb *eiserchomai* and the other free-standing, to enter into. Surely not all could take the prospect of future persecution though they must have been intrigued.

The disciples set up positions of leadership “in every church,” the verb being *cheirotoneo*, literally to elect by a show of hands. Once this had been completed, the disciples continue their missionary activity. Again, Paul isn’t mentioned. This silence almost is a kind of protection placed around him after nearly having lost his life at Lystra. Again, they return to that city after having covered considerable territory. Antioch was dear to the disciples by reason of having been commended to God’s grace. The verb is *paradidomai*, literally to give beside (second instance of *para-*) or to succeed not unlike receiving an inheritance. Here it’s used with *charis*, grace or favor by reason of the work the disciples had fulfilled. Such work or *ergon* means that which is wrought and includes the whole round of visits from Pisidia to Attalia noted in vs...s. 24-25 prior to arriving at Antioch.

In vs.... 27 note the use of two prepositions *para-* and *sun-* or beside and with: *paraginomai* and *sunago*, to arrive (along side or *para-*) and to gather. The first suggests a leading into the second with regard to the church where “they” told of God’s deeds and used the analogy of a door of faith being opened to the Gentiles. It’s not clear whether the people “they” were addressing are Jews or Gentiles or most likely a mixture of both. If the Jews, this was further proof of the universality of the disciples’ message. If the Gentiles, a real source of delight at the prospect of people like themselves entering the faith. If Jews and Gentiles, proof that both groups could move forward together without hostility.

This excerpt concludes with the places mentioned in vs...s. 24 and 25 in mind, that is, of the need to be on the move as much as possible. The verb *diatribo* means to remain and literally runs as to rub through (*dia-*).

26 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

1) But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2) And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question...22) Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, 23) with the following letter: "The brethren, both the apostles and the elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting. 24) Since we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, 25) it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26) men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27) We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word

of mouth. 28) For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29) that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." Acts 15.1-2 & 22-29

The small word “but” (*kai*) is significant because it signals a change from the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles in 14.28 to those who were sticking to the Jewish custom of circumcision and demanding it of newcomers to the faith. *Ethos* is the word for custom as applied to Moses and signifies the norms he had established. The text at hand omits vs....s. 3-21 which deals with the admission of Gentiles to the budding church, still very much identified with the Jewish religion. From there it jumps to a letter delivered through Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas as addressed to the Gentiles in Antioch and Cilicia.

A letter as in this case is intended to be read aloud, for example, when the new Christians were gathered for Sunday worship. vs.... 24 gets to the heart of the matter, namely, that reports had reached them concerning those who have caused trouble, *tarasso* meaning to throw into confusion. This was done through words, *logos* either as in written form or most likely as gossip. Also these so-called representatives “from us” or those in leadership positions had caused considerable unease, the verb being *anaskeuazo* which means reversing what had been done. Obviously implied is the missionary work under Paul’s direction. This was done without instruction, *diastellomai* inferring the giving of strict instructions. Interestingly no names are given throughout; everyone knew whom they were, and it seemed better to leave it as this. The last thing on everyone’s minds was scandal.

The letter continues to say that Barnabas and Paul will be sent along, they by now being well known which makes for assurance of a warm welcome. In fact, they have risked their lives, *psuche* being used which fundamentally means soul and here suggests their very being. Note too that Judas and Silas will communicate the same thing through word of mouth, these words suggestive of countering any false reports or rumors.

vs... 28 comes across with a rather general admonition inspired by the Holy Spirit to ask only what’s necessary, this being put as a burden or *baros*. Such a weight or load consists of the following three which are quite nitty-gritty. The key word is *apecho* or to refrain from:

- 1) Anything sacrificed to idols
- 2) From blood which includes animals that have been strangled
- 3) Unchastity or *porneia* which also means fornication as well as prostitution

So with this brief exhortation which largely implies staying away from non-Christian religious practices, those who follow them will do well or *diatereo*, the preposition *dia-* or through suggestive of careful observance. With these three in mind, perhaps those who

have come “from us” were insinuating that it’s no problem to engage in pagan sacrifices. Then the letter ends simply with a farewell.

30 May, Ascension of the Lord

1) *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach* 2) *until the day when he was taken up after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.* 3) *To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking of the kingdom of God.* 4) *And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father which, he said, "you heard from me,* 5) *for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* 6) *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* 7) *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.* 8) *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."* 9) *And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.* 10) *And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes* 11) *and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."* Acts 1.1-11

“First book” or first *logos*...word-as-expression, a fitting term for the Gospel or *logos* according to St. Luke. “First” implies that the book at hand is the second *logos*. The first *logos* dealt with the subject of all that Jesus (i.e., the *Logos*) began to do and to teach. *Archo* as to begin also means to rule, have governance over as well as to be the first principle that sets everything else in motion. Here that applies to *poieo* and *didasko*. There’s a specific time frame for these two which fits in with *archo* as to being their source, the day or the Ascension when Jesus ascended into heaven or rather, was taken up, *analambano*. Compare with Lk 24.51: he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.” The verb is *anaphero* which is reminiscent of the ascent of Elijah. It’s preceded by Jesus parting from his apostles, *diistemi* not being like the separation of Elijah from Elisha in 2Kg 3.11: “Behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them.”

Prior to his ascension, Jesus gave a singular commandment to his apostles (*entellomai*) through the Holy Spirit which perhaps consists of what he had said during the Last Supper, something still very fresh in the minds of the apostles. So at this juncture he reminded them, possibly repeating much of what he had said then. As for these apostles—note vs.... 2 says that Jesus had chosen them—he presented himself to them after his resurrection. The verb here is *paristemi*, to stand beside or nearby, *para-*. During this time of forty days Jesus is engaged at giving proofs of being alive, *tekmerion* meaning that from

which something is known for certain. Note the word “many” compared with the few which are recorded in the Gospels.

As well as giving “many” proofs, Jesus continues pretty much as he had done prior to his death and resurrection, that is, speaking of the kingdom of God, only now with a wholly different and charged meaning. There’s no record as to the apostles’ response. They remain pretty much ignorant as they had been and in need of the Holy Spirit which will come shortly at Pentecost. Jesus was fully aware of this inveterate ignorance which is why he charged to them to remain in Jerusalem until they are baptized with the Holy Spirit. Analogous to this is Jesus having been baptized by John, something they could relate to. In this way the Spirit’s descent wouldn’t come as a total surprise.

vs... 6 is demonstrative of the apostles’ continued ignorance, asking Jesus about him restoring the kingdom to Israel. Such ignorance is compounded by him having spoken of the kingdom of God in vs... 3. In other words, they simply didn’t get it and were in dire need of being baptized, something they felt was necessary albeit vaguely. If Jesus weren’t on the verge of ascending into heaven, he’d lay it on them thick. All the more the desire to get out and leave them in charge of the Holy Spirit.

As expected in response to the uninformed question of vs... 6, Jesus repeats the fact that the Holy Spirit will come upon the apostles, giving them power or *dunamis* (the capacity to carry out something) to become witnesses (*martus*). Again, they were virtually clueless at this point and had a lot to ponder until Pentecost some forty days hence.

vs... 9 has the verb *hupolambano* or taken up as from under (*hupo-*); compare with *analambano* and *anaphero* noted in the first paragraph, two verbs with the preposition *ana-* signifying motion upwards compared from below as with *hupo-*.

This excerpt concludes on a somewhat humorous note with two men in white robes¹ posing a rhetorical question with the intent of not receiving an answer. Why are the apostles looking into heaven? The verb is *blepo* (to have the power of sight) compared with two other verbs related to seeing. The first is *atenizo* with respect to gazing into heaven or to look with great intent and the second is *theaomai* or to behold as with a sense of wonder. *Theaomai* applies to seeing Jesus coming at a later time. In other words, *theaomai* with its sense of wonderment should have been applied when they saw Jesus ascending into heaven, not the fixity implied by *atenizo*. *Theaomai* will annul, if you will, this *atenizo* along with *blepo*.

1 Compare with Lk 24.4 concerning the women who visited Christ’s tomb: “While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.” Then in vs.... 5 they pose a rhetorical question not unlike the one at hand, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”

2 June, Seventh Sunday of Easter

55) *But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God* 56) *and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God."* 57) *But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him.* 58) *Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.* 59) *And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."* 60) *And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7.55-60*

The conjunctive *de* translated as “but” suggests something that had happened just before, and that is found in vs. 54. That verse also has *de* and is important to understand what follows: “Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him.” *Diaprio* is the verb for enraged meaning to saw asunder (*dia-* or through), this being intensified by the noun *kardia* or heart which the RSV doesn’t translate. As for the grinding of teeth, it’s done literally “upon (*epi*) him (Stephen).”

As for Stephen being full (*pleres*) of the Holy Spirit, he mirrors 2.4 or the apostles at Pentecost: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (*Pneuma*).” Such fullness enabled Stephen to know his end was close as he gazed into heaven. The Greek text has the verb *huparcho* (*hupo*: from under) suggestive of this which usually translates as to begin; i.e., he began to gaze into heaven by way of being *pleres* of the *Pneuma*. Thus *hupoarcho* is used with *atenizo* or to gaze, to look intently. The adjective *atenes* which comes from this verb means strained, tight. Thus the alpha privative implies something negative but taken here in a positive sense: to gaze without extension in space and time. Stephen, of course, couldn’t do this without the *Pneuma*. Instead of joining him in this *atenizo*, his murderers refused outrightly and blocked their ears after which they rushed upon him. In a sense, it’d be easy for them to gaze in the same direction as Stephen, a missed opportunity which would work to their detriment.

Chances are that when Stephen was seized and dragged outside the city (Jerusalem), he was completely unaware of the violence being done to him. Once outside, the murderers laid their garments at the feet of Saul which is a sign of acknowledging his leadership and implication in the deed. Nothing is said of him being inside Jerusalem but most likely he was present, even led, those crying out, stopping their ears and rushing upon Stephen. Later in life he would compare his Damascus road conversion with Stephen’s *atenizo*, being haunted by it between now and then. Similarly, it’s possible that while Stephen was caught up in his vision Saul got a glimpse of Jesus in God’s glory, albeit fleetingly, but was as yet

unable to acknowledge it. More accurately, he was aware of Jesus' reverse *atenizo* at him, if you will. It was a sure sign that despite being involved so intensely in his persecution of the Christians, he was bound to become one of them.

At the point of death Stephen committed his *pneuma* or spirit to Jesus, having been filled with the divine *Pneuma*. Then like Jesus at his crucifixion, he asked forgiveness for those stoning him. The verb *histemi* for "hold" means not to have the sin of murder being held fast or stand against those committing it. While Saul consented (*suneudokeo*: to have the pleasure with), perhaps he did so half-heartedly due to that fleeting *atenizo* by Jesus to him.²

9 June, Pentecost Sunday

1) Now the whole earth had one language and few words. 2) And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3) And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. 4) Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." 5) And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6) And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7) Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language that they may not understand one another's speech." 8) So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9) Therefore its name was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. Genesis 11.1-9

This excerpt is taken from the Vigil Mass instead of the more familiar account of Pentecost from Acts of the Apostles. The notations are lifted from **Notes on the Book of Genesis**, also on this homepage.

Re. vs.1: Despite the detailed genealogies of Chapter Ten, these various groupings were united as far as language goes. To demonstrate this unity, note the similarity between whole earth (*kal-‘eretz*) and one language (*saphah ‘echath*). To counter this unity, cf. the following references in the previous chapter (10): "These are the sons of Japheth in their lands, each with his own language" [vs... 5]; "These are the sons of Ham, by their families, their languages" [vs... 20]; "These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their languages" [vs... 31]. Here is the first mention of language (*lashon*) in accord with Noah's three sons. This term also means "tongue, "speech:" "A people of foreign speech (*lashon*) and hard tongue"

2 This part about Saul's consent is 8.1 not included in today's reading.

[Ezk 3.5]. *Saphah* as used in 11.1 can mean “lip:” “But oh, that God would speak, and open his lips to you” [Job 11.5]. “Few words:” the adjective ‘*echad*’ which basically means “first,” “one;” the latter is used in 1.5: “And there was evening and there was morning, one day (or ‘day one’).” The primeval unity of speech is soon to be lost; Christian tradition sees a recovery of this unity of speech in the Holy Spirit’s descent at Pentecost:” And how is it that we hear each of us in his own native language” [Acts 2.8]? Also cf. Rev 7.9-10: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb!’”

Re. vs. 2: East (*qedem*): this direction is first mentioned in 2.8: “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east.” Also, it was the side of Eden from which God banished the man: “He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim (etc.).” Perhaps this migration...it took place after the flood when Eden was destroyed...can be taken as a sign of the innate human tendency to reside as close to paradise lost as possible. Migrated (*nasah*): fundamentally, “to pull up” in the sense of breaking camp; it thus suggests temporary living as opposed to a permanent residence and here describes that movement from the east. I.e., people after the flood had been “camped” in the east and spread out to the three other cardinal points. “Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor” [35.16].

Plain (*biqah*): from a verbal root meaning “to cleave” and hence, something lying in between two mountains or hills; it can also apply to a valley. “I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys” [Is 41.18]. In the verse at hand, *biqah* is associated with the “land of Shinar” or Babylon; cf. 10.10: “The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.” Reference here is to Nimrod, “the first on earth to be a mighty man” [10.8].

Settled (*yashav*): the opposite of *nasah*. Perhaps Shinar/Babylon was an approximation of the Garden of Eden even if dimly perceived. Note that 2.14 has one of the four branches of the river that flowed from Eden as the Euphrates (cf. 2.14), this area which had been chosen and can bridge the connection with Eden.

Re. vs. 3: “To one another” is literally expressed in the Hebrew text as “They said man to his neighbor” which signifies spontaneity or unity at the task about to be accomplished. The exclamation “Come” signals that the migrants have reached a place to settle down permanently. This permanence is expressed by the elements necessary for constructing a building, bricks and mortar. vs... 3 may be paralleled with the hard labor imposed upon the Israelites by the Egyptians in order to construct their buildings: “and made their lives

bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor” [Ex 1.14]. In contrast to this slave labor, the “Come” of vs... 3 represents free service.

Re. vs. 4: A continuation of the previous verse with another exhortation the newly arrived migrants expressed among each other, “Come.” Now that these people had bricks and mortar available they set about the task of building a city and tower; the Hebrew reads, “let us build to ourselves” which further expresses the desire for a permanent dwelling place. This is the third mention in Genesis of a city, the first associated with Enoch (cf. 4.17) and the second (10.11): “(Nimrod) built Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is, the great city.”

Tower (*migdal*): a structure erected along with the city, most likely in its center. This term is often used with regard to fortified cities and castles as well as a watchtower. “He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it” [Is 5.2]. Top (*ro’sh*): in the fundamental sense of “head” which extends into the heavens; the very first verse of Genesis has God making the heavens and the earth. Thus the heavens to can represent the attempt not so much to reach God by human means but the extreme or highest point of his creation. The plural “heavens” may be contrasted with the singular “heaven,” often used to denote God’s dwelling: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision” [Ps 2.4]...a verse which easily applies to the one under consideration. The construction of this city and tower has a two-fold purpose:

1) to obtain renown or “name:” “Children and the building of a city establish a man’s name, but a blameless wife is accounted better than both” [Sir 40.19].

2) to prevent the new migrants from reverting back to their nomadic way of life, that is, to avert being scattered (puts). Compare the use of this verb with 9.19: “These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.”

Re. vs. 5: Came down (*yarad*): in the sense of making a descent; cf. Ex 3.8 for a parallel sense and with the same verb: “and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land.” Both verses may be related to 3.8: “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” Here there is no divine descent; God is on the same horizontal plane, as it were, with Adam and Eve. *Yarad* suggests a greater distance from the human race; it is interesting to keep this verb in mind with regard to the upward-reaching tower which militates against the divine *yarad*. “To see,” an action by God after his descent; it is as though God were walking through the city on the same level with it and gazing up at the tower which he perceived as an affront to his divinity. “Sons of men:” as opposed to plain “men” as in vs... 2; “sons” intimates the earthly origins of the human race in comparison with God’s descent.

Re. vs. 6: The opening words of this verb may be seen as God speaking to himself, a biblical way of expression internal self-reflection in an outward fashion. Behold or hen thus serves to introduce this divine reflection by way of exclamation. One ('*echad*): as in "few words" of vs... 1 and the reference to 1.5 as to a fuller sense of this adjective. In the verse at hand, '*echad* is used with "people one" and "language one;" cf. vs... 1 for *lashon* or language.

Beginning (*chalal*): a verb is used here which reads in the Hebrew text, "this they began to do;" past tense in reference to the construction of a city and tower. Cf. 9.20 which uses *chalal*: "Noah was the first (i.e., 'began') tiller of the soil." Propose (*zamam*): connotes murmuring, of proposing in an (often) negative sense: "The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him" [Ps 37.12]. *Zamam* is bound up with the something difficult or impossible to effect (*bastar*) as in Job 42.2 which follows the same structure but in a different sense: "I know that you (God) can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

Re. vs. 7: The conclusion of God's address or self-reflection. Here we have the third and final "come:" 1) vs... 3 where men propose to make bricks; 2) vs... 4 where they propose to construct a city and tower and 3) the verse at hand. Note that vs... 5 already has the Lord having come down and as present within the city. vs... 7 continues this theme, as though he had returned to his own dwelling and returns again. "Let us" parallels that creative burst of 1.26, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Also cf. 18.21 which is more pertinent to the sentiment of the verse at hand: "I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know."

Confuse (*balal*): fundamentally, "to swallow down," "to devour." "You will not let me alone while I swallow down my spittle" [Job 7.19]. *Balal* also means to destroy as in Ps 21.10: "You will destroy their offspring from the earth and their children from among the sons of men." The object of *balal* is "their language" or *saphah* which was one, '*echad* (vs... 1). In a broader sense, this verb is the exact opposite of the harmonizing principle expressed through the adjective; it creates, as it were a flood, of languages after the flood of water from which Noah and his family had recently emerged.

Understand (*shamah*): literally, "to hear." Contrast this with the positive sense of hearing as in Dt 3.4, "Hear therefore, O Israel, the Lord our God is one ('*echad*) Lord." The about to be effected confusion is enhanced by the literal Hebrew text which reads, "not hear man the language of his neighbor." I.e., the confusion is close and personal by this intimate form of human relationship. Speech: another used of *saphah*; compare with "language" of vs... 1.

Re. vs. 8: Scattered (*puts*): a verb with the same intent as "confuse" and "not understand" of vs... 7. *Puts* brings to fulfillment of the people's fear which obliged them to build the city and tower, vs... 4: "lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." For

another reference: “Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered” [Zech 13.7]. “From there” or the city and tower—two centers of unity and language—which are contrasted with “face of all the earth.”

The verse at hand says that the people ceased construction of the city; no mention is made of the tower (*migdal*) but may be implied by the verb left off or *chadal* since both rhyme. “Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead, or shall I forbear” [1 Kg 22.6]? The preposition *l-* (to) prefixed to the verb “to build” heightens the sense of disruption with regard to constructing the city.

Re. vs. 9: Babel: the city’s name, not necessarily applied to the tower. When people migrated to the land of Shinar (vs... 1) they did not give a name to their city. The RSV says that Babel is interpreted as “gate of God” and became synonymous with the confusion of language (vs... 7, *balal*). Contrast “(language) of all the earth” with “face of all the earth,” the latter being the place to which the Lord scattered (*puts* again) the builders of the city and tower. “Through Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify her strong height, yet destroyers would come from me upon her, says the Lord” [Jer 51.53]. Also, “So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence and shall be found no more” [Rev 18.21]. Contrast this scattering with the divine injunction given to Noah and his sons right after the flood: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” Despite the scattering of people with one language, there is not mention that the city and tower are destroyed.

16 June, Trinity Sunday

22) The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. 23) Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. 24) When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. 25) Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; 26) before he had made the earth with its fields or the first of the dust of the world. 27) When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28) when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29) when he assigned to the sea its limit so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30) then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, 31) rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men. Proverbs 8.22-31

This excerpt is lifted from **Expansions on the Book of Proverbs** also on this homepage.

Re. vs. 22: Starting here and going through vs. 31 wisdom shifts direction, if you will, by speaking of her origins or with God before creation came into being. This is brought out by “at the beginning” or *re’shyth*. The verse at hand automatically makes one think of the *re’shyth* of Gen 1.1.

That *re'shyth* is unspecified, if you will ('in the beginning') whereas the one at hand is with respect to the Lord's "work" or *derek* (cf. vs. 13) which specifically means a road or way and hence reads "at the beginning of his way." This *derek* enhances the difference between when wisdom was created and the beginning of creation in Genesis. As for the verb "created," it is *qanah*, it is noted last in 4.7 and means to possess, to acquire. In other words, wisdom was already in existence but acquired by the Lord later on, "at the beginning of his *derek*" or way. A contrast between "first" and "of old" or *qedem* and *me'az*, the latter literally meaning "from then" which refers to the beginning at hand in this verse with regard to "acts" or *mipphal*, the only use of this noun in the Bible. It derives from the verbal root *pahal* (to make, to fabricate). Thus the making of wisdom which took place at the beginning of his work was immediately prior to it. This protracted interlude through vs. 31 is intended to set the stage for wisdom to address her sons in vs. 32, to make them listen to her through the remainder of Chapter Eight. One can only imagine Solomon sitting on the sidelines, as it were, the most eager listener to wisdom.

Re. vs. 23: Three modes of time stretching back to before human life: 1) "Ages ago" or *hulam* prefaced with the preposition *min* or "from:" "from ages" "When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever" [19.25]. 2) "At the first" or *r'osh* and prefaced with the preposition *min* or "from the first (head)." 3) "Before the beginning" or *qedem* prefaced with *min* or "from the beginning" or literally as "from that which was before," *qedem* differing from *re'shyth* of vs. 22 as being more temporal whereas the latter, a noun, is suggestive almost as a place-where. In the verse at hand, *qedem* is associated with *'erets* or "earth." This earth is more localized than the Lord's "work" of vs. 22 and the beginning of Genesis. *Nasak* is the verb "set up," the only instance in Proverbs and refers to pouring out as a libation or the anointing of a king. "For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep and has closed your eyes, the prophets" [Is 29.10]. Because *nasak* is fluid, the idea in Proverbs is that wisdom "was set up" with regard to the just mentioned three time frames but continues to be set up...poured forth.

Re. vs. 24: *Chul* is the verb from "brought forth" as in the next verse, a way to emphasize the birth of wisdom prior to creation. "The north wind brings forth rain; and a backbiting tongue, angry looks" [25.23]. *Tehom* and *mahyan* are the nouns for "depths" and "springs" The former are mentioned prior to creation in Gn .12 and the latter for the first time with regard to Noah's flood (cf. Gn 7.11). In the verse at hand *mahyan* are "abounding" or *kavad* with water, that is, heavy with water (cf. 7.23). Because the flood associated with Noah take place after creation, the *mahyan* are manifestations within creation of the *tehom* which caused the earth to become flooded.

Re. vs. 25: The verb *chul* is used again, this time with regard to both mountains and hills. *Chul* with regard to wisdom is contrasted with these two which "had been shaped" or *tavah*, the only use of this verb in Proverbs which means to seal as well as to be plunged. "Now that your feet are sunk in the mire, they turn away from you" [Jer 38.22]. One gets the

impression that the mountains and hills were sunk deeply, if you will, within the earth, an image of an incredibly long period of time.

Re. vs. 26: *Had-lo'*: “before” or literally “still not” or “not yet” which differs from *qedem* of vs. 23, “before.” While both refer to wisdom’s pre-existence to creation, the former intimates a kind of distance between God thinking about creation and their coming into being whereas the latter intimates a time just prior to their coming into being. *Hasah* is the verb for “made” and of all the verbs between vss.22 and 31 is the only one pertaining to actual making. The other verbs apply to creation as already fashioned, of being arranged in one way or another. *Chuts* is translated here as “with its fields” which the RSV says is “uncertain” and can be rendered something as “nor the fields.” *R’osh* is the noun for “first” and suggests the beginning or first principle of something. In the verse at hand, *r’osh* pertains to “dust” or *haphar*, the only mention of this noun in Proverbs. “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground” [Gn 2.7]. *Tevel* pertains more to the inhabited world compared with *’erets* which often refers to a country belonging to a particular group of people. Is 14.21 contains both: “Lest they (sons of evildoers) rise and possess the earth and fill the face of the world with cities.”

Re. vs. 27: *Kun* is the verb for “established” and used with respect to the “heavens” (*shamaym*) and is reminiscent of Gn 1.7-8 which there is also called “firmament” or *raqyah* meaning that which is spread out. And so wisdom is not unlike the *Ruach* of God “hovering over the face of the waters” [Gn 1.2]. The verse at hand doesn’t intimate that wisdom had a hand in creation but was an observer of all that was transpiring. *Chaqaq* is the verb for “drew” here is with regard to a “circle” or *chug*, one of three biblical references and refers to the vault of the sky as well as the horizon. “Thick clouds enwrap him so that he does not see, and he walks on the vault of heaven” [Job 22.14] (the other reference is Is 40.22). The drawing at hand is done “on the face of the deep” or *tehom* which means that wisdom was present when the Lord brought order from the chaos of *tehom*, again hearkening back to the first verses of Genesis.

Re. vs. 28: *Amats* is the verb for “made firm” and suggests that the skies required being strong enough so as not to dissipate. “She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong” [31.17]. In the verse at hand, *amats* concerns the “skies” or *shachaq* more specifically, clouds. At the other extreme of creation, if you will, are the “fountains” or *hayin* which also means eye. Note the difference from *mahyan* (‘springs’) in vs. 24, but both are from the same verbal root. In the verse at hand, *hayin* are associated with *tehom* (cf. vs. 27). They are “established” or *kun* as with the heavens in the previous verse.

Re. vs. 29: *Sum* is the verb for “assigned” and means more a placing or setting, almost on a pre-arranged site or spot. It has the preposition *b-* (‘in’) prefaced to it reading literally “in setting.” The other Proverbs reference is 30.26: “The badgers are a people not mighty, yet

they make their homes in the rocks.” In the verse at hand, this setting is with regard to the “limit” or *choq* which means an appointed time or portion. “Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful (*choq*) for me” [30.8]. *Choq* serves to prevent the waters of the deep mentioned in the last verse from transgressing or *havar*, that is to go over or go past the Lord’s “command” or *peh* and fundamentally means mouth. Thus the *choq* at hand is not allow primeval waters to pass over the Lord’s mouth, putting it literally but awkwardly. *Chaqaq* is the verb for “marked out” and is used with regard to *mosadoth* (feminine plural), the only use of this noun in Proverbs. In virtually all the other references *mosadoth* refers to basic elements of creation such as the earth: “All the foundations of the earth are shaken” [Ps 82.5].

Vs. 30: ‘*Etsel* or “then” was noted last in 7.12 which in the verse at hand refers to the various uses of “when” (*b-*) prior to creation. However, nothing in those verses is said of wisdom being a “master workman” or ‘*amon*, the only biblical use of this term which derives from the verbal root ‘*aman* (to believe, to trust) and is not unlike the noun ‘*emun* found in 13.17 (and 14,5, 20.6): “A bad messenger plunges men into trouble, but a faithful envoy brings healing.” In the verse at hand, the word “like” is not used; wisdom is the ‘*amon*. *Shahshuhym* is the noun (masculine plural) for “delight” which is found in the next verse and derives from the verbal root *shahah* (to stroke, to delight). “Your testimonies are my delight, they are my counselors” [Ps 119.24]. “Daily” is expressed by *yom yom* or literally “day day.” It is used with “delighting” or *sachaq* fundamentally meaning to laugh and noted last in 1.26. The Hebrew text lacks both “his” and “rejoicing.” “Always” is expressed by “in all times” or *heth* noted last in 6.14.

Re. vs. 31: With this verse wisdom completes her statement begun in vs. 22 as a special companion of the Lord, and his name has not been mentioned specifically since that verse. *Sachaq* is the verb for “rejoicing” used in the previous verse and stated again for emphasis with regard to wisdom “laughing” or enjoying herself as an ‘*aman* (cf. vs. 30). It is used with regard to the Lord’s “world” or *tevel* (cf. vs. 26) which here is joined with “world” or ‘*erets* (cf. vs. 26).

Compare *sachaq* with *shahshuhym* (‘delighting’) as used in the previous verse as well which refers to the “sons of men” (‘*adam*). While wisdom may so delight in men, there is no reference here as to men rejoicing in wisdom. Three modes of time stretching back to before human life: 1) “Ages ago” or *hulam* prefaced with the preposition *min* or “from:” “from ages” “When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever” [19.25]. 2) “At the first” or *r’osh* noted last in 1.21 and here also prefaced with the preposition *min* or “from the first (head).” 3) “Before the beginning” or *qedem* (cf. vs. 22) prefaced with *min* or “from the beginning” or literally as “from that which was before,” *qedem* differing from *re’shyth* of vs. 22 as being more temporal whereas the latter, a noun, is suggestive almost as a place-where. In the verse at hand, *qedem* is associated with ‘*erets* or

“earth” (cf. 3.19). This earth is more localized than the Lord’s “work” of vs. 22 and the beginning of Genesis. *Nasak* is the verb “set up,” the only instance in Proverbs and refers to pouring out as a libation or the anointing of a king. “For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep and has closed your eyes, the prophets” [Is 29.10]. Because *nasak* is fluid, the idea in Proverbs is that wisdom “was set up” with regard to the just mentioned three time frames but continues to be set up...poured forth.

23 June, Corpus Christi

18) And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. 19) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; 20) and blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" Genesis 14.18-20

This excerpt is lifted from **Expansions on the Book of Genesis**, also on this homepage.

There is a redeeming aspect to this rescue of Lot and handing him over to the king of Sodom through the medium of Melchizedek, king of Salem who “brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God the Most High” [vs. 18]. As his very name intimates (‘righteousness is my king’), Melchizedek is very different from the anonymous king of Sodom, being a priest (*kohen*) besides. This is the first mention of “priest” in the Bible, and Melchizedek is an archetype of priests that will follow in his footsteps. Not only was Melchizedek a priest but was one of “God the Most High (*helyon*).” He received this honor from the Lord which was included in the land of Canaan set aside for Abram. If the Lord can make Canaan as Abram’s future inheritance, it’s just as easy for him to insert only one king who held righteousness in high regard and who would recognized Abram as the future inheritor. Thus Melchizedek is similar to Enoch and Noah before him, two men singled out for having walked with God while the multitude among which they had lived hadn’t a clue as to what was going on. The Epistle to the Hebrews puts this divine walking in terms not dissimilar to that theme: “He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life” [7.3]. By comparison, the king of Sodom brought no offering to Abram; he could have been a priest but certainly not of God Most High, given the already tarnished reputation of his city. Salem refers to *shalom* or peace and refers to the future Jerusalem where Melchizedek reigned. Surely from that high vantage point he and his subjects were able to witness the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that was to come. The offerings of Melchizedek (bread and wine) are modest but significant insofar as they are representative of that the fruit of that land Abram was to inherit, especially Salem which later would become so important.

In vss. 19-20 the king/priest Melchizedek blessed (*barak*; cf. 9.1 where God blesses Noah and his sons) Abram and does so by “God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.” This short but significant *barak* has the preposition *l-* prefaced to “God.” That is to say, it reads literally “to God,” that Abram is “to” him, a direct relationship with God, the first divine relationship acknowledged by a person. Despite the summons to leave his native Haran, take the journey into Canaan and then unexpectedly flee into Egypt and back to Canaan, Abram received no confirmation from a fellow human being about this mission. That means Abram had to live by the initial divine summons even though it was re-confirmed while in Canaan. How does Abram share this...or can he? Is there anyone among his family who can comprehend his actions such as erecting an altar? And so Abram is not unlike his predecessor Noah who pretty much kept to himself. The person closest to him is his nephew Lot though he emerges more as an opportunist or hanger-on to Abram than anything else. Even his first rescue just recounted and his more dramatic one from Sodom later on isn’t especially flattering.

Returning to the blessing of vs. 19, we have for “maker” (of heaven and earth) the verb *qanah* which more fundamentally means to acquire, to purchase, as noted earlier with reference to the proper name Cain. In the verse at hand, *qanah* implies that God had acquired heaven and earth meaning that it pre-existed or was just as eternal as he and thus sharing in some type of divine life. It’s a sentiment not entirely unlike the Spirit hovering over the waters in the opening verses of Genesis discussed in that context. We can expect someone like Melchizedek and his predecessors to have an idea like this, quite in line with a proper understanding of the biblical divinity for a person; he and they had lived in relative isolation yet kept the primeval understanding of God alive throughout so many generations. While Melchizedek lacks genealogy (cf. Heb 7.3 already cited), definitely he is a descendant from one of Noah’s three sons and had maintained some semblance of the Lord with whom Noah had walked. That means his descendants going back that far managed to keep alive a spark of divine awareness. Just the fact that human relations with God became so problematic due to the increase of sin and corruption is a sad commentary on the state of affairs in which Abram found himself. At the same time this narrow focus upon a single individual here and there within Genesis is exciting, the reason why it captures our attention.

The second half of Melchizedek’s blessing is a reminder to Abram not to glory in his recent triumph of having rescued Lot but to attribute it to the Lord: “Blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” *Magan* is the verb for “deliver” which occurs two other times in the Bible, Prov 4.9 and Hos 11.8; from it is derived the noun “shield.” In the context at hand Melchizedek wishes Abram to acknowledge that God had acted as his shield...perhaps not so much to destroy his enemies but to protect him from them which accounts for the lack of details concerning how Abram got Lot (i.e., by not

slaying his captors). That would tie in nicely with Abram's earlier division of his forces into two parties, a division that took place deliberately at night or in secret. In sum, Abram would snatch Lot away under cover of darkness with his captors being unaware of what had transpired.

Abram's meeting with Melchizedek took place with the intent of handing over Lot to the jurisdiction of the king of Sodom in whose territory he had resided (cf. 13.12). Once Abram gave him a tenth of his possessions—and this was no mean sum chiefly consisting of animals and perhaps slaves—Melchizedek was overstepped by the king who was observing closely the blessing just pronounced. He intervenes with “Give me the persons but take the goods for yourself” [vs. 21]. Melchizedek is forced out of the picture by the king who demanded Abram's possessions or *rekush* noted in vs. 12: “they also took Lot...and his goods and departed.” As for the word “persons,” the Hebrew has *nephesh* or literally, “soul” which pertains to breath, a fact noted earlier in this document. And so we see a distinction here, one not found in vs. 12, between *rekush* and persons. This king wanted human beings, not *rekush*, to bring back to Sodom for reasons all too easily associated with the name of the city. Since he had the power to do what he wanted and Melchizedek was unable to counter him, the situation became tense very quickly. Melchizedek didn't want to do the king's bidding, trying his best to prevent the handover of these persons...*nephesh*...into his possession. Because *nephesh* implies the very essence of a person, the king wanted to put his intended prey totally under his control and his alone. By saying to Abram that the Lord “has delivered your enemies into your hand,” he was hoping that Abram would get the hint, that one of these enemies was the king of Sodom, a man never to be trusted.

So here we have Melchizedek and the king of Sodom, two diametrically opposed characters, coming out to meet Abram, each with a different purpose. Melchizedek takes the initiative by pronouncing his blessing, thereby hoping to work in Abram's favor. Although his words sounded noble in comparison with the king, his offerings of bread and wine must have looked pathetic to such an ignominious character. Both the blessing and offering didn't work because the king of Sodom had his mind set on taking *nephesh*, not *rekush*. Then we have Lot who remains silent awaiting the fate that will be meted out to him shortly. Vss. 22-23 break the tension of this short but tense situation, a struggle between Abram and a less than desirable representative of the land he had entered and was destined to inherit. Abram says to the king of Sodom with confidence, most likely emboldened by his recent expedition to rescue his nephew, Lot, “I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.” The verb for “sworn” is *rum* which fundamentally means to exalt, lift up, and here pertains to the lifting up of Abram's hands in worship. “I have lifted up my voice and cried” [39.15]. That is to say, Abram lifts up his

hands to the “acquirer (*qanah*) of heaven and earth,” this word being used by Melchizedek in his blessing.