Patterns for preaching: a rhetorical analysis of the sermons of Paul in Acts 13, 17, and 20

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Patterns for Preaching—A Rhetorical Analysis
of the Sermons of Paul in Acts 13, 17, and 20

by

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Doctor of Theology

Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972

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The purpose of this study is to identify any consistent strains in the sermons of Paul, with the assumption that such strains are divinely intended guidelines for contemporary preachers. The exact question to be answered is: "What are the inspired patterns for preaching contained in the sermons of Paul?"

An introductory chapter deals with the variety and effectiveness of Paul's preaching, the pragmatic aim and method of rhetorical analysis, and the abbreviated nature of the Biblical record.

The next three chapters provide a detailed examination of three of Paul's sermons: his sermon to the Jews in Acts 13 (Chapter Two), his sermon to the Gentiles in Acts 17 (Chapter Three), and his sermon to the Christians in Acts 20 (Chapter Four). These three particular sermons are chosen for analysis because of their substantial recording, their varied content, and, most importantly, because of their different audiences. Each of these chapters is developed in
approximately the same way. First, the historical setting of the sermon is described. Then, an exposition of the Biblical record is given. This exposition consists of an original translation of the sermon, an identification of the sermon’s theme and purpose, an indication of its structure and outline, an explanation of its argument, and a description of the audience’s response. Finally, each chapter concludes with a rhetorical analysis which seeks to determine why the sermon was so effective in achieving its goal.

The fifth and concluding chapter collates the results of the previous three and suggests that the inspired patterns for preaching contained in the sermons of Paul are as follows: a persuasive purpose, a single theme, an orderly structure, and a thorough adaptation of theme, structure, support material, style, and mood to each individual audience. Whenever Paul preached, his purpose was to persuade men to action. To accomplish this goal, he developed each sermon around one central theme, organized his content into a logical framework, and adapted every aspect of the message to the immediate audience before him. Each of these patterns is demonstrated through a review of the apostle’s preaching, and is reinforced by references to contemporary works in communication.
PATTERNS FOR PREACHING--A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS
OF THE SERMONS OF PAUL IN ACTS 13, 17, AND 20

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Bible Exposition
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Theology

by
Donald Robert Sunukjian
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Accepted by the Faculty of the Dallas Theological Seminary and Graduate School of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Theology.

Examining Committee
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CHAPTER I

THE STUDY OF PAUL'S SERMONS

It is reported of Augustine that he had three unfulfilled desires—to see Christ in the flesh, Rome in her glory, and Paul in the pulpit.

To see Paul in the pulpit—that is a desire that many have shared. Broadus, after omitting Christ from the comparison, calls Paul "the greatest of all preachers," and writes that "in the estimation of everyone who diligently studies his character and history, Paul must stand, among all preachers, unrivalled and alone." Wilkinson concludes that "among the preachers of the Christian past, later than Jesus, one figure stands out to the historical eye, salient, unique, incomparable. That figure is the apostle Paul." And Swartz declares:

There have been many eloquent preachers since his day, but the world has not yet seen his equal. The very planet feels his tread, the air yet vibrates with his speech, and his influence is felt throughout the world.

To see Paul in the pulpit—that is the desire of this present work also. To see him preaching through the pages of the New Testament,

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to watch his manner, to study his approach, to profit from his example—
that is the aim of this dissertation. As Bruce aptly puts it:

The minister who wishes to be sure that he stands in the true aposto-
tolic succession will turn to Acts again and again. What was the
message that the Apostles preached? How did they preach it? How
did they adapt their presentation of the message to their varying
congregations—Jewish, "God-fearing," and pagan? How, in other
words, did they solve "the problem of communication"? The preacher
who looks for the answers to these questions in Acts will find them,
and if he tests his own preaching by the answers that he finds, he
will know how far short he falls of the apostolic example.1

The goal of this dissertation, therefore, is to examine the
apostle’s preaching in order to learn from it. Specifically, the pur-
pose of this study is to identify any consistent strains in the sermons
of Paul, with the assumption that such strains are divinely intended
guidelines for contemporary preachers. The exact question to be an-
swered is: "What are the inspired patterns for preaching contained in
the sermons of Paul?"

The Value of Studying Paul

The variety of his sermons

The primary reason for studying Paul, as opposed to some other
New Testament figure, is that his sermons represent a wide variety of
speaking situations. The samples of his preaching are many in number;
and diverse in both content and context. Acts 13 is a missionary ser-
mon to Jews. Chapters 14 and 17 are evangelistic addresses to Gentiles,
the former to the unlettered pagans of Lystra, the latter to the edu-
cated Greeks of Athens. Acts 20 is a pastoral charge to a Christian

1F. F. Bruce, "The True Apostolic Succession; Recent Study in
assembly, while chapters 22, 24, and 26 are speeches of defense and vindication, directed respectively toward a Jewish mob, a Roman official, and a distinguished court.

Limitations of time and space, however, prevent a detailed examination of all of Paul's preaching, and some selection must be made. The speeches in Acts 13, 17, and 20, therefore, have been chosen for particular study in this dissertation. Luke's reporting of these sermons is substantial, and their content is varied. But the primary reason for choosing them is that each is addressed to a vastly different audience. The sermon in Acts 13 takes place before an eager audience in a Jewish synagogue of Pisidian Antioch. The address in Acts 17 is delivered to the cultured and curious Greeks of Athens. And the message in Acts 20 is given to a loving group of Christian believers. Each of these sermons, therefore, represents a different set of communicative conditions, and will serve admirably as a basis for establishing Pauline patterns for contemporary preaching.

**The effectiveness of his preaching**


The effect of his first recorded sermon at Antioch in Pisidia, which brought the whole city to listen to him on the following
Sabbath (Acts xiii.44); the burning eloquence which filled the conscience-stricken Felix with fear and awe (Acts xxiv.25); the impassioned oratory which moved Festus to exclaim that he was mad (Acts xxvi.24); the persuasiveness which fascinated and kept quiet a howling mob of Jews thirsting for his life (Acts xxii.2)—all these tell the same tale, and assure us that among the many and outstanding gifts possessed by the Apostle, that of speech was not the least. High Roman officials, Jewish kings, crowds of heathen, whether among the dilettanti of Athens or the peasants of Lystra, all acknowledge the power of that magic voice.

To the pagans at Lystra there was but one name which could do justice to the brilliance of Paul’s eloquence—Hermes, the herald of the gods! (Acts 14:12).

Surely anyone who can speak with such power and impact must be worthy of examination and emulation.

The Nature of Rhetorical Analysis

The method of approach in this study will be that of a "rhetorical analysis." These words require a brief explanation.

When Bishop Whately published his Elements of Rhetoric, he confessed in his preface that he had hesitated to use the word "rhetoric" in his title, because, he said, it is "apt to suggest to many minds an associated idea of empty declamation, or of dishonest artifice; or at best, a mere dissertation on Tropes and Figures of Speech." One can


2 All Scripture references are to the Revised Standard Version of 1952.

understand the good bishop's hesitancy. "Rhetoric" is one of those words which has been so unfortunate as to lose most of its good connotations and to be known by the bad company it has sometimes kept. There are five or six meanings given for "rhetoric" in the dictionary, but it is the negative ones which come to mind most readily—"artificial elegance of language; discourse without conviction or earnest feelings; inflated language; verbosity; bombast." For this reason it is not unusual to hear certain speeches described as "mere rhetoric," or certain speakers accused of "indulging in meaningless displays of rhetoric." The term, unfortunately, suggests high-sounding words without content, inflation of language to cover weakness of thought, or, worst of all, oratorical falsification to hide true intention.

But in its original and nobler meaning, "rhetoric" was defined simply as "the art of expressive speech or discourse; the art or practice of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion; skill in the effective use of speech." It is in this latter and more positive sense that the term is currently used in the field of communication. Bryant defines "rhetoric" as "the rationale of informative and suasive discourse, a body of principle and precept for the creation and analysis of speeches." Taylor calls it "the discovery and use of

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2 Ibid. Cf. also Aristotle's definition: "Rhetoric then may be defined as the Faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever" (The "Art" of Rhetoric 1.2.1).

3 Donald C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Scope," The
correct methods, with the audience always at the center of attention."
And Burke writes: "Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, or a study of the means of persuasion available for any given situation."

It is with this early and technical meaning, therefore, that the term "rhetoric" is used in this dissertation. The intention of this study is to analyze Paul's sermons from a "rhetorical" standpoint. This means that the main consideration is the apostle's ability as a communicator; the primary focus is on his method of influencing the audience. A rhetorical analysis, therefore, looks beyond the content of Paul's sermons and seeks to determine what he did to successfully impart his ideas to his hearers. Obviously his content must first be clearly understood, but the ultimate aim is strictly pragmatic:

Since speaking is a communicative venture, and since a speaker seeks to communicate a particular set of ideas and feelings to a specific audience, it must follow that the rhetorical critic is concerned

Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXIX (December, 1953), 408.


3Edwin Black ably distinguishes and defines the unique goal of a rhetorical analysis:
"Discourses can be culled for many purposes other than understanding how they work, which is the task of criticism. The political reporter may examine the deliberative address for indications of future policy; the biographer may look for clues to a cast of mind and an inner life; the poetaster may read the oration for its passages of fire; the pilgrim may search the sermon for a faith. These are legitimate preoccupations, and there are more like them; but they are not criticism. They are not disinterested enough to be criticism. Criticism has no relationship with its subject other than to account for how that subject works" (Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965], p. 18).
with the method employed by a speaker to achieve the response consistent with his purpose.\textsuperscript{1}

The primary questions, therefore, that underlie this rhetorical analysis are: What did Paul do to achieve his response? What did he say that influenced his audience? How did he say it? What particular tactics mark the method of his approach? What accounts for the acceptance of his message?

In short, this dissertation will analyze Paul's sermons to see how they "worked" in influencing men for God.

**The Abbreviation of the Biblical Record**

It is doubtful that the Biblical record of these addresses represents the complete text of what was originally said. Paul was often given to long sermons (cf. Acts 20:7-12; 28:23); yet any one of the messages in Acts 13, 17, or 20 can be read through aloud in just a few minutes. Many scholars have been struck by this "tantalizing brevity,"\textsuperscript{2} and have suggested that Luke's reports are compressions of the original messages. Robertson cautions, "One must bear in mind that the reports all bear evidence of great condensation."\textsuperscript{3} Cadbury writes, "The speeches that we have are all relatively brief and succinct and capable

\begin{itemize}
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of explanation as summaries of longer addresses. And McGarvey maintains: "All of these speeches are obviously only epitomes of the originals, very greatly abbreviated, such as could be remembered and reported by the speakers, or even by their hearers." Most students of the New Testament are agreed, therefore, that that the reports in Acts are synopses or compendiums of the original speeches.

It is still possible, however, to believe that the record in Acts reproduces the actual words that Paul spoke. While acknowledging the abbreviated nature of the report, one can at the same time concur with the statement of Conybeare and Howson: Luke "has evidently preserved, if not all the words, yet the very words uttered by the Apostle." Luke may not have reported everything Paul said; but what he

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did report, Paul did say.¹

This dissertation, therefore, will proceed on the assumption that the record in Acts is an accurate, though condensed, report of the sermons as Paul delivered them.

¹Perhaps the analogy of a student taking notes on a professor's lecture is appropriate here. A student does not make a note of every sentence the professor speaks, but what he does write down usually reflects the exact wording and style of the lecturer.
CHAPTER II

THE SERMON TO THE JEWS IN ACTS 13

Threaded throughout the book of Acts is the story of how the new-born Church joyfully set forth to win the world to God through Christ. It is a story of how men quickly and gladly obeyed their Lord’s final command to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The surge beyond Judea and Samaria toward a world-wide witness began when Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark started out on what was to be the first of several evangelistic tours. Acts 13 records the initial stages of their itinerary. They sailed first to the island of Cyprus where for several weeks they proclaimed the word of God (Acts 13:4-12). Then they headed north across 180 miles of water to the southern coast of Asia Minor.

It was probably late summer or early autumn in A.D. 46 when they docked at the port city of Perga in Pamphylia. John Mark, for some unexplained reason, left the party at this point and returned to Jerusalem while the two older men continued on to the inland city of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-14). There, in the familiar environs of a Jewish synagogue, Paul preached his first recorded sermon.

\(^{1}\) W. M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul: Their Influence on His Life and Thought* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), p. 297. This autumn dating becomes significant in the rhetorical analysis of Paul’s sermon.
The Historical Setting

The synagogue

When the Sabbath came, the newly-arrived apostles made their way to the synagogue. On entering, they went to the section reserved for the men, took seats appropriate to their age, and joined the rest of the congregation in worship. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to the two newcomers inviting them to speak a "word of exhortation" to the people (Acts 13:14-15).

The invitation of the rulers was not at all unusual, for the synagogue sermon was not delivered by one particular minister, but could be given by any competent member of the congregation. All that was

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1 The synagogue sanctuary was "a double enclosure, one portion set apart for the use of the men, the other for the women" (Philo The Contemplative Life 3.476).

2 Seating was arranged according to age—the elders in the front and the younger in the back (Philo Every Good Man is Free 12.458). Evidently Paul and Barnabas did not go to the "chief seats" which faced the rest of the congregation and were reserved for persons of rank and dignity in the Jewish community. Luke notes that the invitation had to be "sent to them," suggesting that they had taken their seats in the audience with the people. This act of modesty and humility would have favorably impressed the audience (cf. Matt. 23:6; Luke 11:43), and made them receptive to what Paul was going to say.

3 The vital relationship between this reading and Paul's subsequent sermon will be developed in a later section.

4 The expression, "word of exhortation," was probably a technical phrase used in the synagogue to refer to the sermon which followed the Scripture reading (Frederic Henry Chase, The Credibility of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles [London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1902], p. 179, n. 1).
required was that the individual be of "especial proficiency." ¹

It is unlikely, however, that the rulers would have invited just any chance strangers to speak in public. Somehow they must have known that the apostles were qualified to preach in the synagogue. Perhaps Paul and Barnabas had introduced themselves to the rulers earlier in the week and had asked for the privilege of addressing the congregation that Sabbath. Or maybe their preaching of a new doctrine in the streets and markets of Pisidian Antioch the past few days had attracted the attention of the rulers. Whatever the case, the rulers were certainly aware that the apostles had something they wanted to say. ²

The audience

The synagogue audience approached the Sabbath service with reverence and anticipation. The worshippers came that Sabbath as they came every Sabbath—to thoroughly learn the will of God so that they might not sin against Him. ³ They came to sit quietly and to listen attentively to a message which would "make the whole of life grow into something better." ⁴

The audience was especially eager for this particular service.

¹ Philo Every Good Man is Free 12.458.

² Their invitation to the apostles—"If you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it" (Acts 13:15)—expresses a first-class condition, one which is assumed to be true (Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. III: The Acts of the Apostles [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930], p. 186).

³ Cf. Philo Moses ii.39.168; Josephus Jewish Antiquities xvi.2.4.

⁴ Philo The Special Laws ii.15.282.
For the past few days the Jewish quarter had been buzzing with news of the two strangers and their exciting teaching. It was anticipated that the newcomers would attend the synagogue, and that perhaps one of them would be called on for the sermon of the day.

This, briefly, is the historical setting of Paul's first sermon. He has been asked to speak by the rulers of the synagogue, the audience is favorably disposed toward him, and all are expecting a word from God.

The Biblical Exposition

The text of the sermon

When the invitation to speak was given, Paul stood and went toward the speaker's platform. After motioning with his hand, he began:

"Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen!

'The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people during their sojourn in the land of Egypt, and with an

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1 The Jews "often lived in a separate quarter of the town in which they had received formal permission to settle. The reason for this was not compulsion, but a desire for close union and companionship" (Ch. Guignebert, The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus, trans. by S. H. Hooke, of The History of Civilization, ed. by C. K. Ogden [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1939], p. 216).


3 The translations of Paul's sermons are my own.
uplifted arm led them out of it. And for a period of about forty years
He carried them as a father in the wilderness. And when He had de-
stroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He have them their land as
an inheritance for about four hundred and fifty years.

"And after these things He gave them judges until the prophet
Samuel. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of
Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And after He
removed him, He raised up David to be their king, of whom He also tes-
tified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after My
heart, who will do all My will.'

"Of this man's seed, God, according to promise, has brought to
Israel a Savior, Jesus.

"Before his coming John had heralded a baptism of repentance to
all the people of Israel. And while John was finishing his course, he
kept saying, 'I am not what you imagine me to be. But mark well, there
is one coming after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to
undo.' Brethren, sons of the descendants of Abraham, and those of you
who fear God, it is to us that the message of this salvation has been
sent!

"Now those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they
did not recognize him or the voices of the prophets which are read every
Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him. And though they could find
no ground for putting him to death, they asked Pilate that he be done
away with. And when they had carried out all that was written of him,
he was taken down from the tree and laid in a tomb."
"But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now his witnesses to the people. And we are declaring to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers—that God has fulfilled it to us, the children, by bringing forth Jesus, just as it is written in the second psalm, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten you.'

"And that He raised him from the dead no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give to you the holy blessings of David which are sure.' To the same end He says also in another passage, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to experience decay.' Now when David had served the will of God in his own generation, he fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and experienced decay. But he whom God raised did not experience decay.

"Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this One forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, and that in him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified in the law of Moses.

"Take care, therefore, that there does not happen what is spoken of in the prophets:

Behold, you scoffers, and be amazed and perish,
For I am doing a work in your days,
A work which you will never believe though someone explains it to you."

The content and organization of the sermon

Before Paul's sermon can be rhetorically analyzed, its content and organization must be thoroughly understood. This means that the
sermon's theme and purpose need to be determined—what is Paul trying to say? what is he trying to accomplish? Then, its overall structure and outline must be laid out—what organizational pattern is being used? what are the main points? And finally, the point-by-point development of the message must be traced in detail—how does the thought progress? what are the reasoning processes? what is the proper interpretation of the words? These matters of Biblical exposition are a necessary foundation to the rhetorical analysis, and must first be discussed.

The theme and purpose.—The theme of Paul's sermon is that "God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." This key sentence occurs early in the message and is Paul's way of synthesizing his entire discourse. It is a clear and precise statement that sums up everything he has to say—that God has taken the initiative and has, in line with the appropriate promises, brought the long-awaited Savior to Israel in the person of Jesus.

Paul's purpose in preaching this theme is to persuade his audience to believe in Jesus as Savior so that they might be forgiven and justified. This concern is strongly expressed in the closing section of the message:

Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this One forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, and that in him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified in the law of Moses.

Paul is not satisfied that his audience merely recognize his thematic statement and understand that God has brought Jesus to Israel as Savior. He wants his listeners to accept this God-given Savior so that they
might obtain forgiveness of sins and justification from all things. In short, Paul's purpose is to persuade the audience to act on his theme.

The structure and outline.—The structure of Paul's sermon follows the common pattern of introduction, statement of theme, body, and conclusion. The theme is the central factor; the other three parts relate to it: the introduction leads up to the theme, the body develops it, and the conclusion applies it to the audience.

Paul begins with a recital of some of God's past great works on Israel's behalf—the exodus, the conquest, the theocracy. This moves him naturally into the statement of his theme which is that in this present day God has done the greatest of all works for Israel—He has provided a Savior.

The body of Paul's sermon shows that God's provision of a Savior has been "according to promise." Specifically, God has fulfilled these promises: that He would prepare the nation for the Savior's coming, that the Savior would have omnipotent power, and that the Savior would live forever.

The conclusion of the sermon is in two parts: application and exhortation. In the application Paul stresses the practical consequences that come from having a powerful and eternal Savior. In the exhortation he urges his audience to respond with belief in Jesus lest they be guilty of turning their backs on the greatest work that God has ever done for Israel.

This overall structure can be put in outline form as follows:
Introduction

I. God has been delivering Israel since the beginning of her history.

II. God has used individuals to deliver Israel.

III. God will climax His deliverance of Israel through David and his seed.

Theme

God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus.

Body

I. God has fulfilled His promise to prepare the nation for the Savior's coming.

II. God has fulfilled His promise to provide the nation with a powerful Savior.

III. God has fulfilled His promise to provide the nation with an eternal Savior.

Conclusion

I. Through Jesus as Savior there is forgiveness of sins and justification from all things.

II. Be diligent to believe this greatest work that God has done for Israel.

The outline reveals the continual interplay of the five main features of Paul's theme—God, promise, Israel, Savior, Jesus. This interplay will become even more apparent as each major part of the sermon is now developed in detail.

The development.—Paul begins his sermon with a review of what God has done for "this people Israel":

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people during their sojourn in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm led them out of it. And for a period of about forty years He carried them as a father in the wilderness. And when He
had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He gave them their land as an inheritance for about four hundred and fifty years.

And after these things, He gave them judges until the prophet Samuel. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And after He removed him, He raised up David to be their king, of whom He also testified and said, "I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after My heart, who will do all My will."

In this introduction Paul leads up to his theme in three distinct steps, each one building on the one preceding. He first reminds the audience that God has been delivering Israel since the beginning of her history. Then he points out that this continuing deliverance has often been brought about by specific God-given individuals. Finally, he draws attention to God's promise that the climax of this deliverance will be through another specific individual who will be of the seed of David. Through these three introductory steps Paul builds to the statement of his theme—that God has now climaxed this continuing deliverance by bringing forth Jesus as Israel's Savior. This introduction will now be developed in detail.

Paul's first step is to remind his audience that God has been delivering Israel throughout her history. To do this he carefully selects and recounts those events in the nation's past in which God actively redeemed His people. Those events were the choice of the fathers, the deliverance from Egypt, and the gift of the land: ¹

¹"Redemption" is here understood in the broad sense of being freed from some evil, whether that evil be anonymity (the choice of the fathers), slavery (the deliverance from Egypt), or homelessness (the gift of the land). Cf. Max Wilcox, The Semitisms of Acts (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 162; and Evald Löwestam, Son and Savior: A Study of Acts 13, 32–27. With an Appendix: 'Son of God' in the Synoptic Gospels, trans. by Michael J. Petry, Vol. XVIII of Coniectanea Neotestamentica, ed. by Antop Fridrichsen and Harald Riesenfeld (Lund;
The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people during their sojourn in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm led them out of it. And for a period of about forty years He carried them as a father in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He gave them their land as an inheritance for about four hundred and fifty years.

These three events summarize God's basic acts of salvation with regard to Israel. Without the choice of the fathers there would have been no nation in the first place. Without the Exodus, the people would still be slaves in Egypt. And without the Conquest, Israel would have been unable to claim an independent national existence. Paul cites these events to demonstrate that a sovereign God has taken it upon Himself to deliver Israel in every way possible.

Up to this point Paul's historical review has followed a pattern that was very familiar to his audience. But now he makes a slight and deliberate shift. While continuing chronologically, he shifts from events to individuals. Instead of listing further divine acts of deliverance, he moves to the second step of his introduction and begins to mention certain individuals that God gave to the nation:

And after these things He gave them judges until the prophet Samuel. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And after He removed him, He raised up David to be their king.

The individuals that Paul mentions are men that God gave to His people to "save" them. The judges were specifically raised up to save

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1 The Jews recognized the choice of the fathers, the liberation from Egypt, and the gift of the land as basic acts of salvation by which God had brought the nation into being. In their rituals and worship they frequently acknowledged these redemptive events as examples of God's continuing deliverance. Cf. Deuteronomy 6:20-24; 26:5-9.
the nation for its oppressors (Judg. 2:16). Later, when the people asked for a king, God gave them Saul to save them by fighting their battles (I Sam. 9:15–16). And David, of course, was destined to deliver Israel by saving her from all her enemies (II Sam. 3:18). All of these individuals were "saviors" in the limited sense of the word.

Paul mentions these men to show that God continued His deliverance of Israel through specific individuals that He Himself gave to the nation. In the first part of his introduction, Paul simply reminded his audience of God's past deliverance. In this second part, he points out that in saving Israel, God often did it through certain men divinely given to the nation for that purpose. By making this subtle shift from God's redeeming acts to God's redeeming men, Paul turns his audience's thinking toward the concept of divine deliverance through divinely-given men. This new concept brings him closer to his theme which is that God has again brought forth an individual who will redeem Israel.

This shift from events to individuals also allows Paul to move into his introduction's third and final section—the promise of God to climax His deliverance of Israel through David. Listing God-given deliverers allows Paul to naturally mention David's name. And once David's name is mentioned, Paul can immediately refer to God's testimony concerning what would be done through David:

And after these things He gave them judges until the prophet Samuel. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And after He removed him, He raised up David to be their king, of whom He also testified and said, "I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after My heart, whom I will make king over My people Israel." After reviewing the great acts of deliverance in the nation's
past, and after listing the great leaders who continued that deliverance, Paul then specifically refers to the divine testimony concerning one of those leaders—"I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after My heart, who will do all My will." In the context of Paul's introduction, this testimony can only mean that God intends to climax His deliverance of Israel through David. The reasoning is as follows: David will do all of God's will; it has been demonstrated that God's will is to save Israel; therefore, God will somehow climax His saving of Israel through David.

As Paul cites this testimony concerning David, both he and his audience understand that the testimony really concerns a future son of David rather than David himself. Paul's quote would quickly remind his audience of a host of Old Testament passages which promised that God would raise up a Davidic son who would offer justice, righteousness, and salvation to the nation. Through this Davidic son, all of God's will would be done. Paul, therefore, in citing God's testimony concerning David, is in effect reminding his audience that God has promised to save Israel through one of David's descendants.

Thus, in his introduction, Paul has moved from the simple idea that God was continually delivering Israel, through the more complex idea that this deliverance was often accomplished by God-given

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1It was commonly understood that David would 'do all of God's will' in the sense that he would give birth to a greater son who would fully do God's will as Israel's Messianic Redeemer. This understanding will be substantiated in a later section.

2The audience would be reminded of such passages as II Samuel 7:12; Isaiah 9:6-7; and Jeremiah 23:5-6.
individuals, to his final focus on God's intention to bring forth an individual from the line of David who would climax Israel's deliverance.

At this point in his sermon there is only one statement that Paul can make that will satisfy the religious feelings he has kindled in his introduction. He has spoken of God's deliverance, he has spoken of God-given men through whom this deliverance came, and he has spoken of God's promise to climax this deliverance through a God-given son of David. Now he unites all three of these ideas into the single concept which becomes his theme: "Of this man's [David's] seed, God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." God has climaxd His continuing deliverance of Israel by bringing forth Jesus as the promised Savior.

Once his theme is stated, Paul immediately begins to develop it by picking up on the phrase, "according to promise." As he now moves into the body of his sermon, he expands this phrase to show that in bringing Jesus to Israel God has done everything that He promised He would do. Specifically, Paul shows that God, "according to promise," has prepared the nation for the Savior's coming, has provided a Savior who has omnipotent power, and has provided a Savior who will live forever.

The first main point in the body of Paul's sermon is that God has fulfilled His promise to prepare the nation for the Savior's coming. The Old Testament promised that a forerunner would prepare the nation for the Savior's coming in two ways: he would turn the people toward righteousness (Mal. 4:5-6), and he would publicly announce the imminent
coming of the Savior (Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3-5). The forerunner would first bring the people to a recognition of their need, and then he would point them toward the One who could meet that need. This dual activity on the part of the forerunner would be God's way of preparing His people to receive the Savior.

Paul now declares that God has fulfilled these promises in John the Baptist:

God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus.

Before his coming John had heralded a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And while John was finishing his course, he kept saying, "I am not what you imagine me to be. But mark well, there is one coming after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie." Brethren, sons of the descendants of Abraham, and those of you who fear God, it is to us that the message of this salvation has been sent!

John was the forerunner sent to "make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:17). He had the dual responsibility of turning the nation toward righteousness and of publicly announcing the imminent coming of the Savior.

John fulfilled his first task of turning the nation toward righteousness by heralding a "baptism of repentance." The key word in his preaching was "repent," as he demanded of his listeners that they "bear fruit that befits repentance" (Matt. 3:2,8). And his call for repentance did prepare the nation, for people from all walks of life flocked to hear him and to indicate their hunger for righteousness through his baptism.¹

¹The gospel accounts reveal that from all over the country religious leaders, common people, tax-collectors, and soldiers thronged to John to confess their sins and be baptized (Matt. 3:5-6; Luke 3:7-14).
But John not only made the people aware of their need for a Savior, he also publicly and continually announced that the Savior would soon appear. He kept pointing to the one who would follow him, the one who would be what the populace supposed John to be. "He kept saying, 'I am not what you imagine me to be. But mark well, there is one coming after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to undo.'"

Thus, through John, God prepared the nation for the salvation He was bringing in Jesus. "According to promise," God awakened the nation to their need of a Savior and directed their attention to the coming One.

Paul concludes his first main point with the glad reminder that he and his audience are part of the nation that God has so specially and earnestly prepared. "It is to us that the message of this salvation has been sent." We are the ones, Paul affirms, who have been prepared for the Savior's coming. The suggestion is, that having been prepared, they should now respond to the Savior that God has brought.

Up to this point the audience has been eagerly following Paul's sermon. His introduction has reminded them of God's promise to save Israel through a Davidic son. His theme has announced the presence of this Davidic Savior in the person of Jesus. And his first main point has shown that the nation was prepared for the Savior's coming through the ministry of John the Baptist. All of this is good news to Paul's listeners.

But now, two questions begin to trouble them. They are bothered, first of all, by the fact that Jesus was condemned to death by the
Jews in Jerusalem. How can Paul claim that Jesus is the Savior in the face of the rulers' condemnation of him as a blasphemous impostor? Surely the spiritual leaders of the nation would not have committed so heinous and unforgivable a crime as to crucify Israel's long-awaited Savior. It is unthinkable that the supposedly most revered men in Israel could be guilty of such madness. Is it not, rather, that the rulers' judgment was correct and that Paul's preaching is in error?

This is the first troublesome question: How can Jesus be the Savior when the rulers have rejected him?

The second question that arises in the audience's mind is closely related to the first. How is it possible, they are wondering, for a dead man to be the Savior? The Old Testament taught that when the Davidic Savior came he would possess all power to save. But a dead man is not "mighty to save"; instead, he is totally without power. How then can Jesus, who was put to death on a cross and buried in a tomb, be the one who has power to save?

Paul realizes that these questions have come up. He also knows that unless he answers them his listeners will have serious reservations about the message he is preaching. He must somehow explain how the nation's spiritual leaders could condemn the Savior to death, and he must show how Jesus, who was evidently powerless to save even himself, could possibly have the power to save others. The answers to these questions form the second main point of his sermon, a point which affirms that

1The audience would be thinking of such Old Testament passages as Psalm 89:25-27 and Isaiah 63:1-4 which speak of one who is "the highest of the kings of the earth" and "mighty to save."
God has fulfilled His promise to provide the nation with a powerful Savior.

The first question is the most difficult one to answer because of its emotional overtones. On the one hand, the audience has a high view of the integrity and spirituality of their rulers. On the other hand, Paul's message is beginning to suggest that these leaders committed a terrible crime. These are incompatible thoughts to Paul's listeners. It is almost inconceivable to them that the supposedly most spiritual men in Judaism would condemn the Savior to death. They would rather reject Paul's message than accept such a monstrous alternative.

This emotional conflict presents Paul with a dilemma. If he bluntly insists on the full guilt of the leaders he will probably alienate his audience. And yet, he cannot ignore the fact that these rulers did indeed reject and condemn the long-awaited Savior. Somehow he must affirm the truth without antagonizing his audience.

Paul's solution to the dilemma is to put the rulers' awful act in the best possible light. He tempers the full guilt of their deed with the idea that what they did, they did in ignorance and in fulfillment of prophecy:

> Now those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him or the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him. And though they could find no ground for putting him to death, they asked Pilate that he be done away with. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, he was taken down from the tree and laid in a tomb.

Paul's first answer to the question of how the rulers could possibly have condemned the Savior is that they did it in ignorance.
They did not wilfully commit such a crime. Had they known that Jesus was the Lord of glory, they would not have crucified him. It was only because they did not recognize who he was that they condemned him.

Paul further tempers the infamy of their crime by pointing out that it was done in accordance with the eternal plan of God. In condemning Jesus, the rulers were not only acting in ignorance, but they were actually fulfilling the prophetic voices which were heard each Sabbath in the synagogue. They were carrying out "all that was written" of how the Savior would be rejected and put to death.¹

Thus Paul answers his audience's first question in such a way that they can accept that Jesus is the Savior in spite of the fact that the rulers condemned him.² He has gently presented the act of the Jews as an ignorant yet expected one. And he has shown that it was an act which actually served the eternal plan of God.

But Paul still must deal with the second question in his listeners' minds—the question which concerns the powerlessness of a dead man. Granted that Jesus' death was an unfortunate mistake, his audience would now be thinking, the fact still remains that, in the speaker's own words, "He was taken down from the tree and laid in a tomb." Jesus is dead. He is, therefore, totally without power to be the

¹They were fulfilling such prophetic voices as Isaiah 53:1-3, 7-9, and Zechariah 13:5-6.

²It should be noticed that in answering this objection, Paul has also managed to subtly add to his characterization of the Savior through the reminder that "they could find no ground for putting him to death." This is Paul's way of presenting the sinlessness of Jesus, a sinlessness which makes it possible for him to be the kind of Savior who can forgive the sins of others.
Savior.

Paul must now answer this second objection. He must show that Jesus is not powerlessly dead, but rather, that he is powerfully alive. To do this, he continues with his second main point by proclaiming that God has raised Jesus from the dead and has granted all power to him:

But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now his witnesses to the people. And we are declaring to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers—that God has fulfilled it to us, the children, by bringing forth Jesus, just as it is written in the second psalm, "You are My Son, today I have begotten you."

Paul's answer to the audience's second question is in two parts. First, he states that Jesus is alive because God has raised him from the dead. He cites the verifiable fact that Jesus' closest associates repeatedly saw him over a period of many days after his resurrection. Their testimony is well-known and can be easily checked, for they "are now his witnesses to the people."

The second part of Paul's answer is that the resurrected Jesus has been granted sufficient power to save. Here his argument becomes a careful reasoning from Scripture. The Scriptures clearly teach that the Savior will be a son of David. They also teach that this Davidic son will be God's Son (II Sam. 7:12-14). Furthermore, they teach that this Davidic Son will become God's Son in the fullest sense at a

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1 Paul's audience would have been quite willing to accept the idea that Jesus was resurrected, for the Old Testament furnished several precedents of individual resurrections (cf. I Kings 17:17-24; II Kings 4:18-37; 13:20-21), and such an event was not strange to Jewish thinking (cf. Mark 6:14; Heb. 11:35). The important point here is that Jesus' resurrection can be substantiated by independent witnesses.
particular point in his life. That point will be after civil and religious leaders have attempted to destroy him. It will be after kings and rulers have taken action against the Davidic son that God will bring him forth as His own Son in the fullest sense. And once he becomes God's Son, he will then be granted all power to save.

Paul's reasoning is that all of this has taken place in the life of Jesus. The civil and religious leaders did set themselves against Jesus. "Kings" Herod and Pilate, and "rulers" Annas and Caiaphas, counseled together against him. But God triumphed over them by raising Jesus from the dead. And now the point in Jesus' life has come when God has said of him, "You are My Son, today I have begotten you." This is the good news that Paul has come to announce:

And we are declaring to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers—that God has fulfilled it to us, the children, by bringing forth Jesus, just as it is written in the second psalm, "You are My Son, today I have begotten you."

1 The psalm which Paul quotes describes this sequence of hostility followed by exaltation:

"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and his anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.' I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you'" (Ps. 2:2-7).

The Jews readily accepted this psalm as Messianic, and applied it in their literature to the opposition to and attacks upon the Davidic son (Lovestam, *Son and Savior*, pp. 15-23).
The prophecy has been fulfilled. Jesus has become God's Son in the fullest sense. And now, as God's Son, he possesses unlimited power. The exalted Jesus has received the universal dominion promised to the divine Son.¹ The omnipotent resources of the Father have been put at the Son's disposal.

Paul quotes Psalm 2:7 to suggest to his audience that the entire prophetic sequence has been fulfilled in Jesus.² The enemies condemned him to death, but God triumphed by raising him to life. David's son has now become God's Son, and as such all power under heaven and earth has been given to him. Jesus, therefore, has omnipotent power, just as God promised that the Savior would have.

¹In Psalm 2, immediately after God declares "You are my son, today I have begotten you," He goes on to grant the Son unlimited power:

"Ask of me; and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (Ps. 2:8-9)

It is interesting to note that Codex D even includes Psalm 2:8 as part of Paul's citation of the second psalm, confirming that the important point is the power Jesus now possesses as the begotten Son.

Rabbinical interpretations of this psalm also make this connection between divine Sonship and unlimited power, applying verses 8 and 9 to the "world-embracing power and dominion" that the Davidic son will have "based on his extraordinary relationship to God" (Lövestam, Son and Savior, pp. 15-23).

Another description of this total sequence—exposure to adversity, exaltation to divine Sonship, and possession of unlimited power—can be found in Psalm 89:20-27. In the New Testament these same ideas of death, resurrection to Sonship, and possession of power can be found in Romans 1:1-4 and Hebrews 1:1-5.

²The New Testament authors "often quoted a single phrase or sentence not merely for its own sake, but as a pointer to a whole context—practice by no means uncommon among contemporary Jewish teachers, as they are reported in the rabbinic literature" (C. H. Dodd, The Old Testament in the New, Facet Booké, Biblical Series, No. 3, ed. by John Reumann [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963], p. 20).
Thus Paul has skillfully come full-circle back to his theme that "God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." He has taken two objections to his message, and how shown them to be the very means by which God has fulfilled His promise to bring forth a Davidic son with unlimited power. The rejection by the rulers and the subsequent death of Jesus were necessary prerequisites to his being exalted to the power of divine Sonship. It was through these seemingly negative events that God was able to fulfill His promise to provide the nation with a powerful Savior.

With this, Paul has come to the end of his sermon's second main point. After an introduction which focused on the Davidic Savior that God would bring to Israel, Paul's message has shown that God has brought this Savior "according to promise" in the person of Jesus. God, "according to promise," first made sure that the nation was prepared for Jesus' coming. Through the forerunner's preaching of repentance and through his announcement of the Savior's imminent appearance, God did what was necessary to predispose Paul's listeners to accept the Savior. And now God puts Jesus forth as the divine Son who has inherited all of the Father's power. While the rejection and death of Jesus might seem on the surface to be objections to his message, Paul has shown that in reality they were the necessary means by which God could bring forth the Savior who would be "mighty to save."

Paul is now ready to begin the third main point in the body of his sermon, which is that God has fulfilled His promise to provide the nation with an eternal Savior.
This third point is necessary to round out Paul's message concerning God's offer of salvation. It is not enough just to demonstrate that Jesus has the power to save. Paul must further affirm that this power to save is an eternal power, a power that will never cease. He must show that the salvation being offered is an eternally secure salvation because Jesus is an eternally living Savior. It is for this reason that Paul begins his third and final main point with the declaration that God has not only raised Jesus from the dead, but that He has raised him from the dead never to die again:

And that He raised him from the dead no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: "I will give to you the holy blessings of David which are sure." To the same end, He says also in another passage, "You will not allow Your Holy One to experience decay." Now when David had served the will of God in his own generation, he fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and experienced decay. But he whom God raised did not experience decay.

In the development of this third point Paul explains that Jesus has been raised from the dead never to die again in specific fulfillment of two Old Testament promises. These two promises are that God would give to Israel an eternal Savior, and that God would not let His Holy One experience decay. The first assures that the Savior would live forever, while the second indicates that this permanence would come about through a resurrection from the decay of death. Together, these two promises are fulfilled in Jesus who now lives as the eternal Savior having been raised from the decay of death.

Paul first proclaims that Jesus will live forever because he is the eternal Davidic son whom God promised to give to Israel:

And that He raised him from the dead no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: "I will give to you the holy blessings
of David which are sure.\(^1\)

God had covenanted with David that he would have a son who would endure "for ever" (II Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89:27-37). Years later, after the fall of the Davidic dynasty, God reaffirmed this covenant, and promised that He would yet give to the nation "the holy blessings of David which are sure." This was God's way of saying that Israel would one day receive the eternal Davidic son.\(^2\)

This promise, according to Paul, has now been fulfilled. God has given "the holy blessings" to Israel; Jesus has come as the Davidic Savior who will live forever.

\(^1\)Paul cites the LXX translation of Isaiah 55:3. The same phrase in the Hebrew text reads, "the mercies of David which are sure."

\(^2\)The phrase "the holy blessings of David which are sure" (or, "the mercies of David which are sure") has been variously interpreted. The preferable view is that Paul understands this phrase as an equivalent expression for "the eternal Davidic son." Several factors support this:

First of all, the context of Isaiah 55:1-5, from which Paul quotes, speaks of salvation, an everlasting covenant, and a Holy One given to Israel—phrases which suggest that the eternal Savior covenanted to David is in view.

Secondly, the words "mercies" and "sure" were continually associated in the Old Testament with the covenant promises of an eternal son (cf. especially II Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89:20-38; 132:10-12).

Finally, Paul's listeners themselves accepted the plural expression "holy blessings" as a name for an individual. Bishop writes that the expression in Arabic as "\(ra'fat\), a feminine plural word, but, as in a few other cases, used as personal name [sic.] for boys in given circumstances. We have known it amongst Christians, when a family has desired to place on record its gratitude for 'mercies received'" (Eric F. Bishop, Apostles of Palestine: The Local Background to the New Testament Church [London: Lutterworth Press, 1958], p. 89).

In Greek the expression is a neuter plural, and this also can be used of a person (cf. Luke, Son and Savior, pp. 79-80, n. 4).

These three factors all suggest that "the holy blessings of David which are sure" is a synonymous expression for "the eternal son covenanted to David."
Paul then explains the fulfillment of God's second promise. God has not only fulfilled His promise to provide an eternal Savior, He has done so according to His promise that the Savior's permanence would come about through a resurrection from the decay of death:

To the same end He says also in another passage, "You will not allow Your Holy One to experience decay." Now when David had served the will of God in his own generation, he fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and experienced decay. But He whom God raised did not experience decay.

Paul's reasoning in the explanation of this second promise is as follows. God promised to David that He would not let His Holy One experience decay (Ps. 16:10). This promise either applied to David or it applied to another. It did not apply to David, for "when David had served the will of God in his own generation, he fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and experienced decay." But Jesus "whom God raised did not experience decay." Therefore, the promise applied to Jesus and was fulfilled by his resurrection from the dead. He is the unsullied and immortal Holy One.

Thus Paul has developed his third and final main point. He has shown that Jesus will live forever because he is the eternal Davidic son promised to Israel. And he has shown that Jesus was raised to this prominence from the decay of death because of God's promise concerning His Holy One.

1It should not go unnoticed that Paul, in explaining the fulfillment of this promise, has again managed to subtly add to his characterization of the Savior. His words concerning how David "served the will of God in his own generation" suggest a contrast between the finite David who served God in his own generation and the eternal Savior who will accomplish the saving will of God throughout all generations.
This concludes the body of Paul's sermon. In three main points he has expanded his theme that God has acted "according to promise" in bringing Jesus to Israel as the Savior. Specifically, God has fulfilled His promises to prepare the nation for the Savior's coming, and to provide the nation with a Savior who is both powerful and eternal.

Paul now concludes his sermon with an application and an exhortation.

In the application Paul emphasizes the great benefits that come from having a powerful and an eternal Savior. Because Jesus is a powerful Savior, he can forgive sins; and because Jesus is an eternal Savior, he can justify from all things:

Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this One forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, and that in him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified in the law of Moses.

The first great benefit available through Jesus is the forgiveness of sins. This benefit can be proclaimed because Jesus has been granted omnipotent power. The Father has given all power to His divine Son, and this includes the power to forgive sins. And in granting this power to Jesus, God has climaxed Israel's deliverance. The salvation that was begun in the choice of the fathers, continued through God-given individuals, and anticipated in the Davidic son, has now reached its climax in the forgiveness of sins available through Jesus.

The second great benefit available through Jesus is justification from all things. This benefit can be proclaimed because Jesus is an eternal Savior. His power to save is an everlasting power; he ever lives to save. He is able, therefore, to provide an eternal salvation, something the Mosaic economy could not provide (Heb. 7:23-25). The Law could not justify from all things (Heb. 9:9-10). But the eternal Davidic son who came to do all God's will has put an end to the Law's continual reminder of sin (Heb. 10:1-7).

In simple terms, Paul's application is that because God has provided an omnipotent and eternal Savior, there is now available a full and secure salvation to all who will believe. This is the gospel he has come to proclaim.

The apostle's final words are an exhortation to believe in Jesus:

Take care, therefore, that there does not happen what is spoken of in the prophets:
Behold, you scoffers, and be amazed and perish,
For I am doing a work in your days,
A work which you will never believe though someone explains it to you.

Paul is concerned in the last few moments of his sermon lest his audience respond to this, God's greatest work, as another generation responded to a previous work of God. He views the present situation as analogous to the situation in the opening chapter of Habakkuk.

Paul's reference to "what is spoken of in the prophets" (plural) is probably due to the fact that the minor prophets formed a single book in the Hebrew Scriptures. The actual citation is from Habakkuk 1:5.
violence in the land. God's answer was that He was doing a work in Habakkuk's day which both he and the people would not believe even if God explained it to them. God then proceeded to explain the work—that He was going to use the Chaldeans to deal with Israel's sins—and, as predicted, the response was one of unbelief.

In Paul's mind, this Old Testament situation is similar to the one he and his listeners are now in. The abiding hope of Israel has been that God would someday bring forth the Davidic Savior. God has now done this greatest of all works in their day, and, through Paul, has explained it to them. But now they must take care lest there occur again a response of unbelief:

Because of his concern, Paul concludes his sermon by encouraging his audience to immediately believe what God has done and to receive forgiveness of sins and justification from all things through Jesus.¹

This, then, is the organization of Paul's sermon. His introduction began with a recital of the great saving acts of God by which He brought the nation into existence. It continued with references to the individuals that were divinely given to deliver the nation. And it concluded with a reminder of God's promise to climax this continuing deliverance through a Davidic son. In this way the introduction built up to

¹Some writers interpret Paul's final words as a bitter warning rather than as an honest encouragement. They suggest that Paul observed "symptoms of dissent or disapprobation on the countenances of his hearers" which meant that they were rejecting his message (Howard Tillman Kuist, The Pedagogy of St. Paul [New York: George H. Doran Company, 1925], p. 94; cf. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. III: The Acts of the Apostles, p. 195). But the response to Paul's sermon was so entirely favorable that the idea of his threatening his audience because he saw them scowling must be discounted.
the statement of the sermon's theme, which was that God, according to promise, has brought Jesus to Israel as the Davidic Savior.

The body of the sermon then developed this theme by showing that God brought Jesus to Israel according to His promises to prepare the nation for the Savior's coming and to provide the nation with a powerful and eternal Savior. God prepared the nation for Jesus' coming by sending a forerunner who pointed the nation toward their need of righteousness and toward the soon-coming Savior who would meet that need. And now God has presented Jesus as the Savior who has both the power and the permanence to save, having been exalted to omnipotence and immortality by the resurrection.

The conclusion of the sermon stressed the practical consequences that come from having such a Savior. Because of his power, Jesus is able to forgive sins. And because of his permanence, he is able to fully justify. All of this is seen as the great climaxing work of God in delivering Israel, and the audience is exhorted to respond to it by believing in Jesus.

The response to the sermon

According to one ancient manuscript, the response to Paul's sermon was a deep silence. All the accounts agree that the message had a profound and lasting effect on the audience:

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next sabbath. 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.

1 Codex D.
The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God (Acts 13:42-44).

As the meeting was breaking up, many begged Paul to preach on these matters again on the next Sabbath. Other enthusiastic listeners could not wait a whole week; they immediately followed Paul and Barnabas while the two apostles continued to persuade them concerning the grace of God.

Throughout the week news spread of the sermon that had been preached in the synagogue that Sabbath. Those who had heard the sermon were so moved by it that their zeal caused a standing-room-only crowd at the next Sabbath meeting.

What was there in Paul's preaching that produced such a response? What made his sermon so effective? Why was Paul so persuasive? These are the questions that must now be answered as we move from Biblical exposition to rhetorical analysis.

The Rhetorical Analysis

Paul's effectiveness was due largely to the choices he made. His success, humanly speaking, may be attributed to the fact that every aspect of his preaching was deliberately chosen because of its appropriateness to the particular audience to whom he was speaking. Specifically, Paul was persuasive because he picked a theme, structure, style, and mood that was suitable to the synagogue worshippers of Pisidian Antioch.

The choice of the theme

The theme of Paul's sermon was that "God, according to promise,
has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." While Paul conceivably could have preached on any subject, he chose this particular theme because of its appropriateness to both the occasion and the audience.

The appropriateness of the theme to the occasion.—Paul’s theme was appropriate to the occasion because it corresponded with the Scripture passages that were read in the synagogue that Sabbath.

The reading from the Law and the Prophets was a standard feature of synagogue worship. These readings were not haphazardly selected, but were assigned weekly through the use of "lectionaries," or lists of passages. The lectionaries divided the pentateuchal books into 54, 154, and 175 sections so that the entire Law would be read through in one, three, or three-and-one-half year cycles. This also made it possible for a speaker to know in advance the seder reading of any given Sabbath.

While the sedarim were relatively fixed because of their consecutive nature, considerable flexibility was allowed in the choosing of the haphtaroth. The ruler of the synagogue, or the reader, was free to pick any passage as long as it was appropriate to the seder for the

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3 Seder (plural, sedarim) is the name given to the passage read from the Law, while haphtarah (plural, haphtaroth) is the section from the Prophets. In the Hebrew Bible the Prophets include most of what we would call the historical books as well as the major and minor prophets.
In time, of course, certain haphtaroth became commonly associated with particular sedarim, but alternatives continued to exist and substitutions were allowed.

Though Luke does not specify the particular seder and haphtarah read in Pisidian Antioch that Sabbath, a glance at the lectionaries and a careful reading of Paul's sermon suggests several likely possibilities. One commonly accepted suggestion is that the readings that Sabbath were from Deuteronomy 1 and Isaiah 1. The arguments in support of this view are: (1) Isaiah 1:2, Deuteronomy 1:31, and Deuteronomy 1:37 contain three rather unusual verbs, which Paul also uses in his opening sentences—"exalted," "carried as a father," and "gave as an inheritance"; (2) Deuteronomy 1 would naturally suggest to Paul the historical review of God's dealings with Israel while the invitation of Isaiah 1:18 would be the basis for the offer of forgiveness with which his sermon ends; and (3) the lectionaries reveal that these passages were commonly read together on an autumn Sabbath.

Other combinations have also been suggested. Guilding finds it "tempting to suppose" a seder of Deuteronomy 1 and a haphtarah beginning

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2 The full lectionaries for the one and the three-year cycles are given in Appendix A.

at Jeremiah 30:4. ¹ Hürtman proposes Genesis 15 and II Samuel 7. ²

The most likely suggestion, however, is that the seder for the day was Deuteronomy 4:25-40, followed by hashtaroth from Isaiah 40 and II Samuel 7. This view is consistent with the autumn lectionaries, and, more importantly, these passages seem to be the substructure of Paul's entire sermon. Paul appears to be building his theme around a previous reading of Deuteronomy 4:25-40, Isaiah 40:1-11, and II Samuel 7:4-17.

The reading from Deuteronomy emphasizes God's faithfulness to His people and His unprecedented efforts on their behalf:

"For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not fail you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers which he swore to them.

"For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you; and on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved your fathers and chose their descendants after them, and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as at this day; know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God


in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you this day, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the LORD your God gives you for ever" (Deut. 4:31-40).

It is fairly easy to see the uses Paul makes of this seder. His whole message emphasizes, as does the seder, that God is faithful and that He has done unprecedented works on Israel's behalf. He repeats the references to the choice of the fathers, the exodus from Egypt, and the conquest of the land as examples of God's continuing deliverance, and then proclaims that God has now climaxed this redemption by bringing the promised Savior to the nation. And in his conclusion,

"Take care, therefore, that there does not happen what is spoken of in the prophets:
Behold, you scoffers, and be amazed and perish,
For I am doing a work in your days,
A work which you will never believe though someone explains it to you.

Paul reflects the same spirit of amazement and exhortation that is contained in the words of the seder:

"For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of" (Deut. 4:32).

"Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you this day, that it may go well with you" (Deut. 4:40).

Paul's theme not only corresponded to the seder from Deuteronomy, it also incorporated the haphtaroth of Isaiah 40:1-11 and II Samuel 7:4-17. One of his major points—that God, according to promise, prepared the nation for the Savior's coming through John the Baptist—is taken from Isaiah's well-known words:
A voice cries:  
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.  
And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isa. 40:3-5).

And Paul's assertion that he is "declaring to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers—that God has fulfilled it to us, the children, by bringing forth Jesus," is simply an extension of the words of Isaiah 40:9:

Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, fear not;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
"Behold your God!"

Paul's choice of a theme to fit the occasion is most noticeable, however, in his use of the haphtarah from II Samuel 7:

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a
house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever. In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David (II Sam. 7:4-17).

The list of correspondances between this *haphtarot* and Paul's sermon is almost endless: the redemption from Egypt, the appointment of judges, the removal of Saul, the anticipated Davidic offspring, David's burial with his fathers, the raising up of the Davidic son, the Davidic son as the divine son, and the blessings which are sure for ever. The whole *haphtarot* is a record of God's promise to raise up a Davidic son who, as God's Son, will rule forever. It is the great Davidic Covenant, and it permeates the entire development of Paul's theme. It is this *haphtarot* which leads him to declare that "of this man's seed," God, according to promise, has brought the omnipotent and eternal Savior to Israel.

It is clear, therefore, that Paul did not preach just any sermon that came to mind. Rather, he carefully structured his remarks

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Doeve agrees that "this passage of Scripture forms the background of the speaker's entire argument" (J. W. Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts* [Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum and Comp., 1954], p. 172). Goldsmith goes even further and demonstrates that "the complex of OT citations in Acts 13:33-37 is not a random selection, but one carefully conceived on linguistic and theological grounds to show the Jews how God fulfilled his promise to David in II Sam. 7" (Dale Goldsmith, "Critical Notes: Acts 13:33-37: A Pesher on II Samuel 7," *The Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXXVII* [1968], 324).
around the ideas and concepts contained in the assigned seder and haph-
tarah readings for that Sabbath. He chose a theme that was appropriate
to the occasion. In doing so he was able to take advantage of what his
audience was already thinking about, and to point them to the One of
whom the Law and the Prophets spoke.

The appropriateness of the theme to the audience.—Paul's choice
of a theme was not only appropriate to the Scripture readings of the
occasion, it was also appropriate to the particular audience he was
facing. Three types of worshipers were in the synagogue that Sabbath—
Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers—and Paul fashioned his message so
that he would speak to the religious needs and aspirations of each
group.

First and foremost, Paul designed his sermon to win the Disper-
sion Jews who were probably the majority of his audience. The attitude
of Dispersion Jews toward Judaism was a curious mixture of submission to
and yet freedom from the historic faith of their ancestors. They had a
deep and abiding affection for the holy city of Jerusalem,¹ an affection
which showed itself in their annual pilgrimages² and temple

¹"Deepest of all convictions was that of their common centre:
strongest of all feelings was the love which bound them to Pales-
tine and to Jerusalem, the city of God, the joy of all the earth,
the glory of His people Israel. 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget her cunning; let my tongue cleave to the
roof of my mouth!'" (Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the
Messiah, I, 77).

²Josephus put the number of Jews assembled in Jerusalem at the
time of the Passover as high as three million (The Jewish War ii.14.3).
Philo reports that "countless multitudes from countless cities come,
some over land, others over sea, from east and west and north and south
at every feast" (The Special Laws i.12.223).
offerings. Yet, as much as they loved Jerusalem, they considered their real home to be the foreign country in which they had been born and raised and in which their lot was cast. They took over the language and civilization of their adopted city. And as they entered the industrial and commercial life of the community, the Dispersion Jews gladly obeyed the ancient prophet's counsel to a previous generation of exiles: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer. 29:7).

Such a position was not favorable to the sway of traditionalism. As full citizens of a new land, it was inevitable that they would lose the keen edge of Palestinian Judaism. The old laws and forms did not have the same force in the Diaspora that they had in Judea. The Jews of this region, for instance, tolerated such departures from strict Judaism as a Jewess married to an unbelieving Greek (Acts 16:1-3). They were also relatively indifferent to the ancient Messianic promises concerning a kingdom and a throne:

It was different in the Dispersion. The Messianic hope of course

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1 Philo gives the details as to how this tribute was collected and carried to Jerusalem in The Special Laws 1.14.204.

2 While they hold the Holy City where stands the sacred Temple of the most high God to be their mother city, yet those which are theirs by inheritance from their fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors even farther back, are in each case accounted by them to be their fatherland" (Philo Flaccus 7.524).

3 In Pisidian Antioch the Jews had been granted equal privileges with the native inhabitants (Josephus Jewish Antiquities xii.3.1; Against Apion ii.4). Some even held high public office (Ramsay, The Cities of St. Paul, pp. 256-58).
 existed there also, but in a diluted form and at a dimmer distance, less vividly than in the homeland. There the Jews had to some extent come to terms with things as they were, living as they did under the easy political and civil liberties of the cities and of the Roman Empire . . . that they had no reason to look with excessive eagerness for the overthrow of the present world-order.  

But while they may have lapsed a bit in certain areas, the Jews of Pisidian Antioch were at one with their Palestinian brothers when it came to the Messianic promises which concerned a Savior. Like all Jews everywhere, they were waiting for the day when God would visit and redeem His people, and raise up a horn of salvation for them in the house of His servant David (Luke 1:68-69).

Interest in and enthusiasm for the Messiah's coming had been building throughout Jewry for years. References to him in the literature were becoming more frequent. Speculations as to the time of Messiah's coming engrossed Jews everywhere. It was widely thought that his advent was near at hand.

In Palestine many pseudo-Messianic movements sprang up to take advantage of this mood of expectation. The New Testament mentions three

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2. Cf. especially the pseudopigraphical books of I Enoch and The Psalms of Solomon.

of these (Acts 5:36-37; 21:18). Such movements all came to bloody and disastrous ends, but their frequency and popularity illustrate the temper of the times. The Jews were looking for the Messiah and for the salvation he would bring. Anyone who could direct their thoughts to his coming was a welcome messenger.

Paul is aware of all these strands of thinking. He knows that this mixture of submission to and yet independence from Palestinian Judaism is to his advantage. It means that a message rooted in the ancient faith of the fathers will be welcomed. But it also means that any new feature of that ancient faith will receive a thoughtful and open hearing. In light of these attitudes, therefore, Paul shapes his theme. He speaks of the ancient promises, of God’s continuing care for Israel, and of the long-awaited Holy One. In this he acknowledges the common ties of all Jews everywhere. But Paul also speaks to the independence of the Dispersion Jew. He boldly mentions the inadequacy of the old system and the superiority of the new, proclaiming a forgiveness and a justification that were not available under the law of Moses. He concerns himself, furthermore, with that part of the Messianic hope that is of major concern to a Dispersion audience—the coming of the "Savior." He does not dwell on the Messianic prophecies concerning a throne and a kingdom, prophecies of immense interest only to a Palestinian Jew. His theme is not that God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a "King." His focus, rather, is on that more pervading desire which had

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1 Josephus provides fuller comment on these same three movements as well as on other uprisings in *Jewish Antiquities* xviii.1.6; xx.5.1, 8.6, and in *The Jewish War* ii.13.4-5.
survived generations of exile. Paul's good news for this particular audience is that God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a "Savior." This is his theme, chosen for its appropriateness to a Dispersion Jew.

Paul's theme is also appropriate for the proselytes in his audience, those Greeks and native Phrygians who had been converted to Judaism through the missionary efforts of the Dispersion Jews. Through circumcision, baptism, and a sacrifice, these proselytes had entered the Jewish community, had assumed the yoke of the whole law, and had

1 Ramsay has demonstrated that though Pisidian Antioch was a Roman colony, the Romans themselves did not attend the synagogue in any great numbers (The Cities of St. Paul, p. 313).

2 The zeal with which the Jews sought men to their religion met with such success that converts could be found wherever the Jews settled throughout the Graeco-Roman world. Josephus, with only a slight exaggeration, could proudly boast:

"The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances; and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lightings of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed" (Josephus Against Apion ii.39).

Cf. also the statement of Christ to the Pharisees: "You traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte" (Matt. 23:15); and the complaint of the philosopher Seneca: "The ways of those dreadful people have taken deeper and deeper root and are spreading throughout the whole world. They have imposed their customs on their conquerors" (Augustine The City of God vi.11).

Such proselytism "reached its highest peak and met with its greatest success toward the middle of the first century A.D." (Guignebert, The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus, p. 231).


4 Peah 4:6; Hallah 3:6; Bikkurim 1:4; Sekalim 1:3,6; Hullin
become equal with native Israelites in both obligations and rights. ¹
They lived, thought, and believed as Jews, so that as Paul spoke to the
needs and aspirations of Dispersion Jews, he was also proclaiming an
appropriate message for Dispersion proselytes.

The third group of people in Paul's audience were those non-Jews
who preferred a somewhat looser attachment to the synagogue than that
required of a proselyte. Many of them had been drawn initially to the
synagogue by nothing more than a "general interest in oriental reli-
gions, an interest which induced the Gentiles to seek salvation, some-
times in the eastern mystery cults, and sometimes in the synagogue."²

According to Schürer, it was

the fashion of the time to patronize Oriental religions generally.
The religions of classical antiquity no longer exercised the same
absolute power of attracting the minds of men as once they did. On
all hands people were itching for something new, and they eagerly
clutched at those mysterious Oriental worships which, owing to in-
creased intercourse and more extended commercial relations, were
every day becoming more widely known.³

General interest, however, soon developed into admiration.⁴

Some Gentiles even went so far as to contribute to the annual temple


¹ Philo The Special Laws i.9.219.
² Johannes Munck, Paul and the Salvation of Mankind, trans. by
⁴ Judaism, after all, "offered itself as the supreme way of life,
justified by the oldest book in the world, and expressing itself in a
practical discipline of moral and holy living superior to anything of-
fered by the other ancient religions" (Guignebert, The Jewish World in
the Time of Jesus, p. 230).
collection. But admiration stopped short of complete conversion, mostly because of the requirement of circumcision and the burdensome obligations which it entailed. Instead, these Gentiles were content to attend the synagogue services, accept its monotheistic teaching about God, and observe certain moral principles of the Old Testament that were considered valid for all men. Because of their recognition of the God of Israel as the one true God, these partial adherents to the synagogue were commonly called "God-fearers."

Paul's sermon is especially appropriate to these God-fearers. Twice he addresses himself to them, to make sure they understand that the message is for them. But even more significantly, the entire thrust of his theme is ideally suited to their needs and aspirations. For the God-fearer, Judaism was an attractive, but dead-end street; no outlet of salvation appeared at the end. As long as he shrank from circumcision and its accompanying legalism, he remained an alien to


2. These principles were known as the "Noachin" commandments, because they were said to have been given by Noah to his sons. Seven in number, they were directed against blasphemy, idolatry, fornication, the shedding of blood, robbery, the use of meat containing blood, and disobedience to legal authorities (Kirsopp Lake, "Proselytes and God-fearers," *Additional Notes to the Commentary*, ed. by Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, Vol. V of *The Beginnings of Christianity; Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. by F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake [5 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1920-1933], p. 81). Cf. Kirsopp Lake, "The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem," *ibid.*, p. 208.

3. A. B. Davidson, "'They that Fear the Lord,'" *The Expository Times*, III (1891-1892), 491.

4. Vs. 16—"Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen!" Vs. 26—"Brethren, sons of the descendents of Abraham, and those of you who fear God, it is to us that the message of this salvation has been sent!"
the commonwealth of Israel and a stranger to the covenants of promise (Eph. 2:12). If he had any hope of sharing in the mercies of God through Judaism, it was only because he was clinging to the skirt of a Jew (Zech. 8:23).

To this sincere yet disenfranchised God-fearer, Paul’s message is a message of hope and opportunity. The demands of Jewish legalism are put aside. A full and free salvation is available irrespective of race or upbringing. Paul offers equal rights and privileges apart from the intolerable burden of circumcision. He proclaims a Savior who will provide forgiveness and justification for any man who will simply believe. There could not have been a more fitting or welcome message for those who had been standing on the outskirts of God’s grace.

Thus, Paul’s theme was appropriate to the needs and aspirations of all segments of his audience. His sermon was exactly suited to the attitudes and expectations of the Jews, the proselytes, and the God-fearers of Pisidian Antioch.

The choice of the structure

In addition to choosing a theme that was appropriate to the seder and haphtarah readings of the occasion and to the attitudes and expectations of the audience, Paul also picked a sermonic structure that was familiar to his hearers. He deliberately chose a framework for his message that was consistent with the pattern of preaching that synagogue worshipers had come to expect.

The structure of synagogue sermons.—Synagogue sermons followed
a distinct pattern. They started with an initial text which was not part of the seder or haphtarah for the day. The speaker, however, was not allowed to choose this initial text at random. Instead, he had to choose a text in which at least one word tallied linguistically with a word in the haphtarah. This linguistic link was to be a bridge between the initial text and the haphtarah.

The body of the sermon then proceeded with an explanation or interpretation of the initial text. The explanation involved the quoting of a series of other verses of Scripture, which would be pieced together so as to carry forward the thought of the original text. This process was known as haruzin, a word which basically means "stringing pearls."

During the course of the haruzin the speaker would either quote explicitly from, or more often simply allude to, the haphtarah of the day. The haphtarah was always in the background of the exposition; it was tacitly employed throughout the body of the sermon.

The process of stringing verses together was not to be a random one. Rather, it was to point the message in a particular direction, towards a final text which would form the conclusion of the sermon. This final text was usually taken from the seder reading of the day. Occasionally the final text was taken from some other part of Scripture, but even then it would point directly to the seder.

Thus, synagogue sermons started with an initial text linguistically related to the haphtarah; they proceeded by haruzin which implied

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1 The following sketch of synagogue sermons is abbreviated from J. W. Bowker's "Speeches in Acts: A Study in Proem and Yellammedenu Form," New Testament Studies, XIV (October, 1967), 96-104.
the haphtarah and perhaps quoted from it; and the haruzin led directly to a text which either came out of or pointed to the seder.

The structure of Paul's sermon.--Paul's sermon follows this exact structure with one additional feature—an introduction which is based largely on the seder from Deuteronomy. Rather than plunge immediately into an initial text related to the haphtarah, Paul builds up to his initial text by first developing the key ideas of the seder—the faithfulness of God in redeeming Israel through the choice of the fathers, the exodus from Egypt, and the gift of the land. Then he quotes his initial text as the climax of this process of redemption.

Paul's initial text—"I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after My heart, who will do all My will"—is taken from I Samuel 13:14.1 This text, in its full citation, tallies linguistically with the haphtarah of the day in II Samuel 7:8.2

After quoting his initial text, Paul begins to expound it by

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1 The form of Paul's quotation of I Samuel 13:14 is a bit odd. At first sight he seems to have run different quotations together, and his citation is usually explained (cf. the margin in the Nestle text) as the conflation of three passages: "I have found David" (Ps. 89:20); "The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart" (I Sam. 13:14); and "he shall fulfil all my purpose" (Isa. 44:28). But there is another, less complicated explanation of Paul's words. An Aramaic targum on I Samuel 13:14 has it in the form, "The Lord hath sought him a man doing his will." In the targum the phrase "doing his will" is a substitute for the Hebrew (and the LXX) "after his own heart." It is quite possible that Paul incorporated the targum reading in the quotation of his initial text. Cf. Wilcox, The Semitisms of Acts, pp. 21-22.

2 The corresponding Hebrew parts of these two verses are:

(I Sam. 13:14)
(II Sam. 7:8)
showing that its interpretation involves the promises of God to bring the Davidic Savior to Israel. The familiar process of haruzin is soon evident as Paul successively quotes and applies Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 55:3, and Psalm 16:10. Also, during the course of the haruzin, he continually alludes to the haphtaroth of Isaiah 40:1-11 and II Samuel 7:4-17.

The haruzin eventually leads Paul to his final text which points directly back to the seder. His quotation from Habakkuk 2:5 carries the same sense of urgent encouragement as does Deuteronomy 4:32 in the seder.1

In all respects, therefore, Paul's structure is consistent with the accepted pattern of synagogue preaching. He chose to put his thoughts into an organizational framework that was familiar to his audience. This choice on his part made it easier for his hearers to follow him, and increased the likelihood that they would respond to his message.

The choice of the style

The third area in which Paul adapts to his audience is in the matter of style. His sermon is sprinkled with Hebraisms, and is Semitically flavored throughout. He deliberately chooses certain features of vocabulary and grammar which are peculiarly suited to a Jewish audience.

His vocabulary.—Paul inclines his vocabulary to his Jewish listeners by using the language of the Old Testament. A simple glance at the bold-face type and the marginal references in the Nestle text will reveal how much of Paul's expression is reminiscent of the Jewish

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1 See above, pp. 37-38 and 43-44.
Scriptures. His sentences are full of the very words and phrases of the Old Testament.

This tendency toward a Semitic vocabulary can be appreciated further by analyzing the words peculiar to Acts as they occur in Paul's sermon and in the rest of the book. Of the words in Paul's sermon that are peculiar to Acts, eighty per cent are found in the Septuagint and seventy per cent are found in Greek writers prior to the Christian era.

Of the words peculiar to Acts throughout the whole book, only sixty-three per cent are found in the Septuagint while a full eighty-four per cent are found in Greek writings prior to the Christian era. It is evident, therefore, that at Pisidian Antioch Paul made deliberate efforts to choose words that had a Jewish ring to them.

His grammar.—Paul also suits his grammar to his audience through the frequent use of Semitic idioms and constructions. For example, there is an Hebraism from the Septuagint in verse 22, a "Hebraistic pleonasm" in verse 24, an underlying Aramaic clause of purpose in verse 28, a Semitic impersonal plural used as a passive in verse


29, a *casus pendens* in verse 32, and an instructional formula used only in addressing Jews in verse 38.

All of these features of vocabulary and grammar reveal a conscious effort on the part of the speaker to express himself in a style that is appropriate to the background of his hearers.

**The choice of the mood**

Paul's final area of choice concerns the mood of his sermon. The very atmosphere of his message is designed to encourage a favorable response. This suiting of the mood to the audience is subtle, yet deliberate, as Paul consistently communicates a spirit of love, and a spirit of urgency.

A spirit of love.—Paul creates an atmosphere of love through his gentle treatment of the Jewish nation. He portrays the nation as the firstborn son of God (cf. Exod. 6:22). His introductory sketch pictures the history of Israel as the growth and education of a son: lovingly called out of Egypt (cf. Hos. 11:1); carried by his Father in the wilderness; entering at last into his inheritance, but still kept under the tutelage of judges and prophets. Israel, among all nations, the apostle affirms, is uniquely dear to God.

Paul also shows his love for the Jewish people by presenting the harsh moments of their history in a kind light. He calls the time spent

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1. Ibid., pp. 127-28, 163.
in Egypt a "sojourn" rather than a "captivity." He sees the institution of the monarchy, not as a rejection of Samuel and God, but simply as a request which was granted. He avoids the offensive word "crucifixion," and instead pictures the rulers as asking that Jesus "be done away with." He even alleviates the severity of judgment on those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers by viewing their act against a backdrop of ignorance and prophetic fulfillment. 

Finally, Paul shows his love for the Jewish people by fully identifying with them. His opening statement says that he is one of them—"The God of this people Israel chose our fathers." The choice of the word "our" instead of "your" conveys a positive attitude, and contributes further to the atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.

By communicating a spirit of love in all of these ways, Paul creates a favorable attitude on the part of his hearers, and facilitates their acceptance of his message.

A spirit of urgency.—The second mood that Paul nurtures throughout his sermon is the mood of urgency. It is imperative that his audience respond quickly and without delay. So Paul deliberately prompts this response by suggesting the consequences of unbelief and by stressing that the present generation of Israelites must take immediate action.

First of all, Paul suggests in the introduction that God will
reject those who disobey Him whether they be Jew or Gentile. God "destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan," and "removed" Saul because of iniquity and disobedience. The implication is that any present unbelief will result in the same consequences--God will again reject those who fail to respond whether they are among the nation of His first-born or among the God-fearers of the Gentiles.

This mood of urgency is heightened in the conclusion as Paul again warns that rejection of God's message involves serious danger. His quote from Habakkuk,

Take care, therefore, that there does not happen what is spoken of in the prophets:
"Behold, you scoffers, and be amazed and perish,
For I am doing a work in your days,
A work which you will never believe though someone explains it to you"

...brings dire thoughts to mind: few escaped the consequences of unbelief in Habakkuk's day; it was a dark hour in Israel's history, an hour of national calamity in which the people perished, the monarchy ended, and the nation went into captivity. Paul's point is that the way of salvation may be refused, but not without peril.

It is urgent, therefore, that this generation of Israelites respond to the message that Paul is preaching. Over and over again throughout the message Paul stresses that God is doing a work in their day which they must believe: "it is to us that the message of this salvation has been sent"; "we are declaring to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers—that God has fulfilled it to us, the children by raising Jesus"; "through this One forgiveness of sins is being
proclaimed to you.\textsuperscript{1} This emphasis on the appearance of the Savior in their lifetime points to the necessity of a right and ready response.

Thus the mood of urgency, as well as the mood of love, is deliberately infused throughout so as to create an atmosphere of response. As in all other areas of his sermon, Paul again makes his choice according to the particular situation, and incorporates those emotional overtones which are in line with the needs and characteristics of this unique audience.

**Summary**

Paul's sermon to the Jews in Acts 13 takes place in a synagogue of Pisidian Antioch before an eager and sympathetic audience. His message centers around God's promises to bring to Israel a Savior. These promises, the apostle affirms, have all been fulfilled—the nation was prepared, and then Jesus came as the powerful and eternal Savior. As a result of this great work of God there is available to every man forgiveness of sins and justification from all things. The response to Paul's sermon is immediate and enthusiastic, so much so that one week later practically the whole city gathers to hear him preach again.

Paul's success in so effectively persuading his audience can be attributed to the choices he made. He chose a theme that was appropriate to the occasion in that it corresponded with the **seder** and **haph-tarah** readings for that Sabbath. His theme was also appropriate to the Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers in his audience, for it spoke to the

\textsuperscript{1}The underlined words are those given special emphasis by the word order of the Greek text.
religious needs of each group. In addition to an appropriate theme, the apostle also picked a structure that was familiar to synagogue worshipers, a style that was suited to a Jewish context, and those moods which would stir a warm response.

In all these areas Paul's choice was determined by the nature and needs of the particular situation.
CHAPTER III

THE SERMON TO THE GENTILES IN ACTS 17

Sometime in the autumn of A.D. 51 a man on foot walked into the university city of the world. A Jew, about fifty years of age, he had probably never been heard of in this center of Greek intellectual life. Yet, he was about to preach the most famous sermon in history. His name was Paul, and his sermon would be the Address to the Athenians on Mars Hill.

The Historical Setting

Paul had not necessarily intended to preach in Athens. He had come to the city for a few days of relief after the tiring and dangerous experiences of the past weeks (Acts 16:11-17:15). He was taking a brief rest, waiting for friends to join him. But events soon constrained him to speak, and the Christian gospel was heard in the cradle of Greek philosophy.

The Idolatry of Athens

Like many men of today on holiday in an historic and illustrious city, Paul was interested in seeing the sights of Athens. To his amazement and consternation, the city was a veritable forest of idols. The

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1 This is the full meaning of the Greek κατειδόσλος, "full of idols" (Acts 17:16). Wycherley points out that κατειδόσλος added to a word gives the sense of full saturation, of overflowing. It is used, for example, in references to luxuriant vegetation, or to a "good head of hair," and in such culinary descriptions as "well-sprinkled with
streets of Athens were literally filled with temples, shrines, statues, altars, monuments, pillars, pedestals, and dedications. To fully document the totality of Athenian idolatry would take many pages, for the city was just saturated with "statues of gods and men--statues notable for every sort of material and artistry." Even virtues and vices were personified and worshiped. Strabo, in his geography of the ancient world, hesitated "to describe the multitude of things in this city that are lauded and proclaimed far and wide," fearing that it would take him on too great a digression. Instead, he was content to simply recall Hegesias' summation of Athens as "the possession of the gods, who seized it as a sanctuary for themselves." 

Idolatry was rampant in Athens, and Paul's spirit was aroused at the sight of it (Acts 17:16). It was impossible for him to remain silent in the presence of such ignorance. So he gave up his intended rest and began to speak in the city.


Ample enumerations and descriptions can be found in Pausanias Description of Greece i.2-30, and in Oscar Broneer, "Athens: 'City of Idol Worship,'" The Biblical Archaeologist, XXI (February, 1958), 2-28.

Livy From the Founding of the City xlv.27.

Pausanias lists altars to Mercy, Shamefastness, Rumor, and Effort, and mentions a cult of Persuasion (Description of Greece i.17.1; 22.3). Cicero approved of the deification of Intellect, Piety, Virtue, and Good Faith, but complained that Athens did a "bad thing" when "they established a temple to Disgrace and Insolence; for it is proper to deify the virtues but not the vices" (De Legibus 11.11).

Strabo Geography ix.1.16.
The initial witness

Following his normal procedure, Paul first took advantage of the openness of the synagogue to reason with the Jews and God-fearers worshiping there. At the same time he went daily into the agora to talk with those who happened to be there (Acts 17:17).

In the course of a few days Paul achieved a notoriety of sorts as reports of a "new teaching" spread through the agora. Many were attracted to him, and were curious about what he had to say. Among those who engaged him in conversation were certain of the Epicurean and Stoic

1 The agora, or marketplace, was the commercial, political, and social center of Athenian life. According to Ricciotti:
"Most of Athenian life was carried on in the public places, and the heart of that life was the market place. The Athenians did everything there: they bought and sold and traded; they discussed politics; and they besought their gods. In one corner a rhetorician harangued the crowds, while in another a strolling player parodied the mannerisms of celebrated personages. On one side of the portico enclosing the agora the Stoics had installed themselves to study the doctrines of Zeno. Opposite them the disciples of Epicurus were elaborating the philosophy of their master. Strangers from far-off regions, dressed in the garb of pilgrims, arrived every now and then and described the powers of some unknown oriental god, the efficacy of an unknown rite, or the magic virtues of mysterious stones or plants.

"The Athenians crowded the agora every day and spent much more time there than in their own homes. Idle, talkative, mocking, greedy for news, they were busy trying to see and hear everything that was going on, one moment watching a juggler in open-mouthed delight, and the next minute listening to a Platonic philosopher discuss the eternal ideas; now storming with questions a merchant just arrived from India, and now carefully noting the responses of an Egyptian soothsayer predicting the fate of the Empire or explaining a set of live philters" (Giuseppe Ricciotti, Paul the Apostle, trans. by Alba I. Zizamia [Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1952], pp. 316-17).

The agora was one place where Paul could count on finding ready listeners.
philosophers (Acts 17:18).¹

Initial reaction toward the apostle was not entirely favorable. The Athenians evidently took him to be "one of the numerous wandering orators who then went up and down the world in the service of some philosophical cause."² Some dismissed him with a sneer: "What would this babbler say?" Their word for "babbler" was σημειολόγος, an abusive piece of Athenian slang. Originally a σημειολόγος was a small bird, such as a crow or a magpie, which picked up scattered kernels of grain. Later it was used to refer to anyone who picked up scraps in the marketplace, to a worthless character who made his living by scrounging. Finally it came to be used figuratively to mean "a gatherer of words"—one who picked up scraps of learning here and there and purveyed them where he could.³ "Smatterer" is a good rendering. "Unskillful

¹The Epicureans and Stoics were the most influential schools of that time. Other schools not mentioned by Luke were either compromise positions (the Academics, the Peripatetics) or were more given to practical rather than theoretical discussions (the Cynics). The Epicureans and Stoics both had teaching centers in or near the agora (Olaf Moe, The Apostle Paul: His Life and His Work, trans. by L. A. Vigness [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1950], p. 285; cf. Bertil Gärtnern, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation, trans. by Carolyn Hannay King, Vol. XXI of Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis, ed. by Anton Fridrichsen and Harald Riesenfeld [Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1955], pp. 47-48).

²Adolf Deissmann, Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History, trans. by William E. Wilson (2nd ed., revised and enlarged; New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), p. 198. There were a host of "rhetoricians and Sophists who roamed from city to city like literary knight-errants, ready to engage in any rhetorical tournament with the champions they chanced to meet. . . . There can be little doubt that Paul was taken by the frequenters of the market-place for one of these vagrant teachers" (J. M. Mecklin, "Paul in Athens," The Bible Student, VII [February, 1903], 81).

³Gärtnern, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation, p. 48.
"plagiary" also carries the idea.¹ It was a taunt which suggested that Paul had picked up a smattering of philosophic phraseology and was trying to pass himself off as some great teacher.²

Others were more charitable, though none the less confused. To them Paul seemed to be "a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he preached Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). Hearing him speak of a masculine "Jesus" and a feminine "Anastasia," they thought he was introducing a new pair of deities similar to the many other divine couples that inhabited their Pantheon, with Resurrection as either the wife or daughter of Jesus.³

The invitation to speak

Regardless of their attitude toward Paul—whether contemptuous or confused—they were all curious as to what he was saying and


²Note the use of ἄνδρης and the optative to indicate a fourth class condition in their snide question. "It means, What would this picker up of seeds wish to say, if she should get off an idea?" It is a contemptuous tone of supreme ridicule" (Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. III: The Acts of the Apostles [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930], p. 281).

³Ricciotti notes that later on "Mohammed fell into a similar misunderstanding when he heard Christian preachers teach the Divine Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Arabic, the word 'spirit' (ruh) is feminine, and Mohammed thought it designated a woman, the wife of the Father, and mother of the Son, whom he then identified with the Virgin Mary" (Giuseppe Ricciotti, The Acts of the Apostles; Text and Commentary, trans. by Laurence E. Ayrne [Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1958], p. 270).
interested in hearing more. But the agora, with its noise and bustle, was a poor place to listen to or to contemplate a new religious teaching. So the Athenians invited Paul to the seclusion of the nearby Areopagus, or Mars Hill. ¹ There, free from the threat of disturbances and interruptions, they asked him to discuss his views at greater length, saying:

'May we know what this new teaching is which you present? For you bring some strange things to our ears; we wish to know therefore what these things mean (Acts 17:19-20).

Luke, at this point, adds an explanatory remark to characterize the audience that was forming around Paul:

Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new (Acts 17:21).

It was an audience enamored of novelty and endlessly inquisitive. The Athenians were notorious for their curiosity. Writing four and a half centuries before Luke, Thucydides characterized the Athenians as "men who sit as spectators at exhibitions of sophists," as "spectators of words and hearers of deeds," attentive to "novel proposals," and "in thrall to the pleasures of the ear."² Novelty was their life's pursuit.

¹The Areopagus was a hill situated next to the agora. Steps cut into the sheer rock led to the top where rough rock-hewn benches formed three sides of a square. In ancient times this was the meeting place of the Court of the Areopagus, the supreme Athenian tribunal (Jack Finegan, Light from the Ancient Past: The Archeological Background of the Hebrew-Christian Religion [Princeton: University Press, 1946], p. 275). Pausanias traces the name "Areopagus" or "Hill of Ares" to the legend that the first case tried on the hill was a charge of murder against Ares, the Greek god of war (Description of Greece i.28.5). The translation "Mars Hill" is justified since Mars is the Roman name for Ares.

²Thucydides History of the Peloponnesian War 111.38. Half a century later Demosthenes also complained on more than one occasion
And Paul, to them, was the newest thing to hit town. So they gathered to listen, not because it would be important, but simply because it would be new.

The setting, therefore, of Paul's Athenian sermon is a city wholly given to idolatry. A mixed and inquisitive audience has been attracted by the apostle's initial witness. Some of Paul's listeners are philosophers; some are not. Some think he has only bits and pieces of other men's wisdom to offer. Others are confused as to who and what he is preaching. All are intellectually curious, ready to give an ear.¹

The Biblical Exposition

The text of the sermon

So Paul, faced with a curious audience in a city of idolatry, said:

"Men of Athens! I observe that in every way you are very religious. For as I was passing along and examining the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the Unknown God.' Now then, what you worship but do not know, this I proclaim to you.

"The God who made the world and everything in it, the One who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in shrines made by hands. Nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything, since it is about the feckless curiosity of his fellow-citizens (First Philippi 10; Answer to Philip's Letter 17).

¹Some have suggested a different understanding of the historical setting of this sermon. For a discussion of their views, see Appendix B.
He Himself who gives to all life and breath and all things.

"And He made from one the whole human race to live over all the face of the earth, establishing the fixed times and the boundaries of their habitation, in order that they might seek God, that perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him.

"And yet, He is really not far from each one of us, for 'In Him we live and move and have our being,' as indeed some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

"Since we, therefore, are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like an image of gold, silver, or stone, fashioned by the skill and imagination of man.

"So then, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now declares to men that all, everywhere, should repent. For He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, having given proof to all by raising him from the dead."

The content and organization of the sermon

The theme and purpose.—Paul builds the sermon around his introductory promise to make the Unknown God known. What the Athenians worship but do not know, he will proclaim to them. And the summary of his proclamation becomes his theme: The Unknown God is the Creator of the universe and the Father of men. This statement is the dominating thought of the sermon. It is an affirmation of the true nature of God in contrast to the false impressions which have led the Athenians to idolatry.

By introducing his audience to this rightful conception of God,
Paul hopes to open their eyes to the error and emptiness of their own religion. His ultimate goal is to persuade the Athenians to repent of their idolatry, to abandon the fallacious worship which has been based on their ignorant conceptions. God has been overlooking this ignorance, but now He "declares to men that all, everywhere, should repent." Paul's purpose, therefore, is to turn his hearers from the worship of idols to the service of the true and living God.

The structure and outline.—The sermon's introduction is designed to gain the audience's goodwill and to orient them toward the subject. Paul begins with a favorable remark about Athenian interest in religious matters, and then announces that his address will be about the Unknown God whom they worship but do not know.

The body of the sermon is in two parts, each of which presents an aspect of Paul's theme and a preview of his purpose. In the first part Paul presents God as Creator of the universe, and reasons that God cannot, therefore, be confined by man-made shrines nor served by human hands. In the second part he characterizes God as the Father of the human race, and deduces from this that He should not, therefore, be conceived of as an image. The full theme thus emerges—God is Creator and Father—and each of these aspects is seen in opposition to the shrines, sacrifices, and images of Athenian idolatry.

The sermon concludes with an appeal for repentance and a warning of judgment to come.

Before developing these thoughts in detail, it might help to visualize the overall structure in outline form:
Introduction

I. You are very religious.

II. I observed an altar to the Unknown God.

III. I will proclaim Him to you.

Body

I. God is the Creator of the universe (theme).
   A. God made the world and all things in it.
   B. God is not, therefore, confined in man-made shrines nor served by human hands.

II. God is the Father of men (theme).
   A. God created men as His offspring.
      1. He made men to seek Him.
      2. He helps men to find Him.
         a. He establishes the times and boundaries for them.
         b. He remains very near to them.
            1) Men are dependent on God.
            2) Men are descendant from God.
   B. God ought not, therefore, be thought of as an image.

Conclusion

I. God now declares that men should repent of idolatry.

II. God has fixed a day of judgment and has appointed a judge.

The development.—Paul begins his sermon by centering on the religious devotion of the Athenians:

Men of Athens! I observe that in every way you are very religious. For as I was passing along and examining the objects of your
worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: "To the Un-
known God." Now then, what you worship but do not know, this I
proclaim to you.

Following the customary salutation, Paul acknowledges the extraordin-
ary religiosity of his listeners. In every way they are "very religious." Their devotion to the gods has impressed him. Among the many objects

1"Men of Athens" is "the form of address common with the Attic
orators and constantly occurring in the speeches of Demosthenes" (Joseph
Addison Alexander, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Classic Com-
613).

2It seems preferable to translate the adjective δεισιδαιμονεσ-
tedous as "very religious." Older scholars usually limited the rendering
to the unfavorable sense of "very superstitious" (Frederic Henry
Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1902], pp. 212-13; Edwin Hatch, Essays in
Biblical Greek [Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1889], pp. 43-45; Eber-
hard Nestle, "Contributions and Comments: Acts xvii.22," The Expository
Times XI (1899-1900), 378; and "Notes of Recent Exposition," The Exposi-
tory Times, XXXIII (August, 1907), 485-87). But more recent evidence has
made it clear than the word, meaning literally "fearers of the gods," is
sufficiently ambiguous and comprehensive to bear both connotations (Wer-
ner Foerster, "δεισιδαιμων, δεισιδαιμωσια," Theological Dictionary of
by Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Com-
pany, 1964], p. 20; Gärtner, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Reve-
lation, p. 238; Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, English Translation and
Commentary, Vol. IV of The Beginnings of Christianity; Part I: The Acts
of the Apostles, ed. by F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake [5 vols.;
Hoehling, "Deisidaimonia, a Footnote to Acts 17:22," Concordia Theo-
logical Monthly, XXXIV (August, 1963), 466-71; and N. B. Stonehouse,
"The Areopagus Address," in Paul Before the Areopagus and Other New Tes-
tament Studies [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,
1957], pp. 16-17). Δεισιδαιμονεστερον is a vague term, capable of ex-
pressing both blame and commendation, depending on the attitude of the
speaker and the audience. Paul's use of the word allows his hearers to
feel that they are being slightly commended for their religious scrupu-
losity, and yet leaves him free to criticize their inadequacies and com-
ment his own faith to them. The English translation "very religious" seems
the best way to express the vagueness of the Greek word.

3Other writers of antiquity were similarly impressed. The com-
mon consent was that the Athenians were "the most pious of the Greeks"
of worship which he has examined, he has been struck in particular with an altar inscribed "To the Unknown God." This altar, more than anything else, testifies to their religious zeal. Its presence is evidence to him of their desire to recognize all the divine powers of the universe. At the same time, however, the altar and its inscription also testify to a certain ignorance on their part, to a reverence that is without knowledge. They worship a deity, but they do not know who he is or what he is like. They acknowledge his existence, but admit that they know very little about him. Since they, therefore, have openly confessed their ignorance, he will feel free to proclaim the truth to them. He proposes, then, to make the Unknown known.

This introduction to Paul's sermon serves many purposes. First of all, it clears up the misunderstanding and answers the criticism of his activity in the agora. His introduction clarifies that he is not a proclaimer of "foreign deities," but rather a proclaimer of the "Unknown God" whom they themselves have tacitly acknowledged. He is not introducing new divinities, but simply trying to make known the God whom they

(Josephus Against Apion ii.130), "the most devoted in the worship of the gods" (Isocrates Panegyricus 33), and "far more devoted to religion than other men" (Pausanias Description of Greece i.24.3). According to Plato, his fellow Athenians offered up to the gods "more and finer sacrifices than any of the Greeks, and have adorned their temples with votive emblems as no other people have done, and presented to the gods the costliest and stateliest processions year by year, and spent more money thus than all the rest of the Greeks together" (Alcibiades ii.148).

Cf. Sophocles Oedipus at Colonus 260, and Pausanias Description of Greece i.17.1.

1For a discussion of the questions connected with this altar and its inscription, see Appendix C.
reverence but have no knowledge of. Nor is he a "babbler," an unskil-
ful plagiarizer of other men's ideas, as some have criticized. Rather,
he boldly asserts that he is qualified to provide them with true knowl-
edge. He sounds a note of independent authority—what they do not know,
he will tell them.

Second, Paul's introduction serves the purpose of orienting his
audience toward the subject of idolatry. Though he does not yet take a
judgmental stance toward this dominant characteristic of Athenian reli-
gion, his initial comments at least focus attention on it. His refer-
ences to their religiousness, their objects of worship, and their un-
usual altar bring the subject to the forefront of their thoughts, and
set the stage for his ultimate purpose which is to turn the Athenians
from the worship of idols to the worship of the living God.

Third, the introduction begins the motif of ignorance, a motif
which is threaded throughout the whole sermon. It is this lack of
knowledge about the true God which has led the Athenians to wrong con-
cclusions about the qualities and characteristics of deity, and subse-
quently into idol worship. It is this same ignorance of which all men
everywhere must now repent. This motif, then, is begun in the intro-
duction, utilized throughout the body of the sermon, and made the basis
for the concluding appeal.

Finally, and obviously, Paul's introduction reveals the direc-
tion his message will take. It announces that his sermon is to be about
the nature of the true God. His theme will concern the knowledge of the
Unknown God. He will fully and plainly set forth what they are
worshiping but do not know.

Once the theme is announced, Paul moves immediately into the body of the sermon with the development of his first main point--God is the Creator of the universe:

The God who made the world and everything in it, the One who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in shrines made by hands. Nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything, since it is He Himself who gives to all life and breath and all things.

Paul begins by affirming that God is the One who has made the world and everything in it. He is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. He is the omnipotent Creator, the One responsible for the existence of all things.

This concept of God as omnipotent Creator is fatal to both the temple services and sacrificial rites of Athenian idolatry. For if God made the world and everything in it, He cannot be permanently attached to an earthly residence, such as an Athenian temple.¹ It is inconceivable to think that the Creator is limited to the four walls of a shrine made by hands. Rather, He dwells in the eternal temple of His own creation. It is a vain contradiction of His true nature to suppose that He can be localized in something men have built. He is the Creator, unconfined by His creation.

Moreover, as the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, He is entirely independent of all human care and service. He does not need the

¹Perhaps Paul made this statement with a sweep of his hand toward the Temple of Mars, the Sanctuary of the Eumenides, and the Parthenon of Minerva, which were all in plain sight of the Areopagus (W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, The Life and Epistles of St. Paul [2 vols., unabridged ed.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.], I, 376).
sacrificial rites or the ceremonial offerings prepared by men. He is not served by human hands at all as though He needed anything. The Creator needs nothing from His creatures. On the contrary, the creature is continually, and in the highest degree, dependent on the Creator, for it is God who gives to all life and breath and everything needful for existence. It is a mistake to think that the sovereign Lord of all creation can be served by men with material things in the manner exemplified by Athenian idolatry.

Paul's first point, then, shows the folly of idolatry in view of the knowledge of God as Creator of the universe. The One who made the world cannot be reduced to a local dwelling, and the One who is the source of every aspect of life certainly needs nothing from those entirely dependent on Him. The clear implication is that the Athenians ought to stop their idolatrous practices. They ought to refrain from that ignorant zeal which erects an idol in a temple and presents a sacrifice on its altar. Such habits, Paul declares, are simply inconsistent with the nature of the true God.

Paul's second main point is developed along the lines of his first one. He begins with an assertion about the nature of the true God--He is the Father of men--and concludes with an application of this.

1It is not necessary to read any graduated scale into this triad. "Life" embodies the idea that it is God who is the author of all physical and organic life. "Breath" has reference to the breath of life, the principle of life, which God breathed into man's nostrils to make him a living soul. "All things" is a comprehensive, collective term which includes what has previously been said--"life, breath, and all things that belong to life" (Gärtner, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation, pp. 198-201).
knowledge to the Athenian practice of idolatry:

And He made from one the whole human race to live over all the face of the earth, establishing the fixed times and the boundaries of their habitation, in order that they might seek God, that perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him.

And yet, He is really not far from each one of us, for, "In Him we live and move and have our being," as indeed some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."

Since we, therefore, are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like an image of gold, silver, or stone, fashioned by the skill and imagination of man.

Paul begins his second main point by stressing that God is not only the Creator of the universe in general, He is also, in particular, the Creator of mankind. God made out of one man the whole human race to live over all the face of the earth. There are no "autochtones," races sprung from their native soil. Rather, all mankind is one in origin, all created by God, and all derived from a single common ancestor.

The purpose in thus creating mankind was "that they might seek God." God made men in order that they might turn to Him in worship and service. And God is so concerned that men seek and find Him that He deliberately aids them toward this end. He so strongly desires this

1 The Athenians claimed that they were "autochtones," distinct from other races and the offspring of their own soil: "We are of a lineage so noble and so pure that throughout our history we have continued in possession of the very land which gave us birth, since we are sprung from its very soil" (Isocrates Panegyricus 24). They boasted that they were "neither of mixed origin nor invaders of a foreign territory but were, on the contrary, alone among the Hellenes, sprung from the soil itself" (Isocrates Panathenaicus 124). Cf. Aristophanes The Wasps 1076, and Euripides Ion 29.

2 The reason Paul stresses that all are the children of a common parent is so that when any man seeks God, he will not arrive at some local guardian deity associated with his nation's mythological origins, but will instead find his way back to the ultimate God who created everyone.
response from men that He actually helps them to make it. In other words, God not only created men to seek Him, He also helps men to find Him.

At this point Paul begins to discuss the two steps which God has taken to help men in their seeking and finding. The first step he mentions is the setting of times and boundaries. When God created men to live over all the face of the earth, He established "the fixed times and the boundaries of their habitation." The regular and predictable

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1 There is a controversy about the meaning of καιροῖ (times) and ἀποθέσεως (boundaries). Some understand these as a reference to the temporal and spatial development of different nations. They see God's setting of the "times" as an ordaining of various historical epochs, a determining of set periods for the rise and fall of nations. Reference is usually made in this connection to Daniel 8, where periods of time are granted by God to the individual nations as they supersede one another. Similarly, they interpret the "boundaries" as historical boundary-lines between two inhabited areas. These are the divinely ordained geographical limitations of the different nations (Deut. 32:8). According to this view, therefore, God aids men in seeking Him by prescribing to each nation its time of endurance and its space to dwell in (Henry J. Cadbury, "Lexical Notes on Luke-Acts: I," Journal of Biblical Literature, XLIV [1925], 219-21; Gärtner, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation, pp. 147-51; Lake and Cadbury, English Translation and Commentary, Vol. IV of The Beginnings of Christianity, p. 216; and Richard Belward Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles; An Exposition, in Westminster Commentaries, ed. by Walter Lock and D. C. Simpson [14th ed.; London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1951], p. 316).

Another view takes καιροῖ and ἀποθέσεως as referring not to the times and boundaries of nations, but to the times and boundaries of nature. According to this approach the "times" are the cycles of nature—days, months, seasons—the orderly and rhythmic sequence which makes it possible for men to have food (F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of Acts; The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes, of The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by Ned B. Stonehouse [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954], p. 358; and Martin Dibelius, Studies in the Acts of the Apostles, ed. by Heinrich Greeven, trans. by Mary Line [London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1956], pp. 29-30). Likewise, God's establishing of the "boundaries" is a reference to His shielding the habitation of men, the firm land, against the sea. The "boundaries" are the natural limits God put to the sea so that the chaos of the Flood would not once again overtake mankind (W. Eltester,
"times" which govern man's existence—day following day, month following month, each season succeeding another—were all established by God as a means of pointing men to Him. When He made these cycles as part of the creation, He intended that they be a clearly perceived witness to His eternal power and deity (Rom. 1:20; Acts 14:17).

The same is true of the "boundaries" which protect the habitation of men. God set limits around the sea, guarding the dry land on which men dwell. And this mystery of the boundless sea remaining in check is to challenge men to contemplate a divine power. The "times" and the "boundaries," therefore, have been intentionally provided in order that men might seek God.

But even with this help on God's part, Paul goes on to say, there is no assurance that men will find Him. On the contrary, it is very doubtful that any seeking based on the revelation of God in nature will actually result in finding God. The apostle is very quick to point out this uncertainty, for after declaring that God established the times.


This second approach seems preferable for many reasons. First, it is more in harmony with Paul's earlier emphasis on the unity and common origin of all men. Second; it is consistent with his remarks to another pagan audience about how God in His goodness "did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons [καιροίσα], satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17; the καιροί here are very obviously cycles of nature, not historical epochs). And finally, it reflects the common tendency to see God's ordering of the days, months, and seasons, and His restraint of the sea, as evidence of His concern for and goodness toward men (cf. Psa. 74:13-17; Jer. 31:35-36; I Clement 20).
and the boundaries in order that men might seek Him, he very pessimistically adds, "that perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him."

The seeking of men is like the groping of the blind, or like the fumbling of those in the dark of night, where vision is so impaired that there is little possibility of success. Men's spiritual vision is impaired, their minds are darkened, causing them to fumble in thought and action. They grope in uncertainty, with little chance that they will find God. God created men to seek Him, and provides help so that they will find Him. But men have made only darkened responses to God's revelation, and the goal of finding Him has not been reached.

"And yet," Paul adds, "He is really not far from each one of us." As men grope and fumble as after a dim and distant goal, the God they seek is actually standing perfectly still and nearby. With these words Paul begins a discussion of the second way in which God aids men in their seeking, and that is by staying in close proximity to them.

God helps men to find Him, not only by establishing the times and the boundaries, but also by remaining very near to men.

And He made from one the whole human race to live over all the face of the earth, establishing the fixed times and the boundaries

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1 Paul's use of εί and the optative indicates that he expects a negative outcome from any seeking based on natural revelation. The construction is a fourth class condition, expressing strong doubt that men will ever actually find God this way (Robertson, Word Pictures of the New Testament, Vol. III: The Acts of the Apostles, p. 288).

The problem is not the light of God's revelation, but rather the perverted experience of men. In Romans 1:18-23 Paul declares that the knowledge of God has been clearly revealed in nature. But men, by repeatedly perverting this knowledge, have brought themselves to a state of darkened futility. And now their seeking is merely an ignorant groping which leads most often to the folly of idolatry, the worship of the creature rather than the Creator. Cf. Ephesians 4:17.
of their habitation, in order that they might seek God, that perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him.

And yet, He is really not far from each one of us, for "In Him we live and move and have our being," as indeed some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."

Men may pervert the revelation of God in nature and make Him seem blurry and far away. But in reality God is very near and very perceptible. He is in such an intimate relationship with men that anyone who desires to know and worship Him can find Him.

Paul drives home his pronouncement that God is not far from those who seek Him, and defines more closely the intimate relationship between God and men, by citing some of their own poets. He quotes two lines—"In Him we live and move and have our being," and "For we are also His offspring"—to demonstrate that men are dependent on and descendant from God.

Paul quotes the first line of Greek poetry to show that men are dependent on God. God is so close to men that every aspect of their existence is bound up in Him. Just as creation in general is dependent on the Creator "who gives to all life and breath and all things," so men in particular are wholly dependent on the God in whom they live and move.

1 The plural expression "some of your own poets" has been interpreted in various ways. One obvious explanation is that the following quotation can be found in more than one poet. Another view is that the plural is due to literary convention: "The indefinite plural 'some' used in citing the poets is characteristic of the ancient method of quoting a single or known passage" (Henry J. Cadbury, The Book of Acts in History [New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1955], p. 49; cf. Dibelius, Studies in the Acts of the Apostles, pp. 50-51). A third approach, and the one followed here, is that the expression looks backward and forward, so that both what precedes and what follows are to be understood as poetic statements. See below, pp. 110-14 for a substantiation of this interpretation and for an identification of the authors.
and have their being. Men could not exist apart from the nearness of God.

But even more intimate is the relationship envisioned in Paul's second quotation—"For we are also His offspring." In this citation the proximity of God to men is defined not merely in terms of external nearness, but also in terms of essential oneness. God is as close to men as a father is to his son. There is a similarity between God and men, a similarity based on kinship, for men are descendant from God. Men are part of God's family, made in His image. They are the offspring of God.

Paul has now come full-circle in the development of his second main point—that God is the Father of men. He began by proclaiming that God created all men out of one in order that they might seek Him. Then he presented the two ways in which God helps men to seek and find Him—through the natural revelation of orderly seasons and limited seas, and through the internal consciousness of His own nearness. This latter truth is so plain that even their own poets recognize it, acknowledging that men are wholly dependent on God as His offspring. Paul's unifying thrust, therefore, is that God is the Father who made men to seek Him.

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1 Some suppose that the three verbs—live, move, and have being—form an ascending scale: the physical life of plants, animals, and men; the independent movement of animals and men; and the self-conscious intellectual and spiritual activity which men alone have. Others see them as anticlimactic—spiritual life, animal movement, and bare existence. But such distinctions seem artificial. Practically speaking, the terms are synonymous (Gärtner, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation, pp. 195-97). The three verbs "may be regarded as substantially equivalent, a cumulative or exhaustive expression of the one great thought, that our being and activity are wholly dependent on our intimate relation and proximity to God our Maker" (Alexander, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, p. 619).
and helps men to find Him by revealing, among other things, His Fatherhood to them.

The apostle is now ready to apply this second main point to the Athenian practice of idolatry. The fact that God is the Father of men should have bearing on the way in which men worship God:

And He made from one the whole human race to live over all the face of the earth, establishing the fixed times and the boundaries of their habitation, in order that they might seek God, that perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him.

And yet, He is really not far from each one of us, for "In Him we live and move and have our being," as indeed some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."

Since we, therefore, are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, silver, or stone, fashioned by the skill and imagination of man.

The underlying assumption in Paul's application is that children are like their sire. If we—as intelligent, moral, and rational beings—are God's offspring, then our sire must also be an intelligent, moral, and rational Being, not a dumb, dead, and senseless idol. The Father who enables us to live, move, and have our being, must Himself possess these qualities. He ought not, therefore, be likened to a lifeless image; that cannot move, and is in reality nothing. Since the Athenians are God's children, they ought not to think that their Father is made of gold, silver, or stone. A simple contemplation of their own existence as men should lead them to a true perception of the living God, and to a renunciation of the dead images which their own hands have fashioned. The worship of idols, Paul insists, is simply incompatible with the knowledge of God as the Father of men.

Paul's second point, therefore, like his first, is ultimately directed against the folly of idolatry. In his first point he stressed
that God the Creator does not dwell in man-made temples nor is He served by human hands. In his second point he has shown that God the Father cannot be represented by an image. Together these thoughts oppose all aspects of Athenian idolatry—shrines, sacrifices, and images. At the same time these two points fulfill Paul's pledge to make the Unknown known, to tell them about the God they reverence but do not know. His theme is now complete—the Unknown God is the Creator of the universe and the Father of men.

Throughout all of this Paul has been steadily building toward the ultimate aim of his sermon, which is to win the Athenians from their idolatry. The whole purpose of his message is to get his listeners to turn from this ignorant worship. This thrust now comes to full force in the sermon's conclusion as Paul calls on his audience to repent in view of the coming judgment:

So then, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now declares to men that all, everywhere, should repent. For He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, having given proof to all by raising him from the dead.

At the start of his conclusion Paul ties together some of his previous thoughts. He reaffirms that the religious devotion of the Athenians is essentially being carried out in ignorance. They themselves acknowledge this in their altar to the Unknown God. The abundance of their temples, sacrifices, and images is further evidence that they do not know the true God who is the Creator of the universe and the Father of men. Such ignorance is inexcusable, for the knowledge of God has been readily available. It is their fault that they have not found
Him, for God has revealed Himself to them through nature and through their own inner consciousness.

And yet, culpable as their ignorance is, God has overlooked it. He has allowed it to pass as if unnoticed. He has been merciful, postponing His judgment.¹

The time of God's forbearance, however, is drawing to a close, and God is now declaring that all men everywhere should repent. Messengers are being sent to the ends of the earth to announce that the divine overlooking is to stop. The accountability that has always been due will soon be demanded, for the God who is the Creator and the Father is about to become the Judge. A day of judgment has been fixed, and a man has been appointed who will serve as God's judicial representative. This man is a man of God's own choosing, and he will judge the world righteously and fairly.

The certainty of this judgment to come, and the authentication of this divinely appointed representative, are evidenced by the fact that God has raised him from the dead. The fact that this man has already been resurrected is proof that a day is coming when all men will be held accountable for their worship of God. The Athenians, therefore, should turn from their ignorant idolatry, and should serve the true and living God who has now been declared to them.

Thus, in his conclusion Paul again touches on their ignorance,

¹Cf. Paul's similar statement to another pagan audience at Lystra (Acts 14:16). The same thought about God's divine forbearance in passing over former sins also occurs in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 3:25).
only this time he judges it blameworthy in the light of God's revelation. Then, in view of the demonstrated certainty that God's forbearance will soon turn to judgment, he urges his listeners to repent of their idolatry and to turn in full knowledge to the God who is the Creator of the universe and the Father of men.

This, then, is the development of Paul's sermon. He begins with an observation about their religious zeal, noting in particular their altar inscribed "To the Unknown God." He interprets this inscription as an admission of ignorance, and promises to proclaim to them the God they worship but do not know.

He declares first that God is the Creator of the universe. He is the omnipotent sovereign. He does not, therefore, dwell in shrines made by hands nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything. As the Lord of heaven and earth, He is in no way honored by the proliferation of Athenian temples and sacrifices.

Secondly, Paul states that God is the Father of men. He created the whole human race out of one man. He made men to seek Him, and helps them to find Him by establishing the fixed times and the boundaries of their habitation, and by staying very near to them. His proximity to men is even acknowledged by their own poets who stress men's dependence on and descendence from God. Since men, therefore, are the offspring of God, they ought not to conceive of their sire as an image of gold, silver, or stone, fashioned by the skill and imagination of men.

After thus demonstrating the folly of idolatry in view of the knowledge of God as Creator and Father, the apostle concludes his
sermon by urging his audience to repent. God will no longer overlook their ignorant devotion, but instead has fixed a day of judgment in which all men will be held accountable for their knowledge of God. He has also appointed a man who will serve as His righteous and impartial judge on that day. The certainty of these things has been vouchsafed to men by the resurrection of this divinely appointed man. The Athenians, therefore, should turn from their idolatry, and should worship the true God who has now been made known to them.

**The response to the sermon**

**The response of the Athenians.**—The audience's response to Paul's sermon was varied.—Some of the Athenians mocked, others deferred, but some accepted and believed: 

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from among them. But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them (Acts 17:32-34).

Some in the audience mocked when they heard of the resurrection of the dead. While they might have assented to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the concept of a resurrected physical body was to them absurd. They endorsed, rather, the sentiment which Aeschylus their poet had put into the mouth of the god Apollo: "When the dust hath drained the blood of man, once he is slain, there is no return to life."¹ Though they may have agreed that the worship of idols was

¹ Aeschylus *Eumenides* 647-48. The contempt of the Greeks for the Christian idea of a bodily resurrection is also reflected by Lucian: "Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia [to see Perginus in prison], sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succour and defend and encourage the hero. They show incredible
foolishness,¹ the concept of a bodily resurrection was beyond serious consideration.²

speed whenever any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all. So it was then in the case of Peregrinus; much money came to him from them by reason of his imprisonment, and he procured not a little revenue from it. The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody, most of them (The Passing of Peregrinus 13).

For a sarcastic ridicule of the whole concept of an after-life, see Pliny Natural History vii.55.

¹See below, pp. 115-23.

²Eutychus [Edmund P. Clowney], in "Jesus and Anastasia, Christianity Today, March 27, 1961, p. 13, has described their mocking refusal of Paul's message in verse form:

A learned Areopagite
Who held a Ph.D.,
Awarded him kat' exochen
By the Academy,

Was pleased to spare a moment when
The preacher had been heard
To take aside the little Jew
And offer him a word:

"You're right, of course, about the gods;
Homeric fable can't
Be credible here on the Hill
We willingly will grant.

"We much admired your reasoning
Well seasoned with quotation;
With training in philosophy
You'd gain a reputation.

"It was the more unfortunate
You closed with such a blunder;
Your resurrection concept is
As crass as Zeus' thunder!

"I do not mean you should refrain
From preaching Anastasia;
The Hellenist finds deeper truth
Others continued to show the curiosity and interest which had led to Paul's being taken to the Areopagus in the first place. They were impressed with what he was saying. But they deferred any further discussion for later, promising to hear Paul again at another time.¹

Not all, however, mocked or deferred. Some believed. There were a number in Paul's audience who accepted his message and joined themselves to him. Two from this group are specifically mentioned—Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris.

Dionysius was a member of the Council of the Areopagus, and hence a part of Athenian aristocracy.² His name occurs repeatedly in the pages of Christian tradition. Eusebius twice mentions a letter of

In all the gods of Asia,

"And Resurrection as a myth
Is one with Plato's Real;
The legend of an empty tomb
Has popular appeal.

"You need not change your discourse much,
If only it is clear
That Jesus' body is quite dead
For myths can't happen here!"

¹ Some regard their proposal to hear Paul again as a polite refusal, "as a way out of an embarrassing situation, rather than as a serious promise" (Dibelius, Studies in the Acts of the Apostles, p. 72). But it seems best to take their words at face value since there are other indications in the text that the Athenian sense of courtesy and politeness was not unduly developed.


"It is perhaps safe to infer from such data as we have that the council was small, perhaps about thirty. The members were taken from those who had held certain offices which would have been open only to the wealthy because of the expense they involved, and in fact the membership was practically limited to certain well-known families."
Dionysius of Corinth which records that Dionysius the Areopagite became the first bishop of Athens. 1 Nicephorus, another church historian, relates that he suffered a martyr's death in Athens during the reign of Domitian. A third account, obviously of legendary character, describes him as being sent by Pope Clement I around A.D. 95 from Rome to Paris, where he was beheaded on Montmartre—a story which explains his being confused with St. Denys, the patron saint of France. In the fifth and sixth centuries a series of mystical writings were circulated in his name, and exercised great influence on the church of the Middle Ages. 2

As for Damaris, Ramsay suggests that she must have been "a foreign woman, perhaps one of the class of educated hetairai," in view of the unlikelihood of an ordinary Athenian woman being present at any public meeting addressed by Paul. 3 Smith thinks she was a woman of ill-repute, converted from a life of shame. 4 If so, the inclusion of

1 "Dionysius, one of the ancients, the pastor of the diocese of the Corinthians, relates that the first bishop of the Church at Athens was that member of the Areopagus, the other Dionysius, whose original conversion after Paul's speech to the Athenians in the Areopagus Luke described in the Acts" (Eusebius The Ecclesiastical History iii.4.11; cf. also iv.23.3).


4 "The name is apparently a variant of Damalis, which signifies 'a heifer'; and since it is the sort of designation which was commonly borne by Athenian courtesans, and woman of good fame lived in close seclusion, it is probable that she belonged to that numerous and unhappy order; and it may be taken as an evidence of her
her name might be Luke's way of again drawing attention to the appeal that the gospel has for men and women from all classes and conditions of life.¹

These two, "and others with them" (Acts 17:34), believed Paul's message, turned from their idols, and began to serve the one true God.

The response of the audience, therefore, was varied. Some mocked, others deferred, but some believed.

The response of Paul.—Many have suggested that Paul also had a response to this sermon, and that his response was negative. They claim that the apostle regretted the philosophical approach he took in Athens, that he considered it a failure, and that he abandoned it when he continued his ministry in Corinth. Ramsay expresses this view quite strongly:

It would appear that Paul was disappointed and perhaps disillusioned by his experience in Athens. He felt that he had gone at least as far as was right in the way of presenting his doctrine in a form suited to the current philosophy; and the result had been little more than naught. When he went on from Athens to Corinth, he no longer spoke in the philosophic style. In replying afterwards to the unfavourable comparison between his preaching and the more philosophical style of Apolloës, he told the Corinthians that, when he came among them, he "determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. II 2); and nowhere throughout his writings is he so hard on the wise, the philosophers, and the dialecticians, as when he defends the way in which he had presented Christianity at Corinth. Apparently the greater concentration of purpose and simplicity of method in his preaching at Corinth is referred to by Luke, when he says, XVIII 5, that when Silas and

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¹ Note the different social classes of the Philippian converts in Acts 16:11-40.
Timothy rejoined him there, they found him wholly possessed by and engrossed in the word.

This view enjoys some measure of popularity because of its apparent readiness to be content with the simple gospel rather than with a philosophical argument. The implication is that if Paul regretted his plunge into philosophical method and vowed never again to preach "with eloquent wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:17), then the contemporary preacher should also avoid such reasoning after the flesh and should stick to a simple presentation of the gospel, knowing nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

But is this judgment accurate? Did Paul respond negatively? Did he change his approach at Corinth because of his failure at Athens?

The answer to these questions is a very definite "No." Paul did not

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1 Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen, p. 252.
Cf. also his comments in "St. Paul in Athens--II," p. 275: "There can be no question that the account which he gives in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians shows a recoil from his plunge into philosophic method at Athens: 'and I, brethren, when I came among you, came not announcing in superior language (as a rhetorician) or in superior wisdom (as a philosopher) the mysterious nature of God (as a knowledge reserved for the initiated few); for I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' What a contrast is that to the speech before the Areopagus, with its talk about the 'Divine nature,' and its silence about Jesus and the crucifixion (except in the obscure and nameless hint in xvii.31)"

Rackham agrees that "At Athens S. Paul tried the wisdom of the world and found it wanting; and when he went on to Corinth, he determined not to try excellency of speech or the persuasive words of wisdom, but to preach --what he had not proclaimed in the Areopagus--Christ crucified. His disappointment at the failure of the former method to touch the frivolous Athenians no doubt kindled the fire with which he denounces the wisdom of the world in his first epistle to the Corinthians" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 320).

consider his sermon a failure, and he did not change his method of preaching when he got to Corinth. A close consideration of the data reveals that the apostle's message to the Athenians was an evangelistic and rhetorical success, and that it deserves to be a pattern for those who would speak to today's educated pagan.

In the first place, Luke would not have included this sermon in his account if either he or Paul considered it a failure. It is essential to Luke's own purposes as the author of Acts that this sermon be viewed as a typical and exemplary way of addressing the heathen. In showing how the ascended Lord brought His word to men and established His Church in the face of numerous obstacles, Luke reports many examples of apostolic preaching. It is inconceivable that he would present an apostolic sermon which was designed to show how to preach the gospel. It is particularly incomprehensible that the Areopagus address should be regarded in this light in view of the impressive way in which Luke records the sermon and the pains he takes to fully portray the historical setting. It is more easily understandable that he would include the message as "a characteristic example of a missionary sermon before Gentiles." As Dibelius aptly says:

In giving only one sermon addressed to Gentiles by the great apostle to the Gentiles, namely the Areopagus speech in Athens, his primary purpose is to give an example of how the Christian missionary should approach cultured Gentiles.²


"When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with
preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus"—is not
meant to indicate, as Ramsay suggests, that Paul adopted a simpler, less
philosophical, approach in Corinth. Acts 18:5 is not designed as a con-
trast to Acts 17:16-34, but rather has meaning in its own context. The
full text of Acts 18:1-6 is as follows:

After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a
Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with
his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to
leave Rome. And he went to see them; and because he was of the same
trade he stayed with them, and they worked for by trade they were
tentmakers. And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and per-
suaded Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied
with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus:
And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and
said to them, "Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From
now on I will go to the Gentiles.

In this context, Lake and Cadbury explain verse 5 as a contrast
to verse 4. In Acts 18:4, following a reference to Paul's labor with
Aquila and Priscilla as tentmakers, Luke reports that the apostle "ar-
gued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks."
This suggests to Lake and Cadbury that Paul had to work during the week
and preached only on the Sabbath (verses 3-4), but when Silas and Timo-
thy came to Corinth he was able to give up tentmaking and to occupy him-
sel fulltime with preaching (verse 5).¹

¹"The meaning is that until Silas and Timothy came down to Cor-
inth Paul had to work all the week and preached only on the Sabbath,
but when they arrived he was able to give up all his time to preach-
ing. Was this because Silas and Timothy earned enough for all
three? Or had they brought funds from Macedonia?" (Lake and Cad-
bury, English Translation and Commentary, Vol. IV of The Beginnings
Stonehouse, on the other hand, interprets verse 5 in the light of verse 6. He thinks that the view of Lake and Cadbury is largely inferential and rather forced, since Luke does not qualify his reference to the preaching activity by stating that he could now engage in it every day. Inasmuch as Luke says that Paul was occupied with preaching to the Jews when Silas and Timothy came to Corinth, and thus may be understood as virtually repeating the description of Paul's activity among the Jews in 18:5, it is more satisfactory to conclude that 18:5 is a résumé of 18:4 introduced in order to indicate that, as 18:6 immediately goes on to disclose, soon after the arrival of these men, the Jews turned so sharply against his mission that he turned to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 14:44ff.).

Regardless of which of these explanations of Acts 18:5 is preferred, there is no foundation whatever for the interpretation that Paul's being engrossed in preaching to the Jews reflects a rejection or modification of his message and method in preaching to the pagans in Athens.

Third, Paul's remarks in I Corinthians 2 have more to do with his oratorical style than with his philosophical content. His words are an explanation of his uniform speaking style, not an indication of any change of heart:

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (I Cor. 2:1-5).

Paul is not reflecting in this passage on his ministry in Athens and expressing a new determination to know only "Jesus Christ and him of Christianity, p. 224).

1 Stonehouse, "The Areopagus Address," p. 36.
cruified" in contrast to a philosophically oriented message. Rather, he is reminding the Corinthians that when he spoke among them his oratorical style did not follow the fashion of the day. He is emphasizing that, whether at Athens or at Corinth, he did not employ the "lofty words or wisdom" that were so common among contemporary orators. He did not imitate the current inflated style by using "plausible words of wisdom," but instead used a simple style and relied on the Spirit and power of God.

To fully understand Paul's comments it is necessary to know that by the middle of the first century A.D. Greek oratory had focused almost exclusively on the matter of style. The rhetoric of Paul's day was almost totally preoccupied with the ornamental aspects of public speaking. This preoccupation can best be seen by considering (1) the treatises that were being written, (2) the Asiatic-Atticist controversy that was raging, and (3) the Second Sophistic movement that was emerging.

For several centuries prior to Paul the subject of speech style had been receiving more and more attention in the rhetorical treatises being written. In the fourth century B.C. Aristotle dealt only briefly with the matter in the third book of his "Art of Rhetoric." But from this modest beginning the element of style soon came to dominate the theoretical works of classical authors. Half of the Rhetorica ad Herennium (86 B.C.) is devoted to the kinds and qualities of style. Most of Cicero's attention in his De Oratore (58 B.C.), De Optimo Genere...

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1 He is certainly not repenting of his references to Greek poets, for in this very epistle (I Cor. 15:33) he quotes from the Thais of Menander.
Oratorum (46 B.C.), Brutus (46 B.C.), and Orator (46 B.C.) is directed to stylistic matters. And at the turn of the first century, this one aspect of speaking is the total concern of Dionysius' On Literary Composition, Longinus' On the Sublime, and Demetrius' On Style. In other words, the matter of speech style, initially only a limited segment of the literature, became by the time of Paul the dominating feature of classical theory.

As the subject of style became of paramount theoretical interest, there arose a dispute known as the Asiatic-Atticist controversy. The quarrel between the Asianists and Atticists was largely over the

1 Certain historical and political factors accounted for this concentration on stylistic theories. As Greek democracy faded and power became concentrated in the hands of the imperial authorities, popular assemblies became both infrequent and perfunctory, since their decisions could be altered at any moment. Pleading in the courts was simultaneously restricted. As a result, the voice of the orator no longer had any force in legislative or judicial matters, and his only remaining outlet as a public speaker was the ceremonial oratory of special occasions. Baldwin describes this narrowing of public address:

"Of the three fields of oratory distinguished by Aristotle, deliberative, forensic, and occasional, the first was restricted by political changes. It faded with democracy. So later it faded at Rome, and still later in other realms. Deliberative oratory presupposes free discussion and audiences that vote. The steady increase of government from above administered by an appointed official class hastened also the tendency of the second kind of oratory, forensic, to become technical, the special art of legal pleading. Thus the only field left free was the third, occasional oratory, encomium, or panegyric, the commemoration of persons and days, the address of welcome, the public lecture" (Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (to 1400), Interpreted from Representative Works [Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959], p. 5).

This narrowing of the field of oratory had a concomitant effect on the focus of rhetorical theory. Since only the innocuous and utterly predictable inanities of ceremonial occasions were open to the orator, and since his success on such occasions would depend more on how he spoke than on what he said, it was only natural that the theorists would turn their attention to that which had the most immediate and utilitarian value—the treatment of speech style.
relative merits of the plain and grand styles.¹ The orators of Asia Minor preferred the florid, luxuriant, and bombastic rhetoric of the grand style. The Atticists favored the plain style, which was characterized by clearness, simplicity, and restraint. The heat of the controversy belongs to the latter half of the first century B.C., and is reflected in the works of Cicero and Quintilian.² The important point

¹The rhetorical theory of the day recognized three different oratorical styles—the plain, the middle, and the grand. Each of these is described by Cicero in his Orator.

According to Cicero, the plain style orator is "to the point, explaining everything and making every point clear rather than impressive, using a refined, concise style stripped of ornament" (6.20). He follows the "ordinary usage," uses "plain and simple" words, and avoids "the charm and richness of figurative ornament" (23.76,79). He is free from "the bonds of rhythm," "modest" in metaphor, and not "bold in coin­ning words" (23.77; 24.81). "His delivery is not that of tragedy nor of the stage; he will employ only slight movements of the body, but will trust a great deal to his expression" (25.86). His speech, however, is "sprinkled with the salt of pleasantry," i.e., with humor and wit (26.87).

"The second style is fuller and somewhat more robust than the simple style just described" (26.91). This middle style contains "a minimum of vigour, and a maximum of charm. For it is richer than the unadorned style, but plainer than the ornate and opulent style" (ibid.). It uses neither the intellectual appeal of the former; nor the fiery force of the latter:

"Akin to both, excelling in neither, sharing in both, or, to tell the truth, sharing in neither, this style keeps the proverbial 'even tenor of its way,' bringing nothing except ease and uniformity, or at most adding a few posies as in a garland, and diversifying the whole speech with simple ornaments of thought and diction" (6.21).

"The orator of the third style is magnificent, opulent, stately and ornate" (28.97). His eloquence "rushes along with the roar of a mighty stream," and "has power to sway men's minds and move them in every possible way" (ibid.). The grand orator shows "splendid power of thought and majesty of diction"; he is "forceful, versatile, copious and grave, trained and equipped to arouse and sway the emotions" (5.20).

²Cicero Brutus 82.284-84.291; De Optimo Genere Oratorum 3.7-4.10; Orator 7.23-9.32. Quintilian Institutio Oratoria xii.10.12-26. For an analysis of the Asiatic-Atticist dispute, consult M. L. Clarke, Rhetoric at Rome; A Historical Survey (London: Cohen & West Ltd., 1953), pp. 80-83; G. M. A. Grube, The Greek and Roman Critics (London:
to note here is that by the time of Paul the Greek world had been split into two camps—those who favored the elegant and pure style associated with Athens and Corinth, and those who preferred the flowery and redundant prose that came out of Ephesus and the cities of Asia.

These two phenomena—the theoretical preoccupation with style, and the Asiatic-Atticist controversy—eventually culminated in an era of Greek oratory known as the Second Sophistic. The Second Sophistic can best be described as the triumph of the Asiatic school:

The second half of the first century saw the development of "the second Sophistic" which can best be described as the triumph of display oratory mainly in the Greek part of the empire and especially in the province of Asia.¹

The oratory of this period was committed to the extravagances of the grand style. Whereas Aristotle had conceived of rhetoric as the art of giving effectiveness to the truth, the Second Sophistics saw it only as a means of giving effectiveness to the speaker:

The sophist was over-expressive lest for a moment he should cease to be impressive. The audience need not be held to any course of thought; it must not be held too long by any one device of style; but it must unflaggingly admire. It must be spellbound. The constant implication of Philostratus probably echoes the ideal of orator and audience alike: behold a great speaker!²

It mattered little whether the speaker had a purpose in speaking, for the glory of the speech was an end in itself:

¹Grube, The Greek and Roman Critics, p. 325.

²Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic, pp. 16-17.
For the composition of the whole speech sophistic generally had little care. That planned sequence, that leading on of the mind from point to point, which is the habit of great orators and the chief means of cogency, presupposes urgency toward a goal. Sophists often had no goal. The audience need be won only to admiration, not to decision.¹

The mark of the Second Sphistic is that it "reduced rhetoric to style,"² and made the speaker more important than the speech.

This, then, was the state of oratory in the middle of the first century A.D.: the theorists had been focusing on the single element of style, the orators had been polarized into two stylistic factions, and the Asiatic devotees of the grand style were beginning to carry the day.

It is against the backdrop of these trends that Paul writes to the Corinthians:

> When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (I Cor. 2:1-5).

He had not come to them with the flowery words and elaborate style of an Asiatic orator. Rather, he had spoken in reliance on the power of the Spirit and had used the straightforward speech that was associated with their own Attic region. Nor had he been, as a Sophistic orator, more concerned about his own image than about the substance of his speech. On the contrary, his presence among them had been nothing and the substance of his speech had been everything; he had been with them

¹Ibid., p. 20.
²Ibid., p. 39.
"in weakness and in much fear and trembling," and his unfailing theme had been "Jesus Christ and him crucified." Wherever he preached, whether at Athens or at Corinth, the style and substance of his message was such that men's faith "might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." ¹

The point of I Corinthians 2:1-5, therefore, is not that Paul was sorry for his approach at Athens and determined to do differently at Corinth. Instead, his remarks are a reminder of his continual determination to preach in a clear and cogent style, and to emphasize the message rather than the speaker.

There is a fourth and final reason for discarding the idea that Paul was disappointed with his preaching at Athens. His Athenian sermon ought to be considered a successful pattern for contemporary preaching, not only because the literary purpose of Luke requires it, and not only because the passages in Acts 18 and I Corinthians 2 do not suggest otherwise, but also because of the results he did gain. The number of those who responded to Paul's message was not as small as some would imagine. Luke's language is sufficient to envision a goodly crowd:

¹It is instructive to compare Paul's rejection of "lofty words" (ὑπεροχὴν λόγου) and inconsequential substance with Eunapius' description of the Sophistic orator Maximus:

"Maximus is one of the older and more learned students, who, because of his lofty genius and superabundant eloquence (λόγον ὑπεροχὴν) scorned all logical proof" (Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists 475).

Plato likewise criticizes ὑπεροχὴ as a verbose "excess" which hinders the process of discussion (The Statesman 283C).

These references further substantiate the idea that in I Corinthians 2:1-5 Paul is talking about oratorical style and not philosophical content.
"some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:34). Considering the circumstances, this response was all the more remarkable, for as Sydney Cave so aptly observes:

None are harder to convert than those to whom religion is primarily a topic of speculative interest, and, judged by the standards of modern missionary experience, St. Paul's visit to Athens was, not a failure, but a success. To few, if any, modern missionaries has it been given to gain by a single speech any converts from an audience of dilettanti, interested in religious discussion, but without any sense of religious need.¹

The Athenian attitude toward Paul was one of slightly contemptuous indulgence. It is remarkable, therefore, that any of his audience was willing to break with the popular views of Athens and share the ignominy and disdain attached to the wandering Jew. That a member of the Areopagus Council should be among those willing to do so ought to be evidence enough of the sermon's effectiveness and of Paul's satisfaction with it.²

Paul left Athens, therefore, with the confidence that he had faithfully ministered in the Spirit, and with the expectation that the fruits of his labor would redound to the glory of God.


²Wilbur Smith has the proper spirit in the matter: "Some were saved that day, which would be a dual miracle, considering the audience he had to speak to. There were even a few of the notable people of the city who believed, as a result of Paul's address. Would to God that on every occasion that you or I had ever spoken it could be said that some believed, noble or ignoble!" (Therefore Stand; A Plea for a Vigorous Apologetic in the Present Crisis of Evangelical Christianity [Chicago: Moody Press, 1945], pp. 259-260).
This completes the biblical exposition. It is now time to turn to a rhetorical analysis of the distinctive features of this sermon.

The Rhetorical Analysis

This sermon is "a speech appropriate to Athens only." Every aspect of the message is designed for this particular audience in this particular city. A rhetorical analysis reveals that the following especially are uniquely suited to the thoughts and interests of a pagan Greek—the theme, the support materials, the style, and the mood. They are all deliberately chosen by the apostle in order that he might best turn these Athenians from their idolatrous worship.

The choice of the theme

The sermon's theme is that God is the Creator of the universe and the Father of men. Some question Paul's choice of this theme on the grounds that it says nothing of the death of Christ or of salvation through him. They wonder whether the sermon is something less than a well-rounded Christian proclamation of the gospel, despite the fact that its content is quite unobjectionable. Dibelius, for example, quite pointedly charges that the concluding sentence is the only Christian sentence in the Areopagus speech. At last Jesus is alluded to, even though his name is not actually used. The reference to his resurrection and the proclamation of a judgment by him are the only specifically Christian ideas which are imparted to the hearers.2

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Some try to lessen the force of this objection by claiming that Paul was interrupted before he could complete his sermon. They suggest that a clamor erupted at the mention of the resurrection which prevented the apostle from finishing what he intended to say about Christ:

At this point the patience of his hearers was exhausted. It is evident that Paul had not reached the height of his argument. He spoke of the Judge, but not of the Savior; testified of repentance toward God, but not of faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. That would have been the next step in the unfolding of the discourse, if he had been suffered to proceed.¹

But there is no real evidence for supposing that Paul's sermon was curtailed in any way. The audience was too curious and too interested to have interrupted the speaker. They had asked to hear specifically about his new teaching, a teaching which they knew had something to do with "Jesus" and "Resurrection." Surely they would have heard him out to the end. They would let him have his say, and then they would mock, reject, query, or accept, as they saw fit. There is no hint in Luke's account that the ridicule which some heaped on the idea of a resurrection was anything other than a vocalized response by a segment of the audience at the conclusion of the message.

Even beyond this lack of evidence in the narrative, there is also the very unity of the sermon itself which prevents its being viewed his.

as a truncated address. The composition and development of the message forms an intended whole: introductory reference to idolatry, major points in opposition to idolatry, and concluding appeal to repent of idolatry. "There is," as Dibelius notes, "an intentional harmony between the beginning and the end."¹

Others answer the charge that this is not a Christian sermon by arguing that there probably was more gospel included in the message than meets the eye. They take account, quite rightly, of the compressed and abbreviated nature of the reports of the sermons in Acts.² Stonehouse, for example, writes:

If one once recognizes that the addresses must be regarded as condensed accounts of speeches that lasted considerably longer than the time it takes us to read them through, one may be prepared to face the question whether the several reports, while indicating accurately the disposition and contents of the addresses in summary form, do not imply as much as they actually state. As applied to the situation confronting us here, this observation suggests that Luke means to imply that the message of salvation through Christ is being intimated in epitome in Paul’s proclamation of the divine command that all men everywhere should repent.³

Stonehouse then proceeds to "read between the lines" of verses 30-31, and to show that Paul’s full remarks might well have included an adequate exposition of the wrath to come, the days of grace and salvation, the works worthy of repentance, and the necessity of being assured of a favorable relationship to Christ.⁴

²See above, pp. 7-9.
It seem reasonable to suppose that the full version of Paul's sermon did have some additional information about the life and death of Christ. The fact remains, however, that whether in abbreviated form or in expanded proportions, the bulk of the sermon concerns the knowledge of God and not the knowledge of Christ.

But this is as it should be. The fact that Paul's sermon spends more time on God as Creator and Father than on Jesus as Savior only shows that the apostle knew what was appropriate for this particular audience at this particular moment. His choice of a theme is not an embarrassment, but rather an indication of his own skill as a speaker and an evangelist. Paul knew that if he began with a proclamation of a crucified Jesus he might only have succeeded in adding one more idol to the Athenian pantheon. This is the very confusion that had begun to arise from his witness in the agora, causing some to conclude that he was "a preacher of foreign divinities." As he mounted the steps of the Areopagus it became apparent to the apostle that a stable Christian faith could never be erected until the idolatrous foundation of Athenian religion was broken up. He realized that he must first break the hold of their devotion to images before he could wed them to Christ. He wisely chose, therefore, to direct his message against the inconsistencies and assumptions of idolatry, and he selected a theme which would correct their conceptions and give them the knowledge of the true God.  

(Summer, 1968), 128.

1This approach is not unique to the Athenian sermon. 1 Thess. 1:9-10 also suggests that an idolatrous Gentile must come first to a knowledge of God, and then to a knowledge of Christ:
Paul's sermon, therefore, is admirably calculated as an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans. It starts with their own confessed ignorance of the divine nature. It continues with an exposition of the true knowledge of God, applying this knowledge to the practice of idolatry. And it ends with an introduction to the Judge of God's choosing who will hold men accountable for their knowledge of God: This is the initial proclamation. The second lesson might well begin where this one stopped, with an explanation of who this divinely-appointed man is and why he was raised from the dead. In the meantime, Paul's theme has separated the chaff of unbelief from the wheat of those who want to hear more on the matter. The scoffers have been given something to scoff at, the merely inquisitive have heard enough for a first beginning, while those who have been inwardly touched to repentance will soon learn more of the salvation that is in Christ.

The choice of the support materials

The overall theme is not the only aspect of this sermon that is suited to an Athenian assembly. The materials which support that theme and make up its development are also deliberately chosen because of their appropriateness to an audience of cultured pagans. The apostle carefully picks those subordinate thoughts and ideas which an educated Greek will most readily accept as evidence for the doctrines of God as Creator and Father. This aptness of Paul's supporting materials can

"For they themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."
best be seen by examining his poetical quotations and his philosophical allusions.

The poetical quotations.--To support his assertion that God "is really not far from each one of us," Paul quotes two Greek authors. He submits the writings of their own poets as proof of the intimate relationship that exists between God and men. These quotations occur midway through his second point:

And yet, He is really not far from each one of us, for, "In Him we live and move and have our being," as indeed some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."

The words, "For we are also His offspring," have long been recognized as a direct quote from the Phaenomena of Aratus.¹ The Phaenomena, a treatise in verse on astronomy written between 276–274 B.C., was an extremely popular work among the ancients.² The line which Paul cites is from the poem's introduction, which eulogizes the deity as the father and benefactor of men:

From Zeus let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed; full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men; full is the sea and the heavens thereof; always we all have need of Zeus. For we are also his offspring; and he in his kindness unto men giveth favourable signs and wakeneth the people to work, reminding them of livelihood. He tells what time the soil is best for the labour of the ox and for the mattock, and what time the seasons are favourable both for the planting of trees and for casting all manner of seeds. For himself it was who set the signs in heaven, and

¹ A very similar line, "For we are your offspring," occurs in the Hymn to Zeus by the Stoic Cleanthes, a contemporary of Aratus. For the text of Cleanthes' work, see Thomas Lewin, The Life and Epistles of St. Paul (2 vols.; London: George Bell and Sons, 1874), I, 265.

² It was used as a textbook for generations, with many commentaries being written on it. It was even translated into Latin by Cicero and others (G. R. Mair, transl., Aratus' Phaenomena, The Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955], pp. 186-98).
marked out the constellations, and for the year devised what stars chiefly should give to men right signs of the seasons, to the end that all things might grow unfailingly. Wherefore him do men ever worship first and last. Hail, O Father, mighty marvel, mighty blessing unto men.¹

Paul's second quotation is, "In Him we live and move and have our being." These words can be identified as part of a poem by Epi-menides the Cretan. To make this identification, however, it is necessary to put together many bits and pieces.

First, it needs to be pointed out that Paul's explanatory expression, "as indeed some of your own poets have said," looks backward as well as forward. Evidence for this fact can be found in both Athanasius and Augustine, who attach the clause to the words that have preceded, and not to the quotation from Aratus:

All things derive from the Word their light and movement and life, as the Gentile authors themselves say, "In Him we live and move and have our being."²

And to the Athenians thou saidest by thy Apostle, That in thee we live, and move, and have our being, as certain of their own poets had said.³

These two citations demonstrate that the line "In Him we live and move and have our being" was recognized in the early centuries as part of Greek poetry.

Second, a ninth century Syriac commentary on Acts includes the

¹ Aratus Phaenomena 1-15. It is interesting to note in passing that Aratus, like Paul, sees the seasons of nature as evidence of the power and goodness of the deity. Perhaps Paul knew that his earlier point about God's "establishing the fixed times" would cause his audience to think of this poem and to anticipate a direct quote from it.

² Athanasius The Incarnation of the Word of God xlii.

³ Augustine Confessions vii.9.
words "In Him we live and move and have our being" as part of a poem in which the Cretans are described as "liars, evil beasts, idle bellies":

"In Him we live and move and have our being: and, as certain also of your own sages have said, We are his offspring." Paul takes both of these quotations from certain heathen poets.

Now about this passage, "In Him we live and move and have our being": the Cretans said about Zeus, as if it were true, that he was a prince, and was lacerated by a wild boar, and was buried; and behold! his grave is known amongst us; so Minos, the son of Zeus, made a panegyric over his father, and in it he said:

The Cretans have fashioned a tomb for thee, O Holy and High!

Liars, evil beasts, idle bellies;

For thou diest not; for ever thou livest and standest;

For in thee we live and move and have our being.

So the blessed Paul took this sentence from Minos; and he took the quotation,

"We are the offspring of God,"

from Aratus, a poet who wrote about God, and about the seven [planets] and the twelve [signs].

Third, one immediately recognizes the second line of this panegyric--"liars, evil beasts, idle bellies"--as a phrase which Paul attributes to a Cretan author in Titus 1:12:

One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

Fourth, Clement of Alexandria says that in Titus 1:12 Paul is quoting the Cretan author Epimenides:

... Epimenides the Cretan, whom Paul knew as a Greek prophet, whom he mentions in the epistle to Titus, where he speaks thus: "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies."

1 Isho'dad of Merv, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, ed. and trans. by Margaret Dunlop Gibson, Horae Semiticae, X (1913), quoted by Rendel Harris, "St. Paul and Epimenides," The Expositor, Eighth Series, IV (October, 1912), 352. This same story about Minos and his panegyric is found in the Nestorian commentary known as the Gennat Busbam, or Garden of Delights (J. Rendel Harris, "The Cretans Always Liars," The Expositor, Seventh Series, II [October, 1906], 309-10).

2 Clement of Alexandria Stromata i.14.59.
Finally, Diogenes Laertius mentions among the works of Epimenides a long poem entitled *On Minos and Rhadamanthys*. Presumably this is the work in which Epimenides had Minos pronounce the panegyric.

To summarize, the words "In Him we live and move and have our being" were recognized early as a part of Greek poetry. They are found in a poem containing a familiar description of the Cretans. This description is attributed to a Cretan author, who is elsewhere identified as Epimenides. Corroboration of this identification is achieved by noting a pertinent title among Epimenides' published works.

Both of these lines, therefore, are poetical quotations. The importance of this becomes apparent when it is realized that Paul cites these Greek authors in support of his claim that God is very near to men. The words of their own poets, he argues, prove that there is an intimate relationship of dependence and descendence between God and men. He then goes on to reason that in view of this evidence from their own literature the Athenians ought not to think of God as an image of gold, silver, or stone.

It might seem strange to us that the apostle would offer "poetry" as evidence of the truthfulness of his statements. We are not accustomed to using poetical quotations to prove our points, but merely to embellish them or perhaps to give them an emotional force. But it was not so with the ancients. In the estimation of the Athenians, these quotations were authoritative, for their poets were to them also prophets. Their poets were credited with mantic gifts as well as with

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1Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* i.112.
literary skills. Paul himself refers to Epimenides as a "prophét" in Titus 1:12. In the ancient world, therefore, the words of a poet constituted adequate factual support for an assertion, and were frequently used by speakers.

It is an indication, therefore, of Paul's skill as a speaker that he would choose such supporting material for his sermon. He does not quote from the Old Testament as he did at Pisidian Antioch, but instead picks that which will be convincing to an educated Athenian. His choice of poetical quotations are further evidence of his continual desire to adapt every aspect of his preaching to the unique characteristics of a particular audience.

The philosophical allusions.--There is in the sermon a second type of support material, also chosen for its appropriateness to the immediate listeners. Paul buttresses his points, not only with poetical quotations, but also with "delicately suited allusions" to the tenets of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy. With representatives of both these

1Harris, "The Cretans Always Liars," p. 305.

2Aristotle records that even judicial disputes were sometimes settled by reference to "the poets and men of repute whose judgments are known to all" (The "Art" of Rhetoric 1.15.13).

3It should go without saying that Paul, in introducing these quotations, certainly does not intend to identify the Zeus of Greek literature with the living God of the Bible. He is merely pointing out that "these writers expressed thoughts which, despite the pagan contexts in which they were conceived, indicated a real if limited apprehension of the true God" (F. F. Bruce, The Defence of the Gospel in the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959], p. 43).

schools in his audience (Acts 17:18), the apostle "displays an approach-
ment to philosophical ideas which is otherwise not found in the New Tes-
tament." An examination of his two major points will reveal the extent 
of these philosophical echoes.

Paul's first point is that God is the Creator of the universe:

The God who made the world and everything in it, the One who is 
Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in shrines made by hands. 
Nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything, since 
It is He Himself who gives to all life and breath and all things.

Paul develops this point with the following ideas: God is the source 
of all life, He is not confined in temples, and He needs nothing in the 
way of human service. All of these thoughts have their counterparts in 
Greek philosophy.

Diogenes Laertius quotes the Stoics as teaching that the deity 
is the giver and sustainer of life:

The deity, say they, is a living being, immortal, rational, 
perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil [into 
him], taking providential care of the world and all that therein is, 
but he is not of human shape. He is, however, the artificer of the

\[1\] Gärtnner, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation, p. 71.

\[2\] As an educated citizen of the world, it would have been impos-
sible for Paul not to have come into contact with the major philosophies 
of his time. Strabo points out that these systems of thought were es-
pecially prevalent in Paul's hometown of Tarsus:

"The people at Tarsus have devoted themselves so eagerly not 
only to philosophy, but also to the whole round of education in 
general that they have surpassed Athens, Alexandria, or any other 
place that can be named where there have been schools and lectures 
of philosophers" (Geography xiv.5.13).

And given the apostle's own intelligent and penetrating mind, it is not 
surprising that he should be able to use "the outer garment of Greek 
philosophy in order to clothe and present Christianity in expressions 
and terms familiar to the human intelligence of his era" (Demetrios J. 
Constantelos, "Vassilios X. Joannides on Paul and the Stoic Philoso-
universe and, as it were, the father of all, both in general and in that particular part of him which is all-pervading, and which is called many names according to its various powers.

Seneca likewise insists that a man "will never make sufficient progress until he has conceived a right idea of God,—regarding Him as one who possesses all things, and allots all things, and bestows them without price."²

Seneca also suggests that the deity is not limited to a man-made temple. "The whole world is the temple of the gods," he writes, "and, indeed, the only one worthy of their majesty and grandeur."³ In a similar vein Euripides asks, "What house built by craftsmen could endure the form divine within enfolding walls?"⁴ And Clement of Alexandria writes of Zeno:

Zeno, the founder of the Stoic sect, says in this book of the Republic, "that we ought to make neither temples nor images, for that no work is worthy of the gods." And he was not afraid to write in these very words: "There will be no need to build temples. For a temple is not worth much, and ought not to be regarded as holy. For nothing is worth much, and holy, which is the work of builders and craftsmen."⁵

Finally, there is sprinkled throughout Greek literature the thought that God is not served by human hands as though He needed anything: Plato teaches that piety is certainly a service to the gods, but

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²Seneca Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales 95.48.
³Seneca De Beneficiis vii.7.3.
⁴Euripides Fragment 968, cited in Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts, p. 357.
⁵Clement of Alexandria Stromata v.11.77.
it must not be supposed that it in anyway benefits them or makes them better. On the contrary, as he elsewhere writes, the deity "is able of itself because of its excellence to company with itself and needing none other beside, sufficing unto itself as acquaintance and friend." Euripides has it quite succinctly: "For God hath need, if God indeed he be, of naught." Other writers echo the same thought: "God alone is perfectly free from wants"; "the gods have need of nothing"; it is "the privilege of the gods to need nothing"; and, the deity exists, "needing us not at all." Seneca is most adamant that God needs nothing, but rather gives everything:

But let us forbid lamps to be lighted on the Sabbath, since the gods do not need light, neither do men take pleasure in soot. Let us forbid men to offer morning salutation and to throng the doors of temples; mortal ambitions are attracted by such ceremonies, but God is worshipped by those who truly know Him. Let us forbid bringing towels and flesh-scrappers to Jupiter, and proffering mirrors to Juno; for God seeks no servants. Of course not; he himself does service to mankind, everywhere and to all he is at hand to help. 

Evidently many shared the attitude which Aristodemus expressed to Socrates: "Really, Socrates, I don't despise the godhead. But I think it

1Plato Euthyphro 13A-D.  
2Plato Timaeus 34B.  
3Euripides The Madness of Hercules 1345-46.  
4Plutarch Aristides and Cato Major iv.4.  
5Lucian Cynic 12.  
6Diogenes Laertius Lives of Eminent Philosophers vi.104.  
7Lucretius De Rerum Natura ii.650.  
8Seneca Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales 95.48.
too great to need my service."¹

Thus, many echoes of Greek thought can be heard throughout Paul's first major point.

The same frequency of allusion can be seen in the development of Paul's second declaration, that God is the Father of men:

And He made from one the whole human race to live over all the face of the earth, establishing the fixed times and the boundaries of their habitation, in order that they might seek God, that perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him.

And yet, He is really not far from each one of us, for "In Him we live and move and have our being," as indeed some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."

Since we, therefore, are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, silver, or stone, fashioned by the skill and imagination of man.

The subordinate points of this section—the seasons and times, the groping for God, His nearness and kinship with men—all have their reflections in classical writings.

Reference has already been made to Aratus' belief that the seasons demonstrate the goodness and power of God.² Other writers have similar thoughts. Plato, in one of his dialogues, notes the witness of creation to the existence of God:

CLIN[IAS OF CRETE]. Surely it seems easy, Stranger, to assert with truth that gods exist?

ATH[ENIAN STRANGER]. How so?

CLIN. First, there is the evidence of the earth, the sun, the stars, and all the universe, and the beautiful ordering of the seasons, marked out by years and months.³

¹Xenophon Memorabilia i.4.10.

²See above, p. 111, n. 1.

³Plato Laws x.886A. Cf. also his Philebus 26B and Symposium 188A.
Cicero also argues at length that the orderly processes of nature should inspire one to contemplate God:

> Just as when we see first the beauty and the brightness of the sky, then the amazing speed, which our thought cannot grasp, of its revolution, next the succession of day and night and the changes of the seasons divided into four to suit the ripening of the fruits of the earth and the constitution of living bodies, and the sun their ruler and guide, and the moon marking as it were and indicating the days in the calendar by the waxing and waning of her light; and man himself formed as it were to observe the heavens and cultivate the soil, and lastly all fields and seas made subject to the service of man—when then we behold all these things and countless others, can we doubt that some being is over them, or some author, if these things have had beginning, as Plato holds, or, if they have always existed, as Aristotle thinks, some governor of so stupendous a work of construction?¹

Dio Chrysostom likewise thinks it incredible that men could be ignorant of the deity in view of his provision for them through nature:

> How, then, could they have remained ignorant and conceived no inkling of him who had sowed and planted and was now preserving and nourishing them, when on every side they were filled with the divine nature through both sight and hearing, and in fact through every sense? They dwelt upon the earth, they beheld the light of heaven, they had nourishment in abundance, for god, their ancestor, had lavishly provided and prepared it to their hand.²

But even with such an effective witness, the ancients admit that they are groping for God. The philosophers, says Plato, "are groping in the dark" with their speculations about the origin of matter and man.³

He himself confesses, "To discover the Maker and Father of this Universe were a task indeed, and having discovered Him, to declare Him unto all

¹Cicero Tusculan Disputations 1.28.68-70.
²Dio Chrysostom Discourses 12.29.
³Plato Phaedo 99B.
men were a thing impossible. "1

And yet, in spite of their uncertainty, they still sense that
God is not far away. Seneca exclaims, "God is near you; he is with you;
he is within you." 2 Dio Chrysostom writes that the conception of deity
is innately present in every rational being:

[There is] an idea regarding him and a conception of him common to
the whole human race, to the Greeks and to the barbarians alike, a
conception that is inevitable and innate in every creature endowed
with reason, arising in the course of nature without the aid of
human teacher and free from the deceit of any expounding priest. 3

It is a conception, he goes on to say, which renders "manifest God's
kinship with man." 4 Epictetus urges a man to "subscribe heart and soul,
as he ought, to this doctrine, that we are all primarily begotten of
God, and that God is the father of men as well as of gods." 5

All of these strains of thought are alluded to in Paul's second
point. And so far, all of these allusions are quite comfortable to
Paul's listeners. There would be a certain pleasure in being reminded
of phrases in their own literature which refer to the divinely ordained
seasons of nature, the groping of men, the nearness of God, and the kin­
ship of God with men. They would probably feel flattered at this re­
fection of their tenets in the speaker's message. But when Paul con­
cludes his second point with the deduction,

1Plato Timaeus 28C.
2Seneca Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales 41.1; cf. 120.14.
3Dio Chrysostom Discourses 12:27.
5Epictetus Discourses 1.3.1.
Since we, therefore, are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, silver, or stone, fashioned by the skill and imagination of man, the allusions become embarrassing. They become embarrassing because though the Greek writers might echo Paul's assertions, they do not echo his applications. They do not take the next natural step and renounce the practice of idolatry.

The philosophical literature of ancient Athens simply could not see the inevitable implications of its own insights. It is true that Horace could write with derision in one of his satires:

Once I was a fig-wood stem, a worthless log, when the carpenter, doubtful whether to make a stool or a Priapus, chose that I be a god. A god, then, I became, of thieves and birds the special terror. ¹

But almost uniformly, Greek philosophy at this point is filled with inconsistencies and contradictions. Seneca, one of the leading voices of Stoicism, almost seems to break away when he urges his followers:

Only rise
"And mould thyself to kinship with thy God."
This moulding will not be done in gold or silver; an image that is to be in the likeness of God cannot be fashioned of such materials. ²

But unfortunately, his very next words are, "Remember that the gods, when they were kind to men, were moulded in clay." ³ In other words, clay is the proper material for an idol, not gold or silver.

This same inability to deny idolatry while recognizing God as

¹ Horace *Satire* i.8.1-5. A wooden statue of Priapus, the garden-god, was used as a scarecrow.
² Seneca *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* 31.11. His quote is from Virgil's *Aeneid* viii.364-65.
³ Ibid.
Creator and Father is reflected in the writings of Dio Chrysostom. In that very same discourse in which he recognizes the provision of God in nature and the conception of God in man, 1 he goes on to condone the making of graven images:

For certainly no one would maintain that it had been better that no statue or picture of gods should have been exhibited among men, on the ground that we should look only at the heavens. For although the intelligent man does indeed reverence all those objects, believing them to be blessed gods that he sees from a great distance, yet on account of our belief in the divine all men have a strong yearning to honour and worship the deity from close at hand, approaching and laying hold of him with persuasion by offering sacrifice and crowning him with garlands. For precisely as infant children when torn away from father or mother are filled with terrible longing and desire, and stretch out their hands to their absent parents often in their dreams, so also do men to the gods, rightly loving them for their beneficence and kinship, and being eager in every possible way to be with them and to hold converse with them. Consequently many of the barbarians, because they lack artistic means and find difficulty in employing them, name mountains gods, and unhewn trees, too, and unshapen stones, things which are by no means whatever more appropriate in shape than is the human form. 2

Even the ancients recognized this contradiction between creed and practice. Plutarch, for instance, rebukes the Stoics for their inconsistency and lack of adherence to their founder’s teachings:

It is moreover a doctrine of Zeno’s, that temples are not to be built to the Gods; for that a temple is neither a thing of much value nor holy; since no work of carpenters and handicrafts-men can be of much value. And yet they who praise these things as well and wisely said are initiated in the sacred mysteries, go up to the Citadel (where Minerva’s temple stands), adore the shrines, and adorn with garlands the sacraria, being the works of carpenters and mechanical persons. Again, they think that the Epicureans, who sacrifice to the Gods and yet deny them to meddle with the government of the world, do thereby refute themselves; whereas they themselves are more contrary to themselves, sacrificing on altars and in

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1 Dio Chrysostom Discourses 12.27 and 29 (see above, pp. 119-20).
2 Ibid., 12.60-61.
temples, which they affirm ought not to stand nor to have been
built.\(^1\)

It is because of this philosophical inconsistency that idolatry
can be so rampant in Athens. The paradox of their own literature is
that it flashes with the insights of divine truth, yet resists the ra-
tional and spiritual worship of the living God. Through his allusions
Paul brings this paradox into focus and attempts to lead his listeners
into a step that their own writers have as yet not taken. He wants them
to do what the philosophers have been unwilling to do—to repounce idol-
atry in light of the knowledge of God as Creator and Father.

Paul chooses all of these allusions, therefore, both those that
are flattering and those that are embarrassing, to win his hearers to
his message, and thus to his God. By picking those poetical quotations
and philosophical echoes that an educated Greek would know, he leads his
listeners through and beyond the insights of Athenian religion and into
the full knowledge of the one true God.\(^2\) Paul's goal is that men might

\(^1\) Plutarch The Contradiction of the Stoics 6.

\(^2\) In making these allusions it should be clear that Paul was not
commending Athenian philosophy to Athenian philosophers. He is not ap-
proving the pagan systems of belief which surround these allusions in
context. The Old Testament was the source and authority for all of his
ideas, both main assertions and supporting statements, as a glance at
the margin of the Nestle text will reveal. In alluding to Greek phi-
losophy he was merely taking advantage of those heathen insights which
were consistent with divine revelation. While acknowledging that the
"gods" and "deities" of Greek religion were certainly not equivalent to
the God he was proclaiming, he could still

"allow consistently and fully that pagan men, in spite of themselves
and contrary to the controlling disposition of their minds, as crea-
tures of God confronted with the divine revelation were capable of
responses which were valid so long as and to the extent that they
stood in isolation from their pagan systems. Thus, thoughts which
in their pagan contexts were quite un-Christian and anti-Christian,
believe and repent, and to that end he carefully suits his supporting material to the background of his unique audience.

**The choice of the style**

The third area in which Paul adapts to his audience is in the matter of style. As Robertson notes: "There is a curious Attic flavor to the address of Paul here which every Greek student appreciates. Paul seems to respond to his atmosphere in his very language."¹

Reference has already been made to the familiar quotations and allusions,² and to the straightforward style in general.³ Besides these could be acknowledged as up to a point involving an actual apprehension of revealed truth. As creatures of God, retaining a sensus divinitatis in spite of their sin, their ignorance of God and their suppression of the truth, they were not without a certain awareness of God and of their creaturehood. Their ignorance of, and hostility to, the truth was such that their awareness of God and of creaturehood could not come into its own to give direction to their thought and life or to serve as a principle of interpretation of the world of which they were a part. But the apostle Paul, reflecting upon their creaturehood, and upon their religious faith and practice, could discover within their pagan religiosity evidences that the pagan poets in the very act of suppressing and perverting the truth presupposed a measure of awareness of it. Thus while conceiving of his task as basically a proclamation of One of whom they were in ignorance, he could appeal even to the reflections of pagans as pointing to the true relation between the sovereign Creator and His creatures" (Stonehouse, "The Areopagus Address," pp. 29-30).


² See above, pp. 110-24.

³ See above, pp. 97-103. A further point should be noted in this regard. Paul's avoidance of Asiatic bombast was not only appropriate to the substance of his message and to the region of Achaia, it was also in keeping with Stoicism's views on rhetoric. Seneca develops these views in one of his epistles:

"Even if I were arguing a point, I should not stamp my foot, or toss my arms about, or raise my voice; but I should leave that sort of
major adaptations there are other stylistic features which reveal Paul's intent to speak in a manner proper to Athens. Lake and Cadbury cite the following as "interesting evidences of the more secular style of this speech":

(a) The use of the neuters τοῦτο σιγερομειον (23) and το δετου (29, v. 1 in 27); (b) the use of γε or infrequent compound particles of γε (27 bis); (c) the paronomasia ζωήν καλ πνοήν (25); (d) the frequent alliteration; (e) the accumulation of forms or derivatives of παν, often in connexion with alliteration; (f) the repetition of the particle πάντας (24, 27, 29); (g) the idiomatic phrase παντελεχώ (which is not Pauline πόσιμον).

To these could be added the frequent triadic expressions (vss. 25, 28, 29),

the paronomasia of παντας πανταξον (vss. 30),

and the classical

thing to the orator, and should be content to have conveyed my feelings to you without having either embellished them or lowered their dignity. I should like to convince you entirely of this one fact, that I feel whatever I say, that I not only feel it, but am wedded to it. . . .

"I prefer, however, that our conversation on matters so important should not be meagre and dry; for even philosophy does not renounce the company of cleverness. One should not, however, bestow very much attention upon mere words. Let this be the kernel of my idea: let us say what we feel, and feel what we say; let speech harmonize with life. . . . Our words should aim not to please, but to help. If, however, you can attain eloquence without painstaking, and if you either are naturally gifted or can gain eloquence at slight cost, make the most of it and apply it to the noblest uses. But let it be of such a kind that it displays facts rather than itself" (Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales 75.2-5).

Paul's adaptation to his audience's views on rhetoric is one further indication of the all-around appropriateness of his message.


"comparative of politeness" in δειοσπισμόντεσμα (vs. 22).\(^1\)

Certain of Paul's word choices deserve special mention for they show a deliberate preference for a Greek idiom over the customary Semitic expression. These are κόσμος (vs. 24), θείον (vs. 29), ἀνήρ (vs. 31), and πίστις (vs. 31).

At the beginning of his first major point, Paul declares that God "made the world" (κόσμος). Concerning this statement and the use of κόσμος, Dibelius writes:

The affirmation of God as Creator belongs to the Old Testament; but it is hellenistic, rather than Old Testament usage, when the first phase includes the word κόσμος, whereas the Old Testament would speak of heaven and earth.\(^2\)

Schubert agrees that this is a stylistic choice on Paul's part, stating: "τὸν κόσμον is a deliberate adaptation of τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν to Greek terminology."\(^3\)

The use of θείον (vs. 29) to refer to God is another instance of picking a word familiar to his audience. Not otherwise found in either the Septuagint or the New Testament, it is intentionally and appropriately used in this situation since Paul "is concerned to deal with philosophers who would and often did object to the anthropomorphism of


\(^2\) Dibelius, Studies in the Acts of the Apostles, p. 41

of the Jewish religion.  

The term was, of course, frequently used by the Greeks themselves.  

In verse 31 Paul speaks of "a man" (ἀνήρ) whom God has appointed to judge the earth. Obviously this is the "Son of man" (γὰς τοῦ άνήρ-νου) of Daniel 7:13, Matthew 24:27, and John 5:27, who receives authority to execute judgment from the Ancient of Days. But this latter Semitic idiom would have been meaningless to the apostle's Athenian audience. Hence, he expresses the same sense in plain Greek.  

Finally, in verse 31, Paul uses πίστις in the sense of "assurance" or "evidence," and not with its customary meaning of "faith." Such usage is once again otherwise foreign to the New Testament, but familiar in the language of classical literature.  

Thus, throughout Paul's sermon there are woven those stylistic features which are uniquely appropriate to an educated Greek audience. The choice of words, the use of classical syntax, the inclusion of quotations and allusions, the selection of a straightforward style—all of these are deliberately designed to please the Athenian ear and to penetrate the Athenian heart.  

The choice of the mood  

The final area of adaptation to be considered is the choice Paul made regarding the mood of his message. As he stands to preach against  


2Mare, "Pauline Appeals to Historical Evidence," p. 125.  

the idolatry of Athens, he takes care to express throughout his message a spirit of knowledgeable appreciation and concerned helpfulness.

A spirit of knowledgeable appreciation.—The most striking feature of Paul’s introduction is its noticeable lack of polemic and invective. His spirit has been provoked by the city’s bounding idolatry (Acts 17:16). But he does not begin by deploring their views or by denouncing their images. As Glasser writes:

Paul saw no point in blasting the worship of idols, exposing to ridicule its foolishness, and scolding the Athenians for their stupidity. Why give needless offense through assaulting head-on the radical errors of idolatry? Paul wanted to win men, not fight them.¹

The apostle begins, therefore, by appreciating that which could be honestly commended.² He acknowledges that in every way they are "very religious." The impulse to adore is strong in them. They have a devotion and a longing for the spiritual realities of life. He knows that this is so, not because of hearsay, but because of his own first-hand observation of their religious objects.³

Not only does Paul speak approvingly of their religious enthusiasm, but also his initial reference to their idolatry is of the mildest sort possible. He does not immediately denounce their images as base


²Cf. this same approach in the introductions of Paul’s addresses to Felix (Acts 24:10-21) and to Agrippa (Acts 26:2-23).

³His words, "For as I was passing along and examining the objects of your worship," are an implied compliment, for they suggest that he has made a careful and systematic inspection of their works. He has studied their glories, and therefore speaks knowledgeably of their zeal for religion.
and senseless. Instead, he employs an unusual and almost respectful word to describe what he has seen—σεβασμός, "objects of worship." He acknowledges the plethora of their statuary as evidence of their deep-seated desire to worship something. And it is this same spirit of worship that he would cultivate and channel in his sermon.¹

This mood of knowledgeable appreciation continues throughout the sermon as Paul quotes their poets and alludes to their philosophers. These references reveal both his knowledge of classical literature and his appreciation for the measure of truth contained therein.

A spirit of concerned helpfulness.—At the same time that he is maintaining a mood of warmth and acceptance, Paul is still concerned that the Athenians should turn from the error of their ways. He does not want them to go away lost, however good they might feel. So while he commends their reverential spirit, he nevertheless attempts to show its misdirection. He wants to be helpful to them because he is concerned about them.

This spirit of helpfulness appears early in the sermon. His whole reason for speaking is that he might instruct them concerning the God they worship but do not know. He would satisfy the ignorance and longing which they themselves have confessed in their altar to the Unknown God.

¹ Paul’s choice of σεβασμός creates the proper mood not only because it reveals a warmth on his part, but also because it is appropriate to the very ground they are standing on. The hill of the Areopagus was holy ground to the Athenians. In the great speech in Aeschylus’ Eumenides, in which Athena tells how the Court which met there came to be instituted, the word σέβας or σέβεται is repeated four times in thirty-five lines and recurs again thereafter (Eumenides 680-715).
The concern of the apostle is evident throughout the sermon. The very fact that he is willing to proclaim what may be an unpopular and ridiculous message at least shows his bearers that he cares about them. The full force of this concern appears in the conclusion where he pleads with the Athenians to repent in view of the coming judgment. The burden of his heart is that they might be saved. It is because he knows of the wrath of God's judgment that he is concerned about the Athenians and anxious to help them.

Paul chooses, therefore, to approach his audience with the attitudes of knowledgeable appreciation and concerned helpfulness. And he nurtures these moods throughout his message so that the door of repentance will be widely open.

Summary

Paul's sermon to the Gentiles in Acts 17 takes place in the idolatrous city of Athens before a mixed and curious audience. His message is centered around the knowledge of the true God, and is designed to reveal the folly of idolatry. He proclaims that God is the Creator of the universe and the Father of men, and reasons from this to a repudiation of the temples, sacrifices, and images of Athenian idolatry. He then announces that God's forbearance with Athenian ignorance is drawing to a close, and that henceforth they should repent. The response to Paul's sermon is a mixture of ridicule, procrastination, and belief.

The measure of persuasion that the apostle achieved can be explained in light of the choices he made. The theme of his sermon presents a conception of God that is incompatible with the worship of
idols. He supports this theme with poetical quotations and philosophical allusions that are familiar to his educated audience. He speaks in a style that is acceptable to the region, and in an idiom appropriate to cultured Greeks. And throughout his sermon he communicates an attitude of knowledgeable appreciation as well as a concern to be spiritually helpful.

The theme, supporting materials, style, and mood are all appropriate, therefore, to the cultured Greeks of pagan Athens. The choice Paul made in each of these areas was best designed to meet the unique characteristics of his immediate audience.
It was a time of uncertainty for the apostle. He was sailing to Jerusalem with money that had been collected for the church of that city. But an ominous cloud hung over the future, for he sensed that danger and distress were waiting for him in Jerusalem. It was even possible that he might be killed there.

It was also a time of remembrance. As he sailed over the sea, wondering about the future, he also remembered the past. He thought of the work he had done and the friends he had loved. He recalled the joys and trials of previous years, and the faces of those among whom he had labored. And as he remembered, he was filled with affection for his sons in the faith.

Uncertainty and remembrance—in some men these might have led to a fearful paralysis or a maudlin sentimentality. But in Paul they led to a spirit of diligence and exhortation, and they resulted in a sermon that has touched and spurred the hearts of Christians through all generations.

The Historical Setting

Paul's journey to Jerusalem

In A.D. 54-56, while Paul was ministering in Asia, a collection was in progress among the churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia on
behalf of the Christians at Jerusalem. The apostle was co-ordinating this effort from his base at Ephesus, and during this time he wrote across the Aegean Sea to the Corinthians, saying:

Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may speed me on my journey, wherever I may go (1 Cor. 16:1-6).

This excerpt from his letter is important not only for its instructions concerning the collection, but also for its glimpse into the future plans of the apostle. He hopes to see the Corinthians in a few months, coming by way of Macedonia. After visiting them, however, he is not sure where he will go, though there is the possibility that he will accompany the collection to Jerusalem.

As time passed and the collection grew, for one reason or another; it did seem "advisable" to Paul that he go with the gift to Jerusalem. His itinerary from Ephesus, therefore, took more definite shape, and he "resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and

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Chase suggests that the apostle viewed the journey as a means of promoting unity among the churches:

"He realized that it was a matter of the last importance for the binding together of the Jewish Churches of Palestine and the Churches of the Gentile world that he himself, the Apostle of the Gentiles, should be the bearer of this liberality of the Gentiles, and should himself be witness of what he hoped would be the joyful acceptance of these gifts on the part of the Jewish Christians" (Frederic Henry Chase, The Credibility of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles [London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1902], p. 258).
Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there I must also see Rome'" (Acts 19:21). With his plans thus formed he departed shortly from Ephesus and went through the parts of Macedonia, encouraging the churches in the area. Eventually he came to Corinth where he spent three months (Acts 20:1-3).

Sometime during his stay in Corinth it became apparent to Paul that the trip to Jerusalem, though necessary, would only be undertaken at the risk of his life. The animosity of the Jews which everywhere seethed against him was beginning to boil over. He began to sense that his life was in serious danger. A letter written from Corinth to Rome about this time reveals his concern in the matter; after informing the Romans of his itinerary and the gift, he asks for their prayers concerning his upcoming voyage:

Since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem; they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been raised, I shall go on by way of you to Spain; and I know that when I come to you I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ.

I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company (Rom. 15:23-32).

The apostle's apprehensions were confirmed on the eve of his

departure from Corinth "when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria" (Acts 20:3).¹ The discovery of this plot caused a change in plans, and instead of sailing directly to Jerusalem Paul decided to return through Macedonia. Several weeks later, after circling the Aegean Sea, he finally boarded a ship at Assos and once again headed for Jerusalem and for the uncertain reception awaiting him (Acts 20:3-15).

Paul's summoning of the Ephesian elders

By now the apostle was in somewhat of a hurry: "he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16), and this was little more than three weeks away. But as his ship made its way down the Asian coast, the uncertainty of the future and the remembrance of the past began to crowd his thoughts. Paul began to feel the tug of nearby Ephesus, a city which held special memories for him. He had spent nearly three years in Ephesus, longer than he had stayed in any other place. And it had been a fruitful ministry: the power of God had worked through him to such an extent that "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10; cf. vs. 20). His ministry to them had been long, but his departure from them had been short, hurried by the riot of the silversmiths (Acts 19:23-20:1). Now nearly a year had passed since he had seen the Christians of

¹ "The style of this plot can be easily imagined. Paul's intention must have been to take a pilgrim ship carrying Achaian and Asian Jews to the Passover. With a shipload of hostile Jews, it would be easy to find opportunity to murder Paul" (W. M. Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen [3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949], p. 287).
Ephesus, and though he was in a hurry, there were some things he felt he should say to them. He knew of certain dangers that they would face, and sensed that he must warn them now since he might never see them again.

Yet, a detour to Ephesus would surely mean a delay in reaching Jerusalem. To visit that city of so much toil and so many memories was to risk spending undue time there. The affairs of the church, or a collision with his adversaries, or some other unexpected event, could detain him for months and prevent him from reaching Jerusalem with the gift he was bringing. Paul decided, therefore, "to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia" (Acts 20:16). At the same time, however, he thought to ask the Ephesians to meet with him at Miletus. While it was unwise that he go to them, perhaps they would be willing to come to him. Therefore, when his ship docked at Miletus, "he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17).

The "elders" were the spiritual leaders of the church of Ephesus. They were responsible for the administration of its activities and the welfare of its members. They were men who knew and loved Paul. He himself had probably led many of them to Christ during his stay in their city. They gladly accepted his invitation and hurried expectantly to meet him.

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1 Ephesus was about thirty-seven miles from Miletus. It would only take a few days for a messenger to make the trip and return with the elders, leaving Paul ample time to still make Jerusalem by Pentecost (cf. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Howard F. Vos, The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands [Chicago: Moody Press, 1967], p. 370).
This, then, is the setting for Paul's sermon to the Christians in Acts 20. Prompted by his own uncertain future and by his concern for those among whom he had worked so long, he has asked the leaders of the Ephesian church to meet with him at Miletus.

The Biblical Exposition

The text of the sermon

As the men arrived Paul probably greeted them by name. And when they were all assembled before him, he said to them:

"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I lived among you all the time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from anything that was profitable, preaching to you and teaching you publicly and in various houses, bearing witness to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.

"And now, as you see, bound in the spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit bears witness to me in city after city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the gospel of the grace of God.

"And now, listen carefully, I know that you will see my face no more, you all among whom I went about proclaiming the kingdom. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am free from the blood of all, for
I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He obtained with the blood of His Own. I know that fierce wolves will come in among you after my departure, not sparing the flock; even from among your own selves will men arise, speaking perversions, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night and day to admonish each one with tears.

"And now I commend you to the Lord and to the word of His grace, who is able to build you up and to give you your inheritance among all who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my needs and to those who were with me. I have shown you always that through such toiling you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

The content and organization of the sermon

The theme and purpose.--The theme and purpose of Paul's message are expressed by the words, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock." Everything he has to say either leads up to or follows from this central injunction. His aim is to persuade the elders of Ephesus to guard themselves and the church against the dangers that are going to come.

The structure and outline.--To achieve this goal, Paul structures his message around his own experience and around the perils that
will threaten the elders. He presents his own response to external trouble and internal temptation as an example to the elders of the way in which they also should go about guarding the flock and themselves.

The first section of the sermon concerns Paul's two-fold example to the elders. He reminds them first of the external trouble he faced at Ephesus, and of how he responded to it by all the more diligently serving the church. Then he directs their thoughts to the internal temptation he is now facing, and to his response of self-denial. In both these ways he has been an example to them of how a man ought to guard the welfare of the church and the integrity of his own soul.

In the second section Paul reveals that his example among them is coming to an end. His future is full of uncertainty, and he doubts that they will ever see him again.

They, therefore, must carry on in imitation of the example he has set. This is the thrust of his third section, and the main point of the whole sermon. They will be faced with external troubles as he was; so they must guard the flock by following his example. They will also be tempted inwardly, as was he; they must therefore guard themselves as he guarded himself.

This is the overall movement of Paul's sermon. It is a message of exhortation, based upon his own example and departure from them. In outline form it appears as follows:
I. You yourselves know my example among you.

A. You know how I served the church in the face of external trouble.
   1. I was troubled by the plots of the Jews.
   2. Yet I did not shrink from anything that was profitable.

B. You see how I am denying myself in the face of internal temptation.
   1. I am tempted by the uncertainty and foreboding of the future.
   2. Yet I do not consider my life of any account for the sake of my ministry.

II. Now this example has come to a blameless end.

A. You will see my face no more

B. I am free from the blood of all.

III. As overseers of the church you must follow this example:
    Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock (theme).

A. Be on guard for all the flock against external trouble.
   1. You will be troubled by false teachers from without and within.
   2. So shepherd the church and remember my example of service.

B. Be on guard for yourselves against internal temptation.
   1. You will be tempted to profit financially from the ministry.
   2. So look to the Lord for your reward and remember my example of self-denial.

The development.—The development of Paul’s sermon is simple and direct. The scene is one of the most moving in all the New Testament, and the words need hardly any comment at all.
Paul begins by reminding the elders of his example among them in the face of external trouble:

You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I lived among you all the time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from anything that was profitable, preaching to you and teaching you publicly and in various houses, bearing witness to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.

They all know his manner of life from the moment he began to minister among them. They know that he served with all humility and tears though troubled on every hand by Jewish plots. They know that he had been "in peril every hour" in their city (I Cor. 15:30). But through it all he had not refrained from anything that might be of

\[1\] Luke does not describe these plots in detail in his narrative of Paul's Ephesian ministry (Acts 19:1-20:1). He does record that Jewish hostility forced Paul out of the synagogue and into the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). He also mentions the activity of the Jews during the riot of the silversmiths, though it is difficult to determine their exact role in the uprising (Acts 19:33-34).

The fullest picture of Paul's troubles during this time is found in his correspondence with the Corinthians, part of which was written while at Ephesus. In I Corinthians 16:8-9 Paul reports that a wide door of effectual work is open to him at Ephesus, but "there are many adversaries." At the beginning of his second letter he describes what it was like in Ephesus:

"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead; he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us" (II Cor. 1:8-10).

Cf. also the statements in I Corinthians 4:9-13; 15:30-32; and II Corinthians 11:21-27.

It is impossible to exaggerate the animosity of the Ephesian Jews. They were even the ones responsible for precipitating Paul's eventual affliction in Jerusalem: seeing him in the temple, they "stirred up all the crowd, and laid hands on him, crying out, 'Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place'" (Acts 21:27-28).
spiritual profit to them. On the contrary, he had thoroughly declared the word of God to everyone. He had ministered to them publicly in the synagogue and in the hall of Tyrannus, and privately from house to house. He had testified to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in Jesus Christ. He had not held back a thing, either of himself or of his message. Though troubled externally by conspiracies and threats, he had served the church with a diligent and comprehensive proclamation.

After this reminder of his past example, Paul turns to his present circumstances and reveals his response to the internal temptation he is now facing:

And now, as you see, bound in the spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit bears witness to me in city after city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the gospel of the grace of God.

He is now under an inner compulsion to go to Jerusalem. Though he does not fully know what will happen to him in the city, he is certain that he will receive a hostile reception. The Holy Spirit has told him repeatedly that imprisonment and distress are waiting for him. He has already been the object of Jewish plots; in Jerusalem such attempts

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1 The commentators argue whether Paul's words should be rendered "bound in the spirit" (his own), or "bound in the Spirit" (the Holy Spirit. The addition of the word "Holy" in verses 24 and 28 might suggest that Paul's own spirit is in view here. But since Paul considered his own spirit to be under the control of the Holy Spirit, the sense does not differ greatly either way.

2 This witness of the Spirit continued even after Paul left the elders (cf. Acts 21:4,10-11).
on his life will be even more convenient and more numerous. But he is not drawing back on account of this. He is not yielding to any inward temptation to fear for his life or to withdraw from his mission. Instead, he is pressing on, considering his life of no account as far as he is concerned.\(^1\) His life is not dear to himself. He is ready to suffer and, if need be, to die at Jerusalem. His main concern is not to protect himself, but to fulfill the course which Christ marked out for him. He is denying himself in order that he might complete the ministry which he received from his Lord. Though faced with the ominous uncertainty of the future, he is intent on bearing witness to the gospel of the grace of God, and expects that that grace will be sufficient for him in any hour of personal peril.

This has been his example to them—an example of diligent and thorough service in the face of external trouble, and an example of complete self-denial in the face of internal temptation.

This example, however, is coming to an end:

And now, listen carefully, I know that you will see my face no more, you all among whom I went about proclaiming the kingdom. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am free from the blood

\(^1\) Paul did value his life, but only insofar as it meant something to others. He did not grasp life for himself, but he did acknowledge that his presence was useful to the cause of Christ. As he later wrote the Philippians:

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith" (Phil. 1:21-25).

Paul was concerned about his life for the sake of the church, but not for his own sake.
of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

He is speaking to them for the last time; they will see his face no more. Bonds and affliction await him in Jerusalem, perhaps even death. If, by God's grace, he is spared and is free to travel, he intends to go to Rome and then to Spain (Acts 19:21; Rom. 15:24-28). But now he is saying goodbye to the province of Asia. His work among them is over, and he has done his full duty. He has declared the whole of God's will to them. He has neither omitted, nor altered, nor toned down any part of it. Like the trustworthy watchman of Ezekiel, he has sounded the trumpet aloud. If there are any who have paid no heed, their blood will be upon their own heads; he, Paul, is free of responsibility for their doom (Ezek. 3:17-21; 33:1-6).

Paul gives this account of his ministry because of his coming departure. His example is over, and it is complete. From now on the responsibility for the ministry in Ephesus will lie with the elders of the church. The charge and ministry that had been his now has become

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1 It may be that Paul did visit Ephesus again. There are possible hints of this in the Pastoral epistles (cf. I Tim. 1:3; 3:14; 4:13; II Tim. 1:18). But a reconstruction of Paul's itinerary after his first Roman imprisonment cannot be made with complete certainty. As Hendriksen writes:

"Where did he go immediately after his release? We simply do not know with any degree of certainty. The Pastoralas, to be sure, imply a number of journeys, but these are merely 'links' which can be joined together in ever so many different ways" (William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles in New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957], p. 39).

It seems best to take Paul's words at face value. Both he and the elders believe that this is their last hour together. Even if he does pass through their city again, for all practical purposes his ministry among them is over.
their. And what he has done, he now asks them to do. He is leaving them, but he is also leaving them the memory of his own example. And they must perform their part faithfully as he had done, by being on guard for themselves and for all the flock of God.

At this point Paul has arrived at the theme of his sermon. The review of his example and the announcement of his departure have prepared the way for his central exhortation. His example to them has been two-fold: in the face of external trouble he guarded the church with a diligent and thorough proclamation, and in the face of internal temptation he guarded himself with a spirit of self-denial. His departure from them means that they must now follow the pattern he has set. With the groundwork thus laid, the apostle earnestly and emphatically states the theme of his message—"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock."

Paul's development of this theme follows the same two-fold development of his own example. First he warns the elders of the external trouble that they will encounter, and exhorts them to guard the flock. Then he reveals the internal temptation they will face, and urges them to guard themselves. In each instance he reminds them again of his own response when confronted with similar circumstances, and encourages them to follow his example.

First, Paul exhorts the elders to guard the flock against external trouble by diligently and thoroughly serving the church:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He obtained with the blood of His Own. I know that fierce wolves will come in among you after my departure, not sparing the
flock; even from among your own selves will men arise, speaking perversions, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night and day to admonish each one with tears.

The responsibility for the flock is now theirs, for they have been made the overseers. As such they must guard the sheep with unceasing vigilance, for ferocious wolves will attack from without and will attempt to ravage the flock. When the apostle is gone the false teachers will spring among the sheep and cause great havoc unless the elders are watching out as true shepherds.

The danger, however, will not only come from without. It will also come from within, for men will arise from within the Christian community itself and will begin to pervert the truth. They will twist the apostolic teachings in an attempt to build their own following. Distorting sound doctrine, they will seduce the believers themselves into heretical paths unless the elders are guarding against them.

This is the external trouble that the elders will face—an assault by false teachers. To guard against it they must serve the church as Paul had done. They must shepherd the flock, watchfully protecting from the marauder without and nourishingly feeding against the perverter within. Their rod and their staff must be alert to the first sign of danger, and they must prepare a table in the green pastures of truth lest the sheep wander astray into the barren wastes of error. They must do all of these things with the same zeal and earnestness that

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1 These "fierce wolves" are false teachers, described as savage beasts because of the great damage that they do. Cf. the warning of Christ: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15).
characterized the apostle's ministry among them, remembering how for three years he did not cease night and day to admonish each one with tears. They must remember that when troubled externally he did not shrink from anything that was profitable, but preached and taught, publicly and privately, declaring the whole counsel of God to both Jew and Greek. In the midst of external danger he diligently and thoroughly served the church. The false teachers will come to Ephesus, and when they do the elders must guard the flock against them by following the example he has left.

After this exhortation to guard the flock from external trouble, Paul then urges the elders to guard themselves against the internal struggle they will face as overseers. They will be tempted to materially profit from their position in the church, and they must guard against it with a spirit of self-denial:

And now I commend you to the Lord and to the word of His grace, who is able to build you up and to give you your inheritance among all who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my needs and to those who were with me. I have shown you always that through such toiling you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Paul warns the elders that they will be tempted to profit financially from the ministry. The desire for personal gain, or at least for material comfort, will be a snare to them. And the only way they can avoid falling into the trap is to guard themselves with a spirit of complete self-denial. This is how Paul is guarding himself now as he journeys to Jerusalem, and it is also how he guarded himself when he labored among them at Ephesus. Faced now with the internal struggle of
whether to seek his physical safety or the completion of his ministry, he is denying himself, considering his life of no account as far as he is concerned. When faced earlier with the inward temptation to profit from his ministry among them, he adopted the same spirit of self-denial. They themselves can testify that he had resisted the impulse to gain financially from his position in their midst. They know that he had coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. They know that his own hands had ministered to his needs and to the needs of those who were with him. At all times he was an example to them of how a leader ought to shepherd the flock without thought of material reward.

1 In ancient times wealth was measured in clothing as well as in gold and silver (Josh. 7:21; Judg. 14:12-13; II Kings 5:5,22-23; Neh. 7:70-72; Job 27:16-17). This explains how a man could lose his riches to the moth, as well as to rust and thieves (Matt. 6:19-21; Luke 12:33-34; James 5:1-3).

2 In the Greek text "these words occupy an emphatic position at the end of the sentence; they were no doubt accompanied by an appropriate gesture" (F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary [London: The Tyndale Press, 1951], p. 382). Paul undoubtedly pursued his tentmaking trade at Ephesus, probably with Aquila and Priscilla (cf. Acts 18:1-3, 18-20).

3 The reference is to Timothy, Erastus, Luke, and others who travelled with Paul. The apostle's earnings probably went toward their expenses as they traversed the province of Asia with the gospel. It may also be that Timothy's "frequent ailments" (I Tim. 5:23) at times incapacitated him from working and required additional expense.

4 Paul was not against a minister's earning his living by means of the gospel. On the contrary, he firmly taught "that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (I Cor. 9:14; cf. Rom. 15:27; Gal. 6:6). But he also knew that there were times when a leader needed to give up this right for the sake of his ministry (I Cor. 9:3-18; II Thess. 3:6-12). He himself had accepted no support except from the Christians of Macedonia (II Cor. 11:7-10). Evidently the circumstances in Ephesus were such that the elders likewise should not initiate or encourage anything that had to do with their own financial support. Acts 19:18-19 may provide a hint of these circumstances:
Now they must follow the pattern he has set. Through hard toil they must "help the weak," ever keeping in mind the words of the Lord Jesus when he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Denying themselves every material advantage, they must labor unstintingly for the church. And in return they will find a greater blessedness than could be gained through any temporal pay, for God Himself will give them their inheritance among all who are sanctified. The Great Shepherd himself will bless them with every spiritual blessing.

To this end, therefore, Paul commends them to the Lord and to it seems that many believers in Ephesus 'got rich from religion' even after their conversion. Given such a setting it was probably all the more necessary for spiritual leaders in the city to avoid even the least appearance of mercenary intentions.

1 These words are capable of two different explanations. The "weak" could be the poor, the feeble, the physically sick—those who are not able to care for themselves. If so, the apostle is exhorting the elders to provide for the physical needs of those under their charge as his own hands had ministered to the needs of his associates (cf. Rom. 12:13; Eph. 4:28). It seems more likely, however, that it is the "weak in faith" whom Paul has in mind—those believers who are not yet sufficiently mature in the faith and who might suspect the elders of covetous motives (cf. Rom. 14:1; 15:1; I Cor. 9:22; I Thess. 5:14). If this latter interpretation is correct, then Paul is urging the elders to follow his example of waiving his rightful support for the sake of his ministry. In either case the appeal is for a spirit of complete self-denial based on the apostle's own example to them.

2 This saying is not found in any of the four Gospels, but the command to "remember" suggests that the words were familiar to the elders. It is possible that a collection of the Sayings of Jesus circulated in Ephesus at this time (cf. I Tim. 6:3; 5:18; Luke 10:7).

3 The "inheritance" Paul speaks of is the present enjoyment of the riches of God that are in Christ Jesus. His exhortation here is similar to the one he gave the Colossians: "Work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward" (Col. 3:23-24). Cf. also Ephesians 1:18; 5:5; Colossians 1:12; I Peter 3:9.
the word of His grace. Since his own example among them is coming to an end, he entrusts them to God, confident that God through His word will build them up, producing in them that spirit of self-denial which will guard them against any inward temptation.

This completes the development of Paul's sermon. He begins with a reminder of his own example—of how he diligently and thoroughly served the church in the face of external trouble, and of how he denied himself for the sake of his ministry in the face of inward temptation. He then reveals that his example among them is coming to an end. The responsibility for the Ephesian church now belongs to the elders alone. They, therefore, must imitate Paul's example and be on guard for themselves and for all the flock. They must shepherd the flock night and day in order to guard the church against the external danger of false teachers. And they must thoroughly deny their own self-interests in order to guard themselves against the internal temptation of financial profit. They must dedicate themselves to a ministry of service and self-denial, and thus fulfill their calling as faithful overseers of the church of God.

The response to the sermon

The immediate response.—Luke records that the immediate response of the elders to Paul's message was one of sorrow and great grief:

And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they all wept and embraced Paul and kissed him, sorrowing most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they brought him to the ship (Acts 20:36-38).

When the apostle had finished speaking he knelt down with them
all and prayed. By now the elders were all in tears, sorrowing at the thought that they would see his face no more. They began to embrace Paul and to kiss him repeatedly. They lingered about him, reluctant to let him out of their sight. But the time had come to go. So they walked the distance to the ship with him, thus spending the last moments possible in his presence.

The long-range response.---In addition to this immediate and emotional outpouring, there was also a prolonged and resolute response to Paul's sermon. The elders were instantly touched by the announcement of his departure. But also, and more importantly, they were permanently affected by his warnings of the future. The apostle's words of exhortation made such an impression on the elders that for years to come they zealously guarded the flock from false teachers and themselves from covetousness.

The apostle predicted that the Ephesian elders would be troubled externally by false teachers. Fierce wolves from without would ravage the flock, and perverters from within would attempt to lead the sheep astray. This prediction came to pass in just a few years as false teachers from without and within assaulted the church of Ephesus. The record of their activity is preserved in the two letters Paul wrote to Timothy, a young pastor in Ephesus.2

1"The imperfect καταφελοῦν expresses the lingering of the parting and not only that each man kissed Paul while embracing him, but also that each one could hardly let him go" (R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles [Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1944], p. 857).

2For Timothy's location in Ephesus, cf. I Timothy 1:3. Though
The false teachers who assaulted from without seem to have been Judaisers with an interest in speculative matters. Occupying themselves with "myths and endless genealogies," these men promoted "speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith" (I Tim. 1:4).\(^1\) They were full of "godless chatter and contradictions" (I Tim. 6:20), and engaged in "stupid, senseless controversies" which did nothing but "breed quarrels" (II Tim. 2:23).\(^2\) Giving themselves to a "disputing about words," they accomplished no good, but only ruined their hearers (II Tim. 2:14). The full description of their nature and activity reveals them to be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Among them are those who make their way into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth. As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so the second letter does not say where the recipient was, there are several passages which point to Ephesus (cf. Hendriksen, Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles, p. 43).

\(^1\) The "speculative" Judaism which threatened Ephesus is to be distinguished from the "Pharisaic" Judaism which troubled Rome and Galatia by its insistence on circumcision and the observance of the Law (cf. Fenton John Anthony Hort, Judaistic Christianity [London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1904], pp. 130-46). The "myths and endless genealogies," according to Hort, were the profuse legends which had grown up among the Jews concerning the patriarchs and other heroes of early Mosaic history (ibid., pp. 136-37).

\(^2\) The "contradictions" and "controversies" represented the different interpretative decisions of the competing schools of Hillel and Shammai. The Jewish Halacha was full of these myriad and contrasting opinions, based on endless and minute distinctions (ibid., pp. 140-43, 210-13).
men also oppose the truth, men of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith (II Tim. 3:2-8).

Passing themselves off as genuine "apostles" (Rev. 2:2; cf. I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 3:13; II Cor. 11:13), these bickerers began to ravage the flock. Their "morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words" produced "envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling" (I Tim. 6:4-5). Their godless chatter led their listeners "into more and more ungodliness," and their talk ate "its way like gangrene" (II Tim. 2:16).

Perhaps influenced by the doctrines of these enemies from without, false teachers also arose from within the Ephesian community and began to speak perversions. Among their own selves some swerved from "a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith," and "wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they [were] saying or the things about which they [made] assertions" (I Tim. 1:6-7). The Pastorals mention many of these defectors. Hymenaeus and Alexander rejected a good conscience, made "shipwreck of their faith," and began to blaspheme (I Tim. 1:19-20). Phygelus and Hermogenes were among those in Asia who turned away from Paul and his teaching (II Tim. 1:15). Hymanaeus and Philetus "swerved from the truth" and upset the faith of some with their perverse teaching that the resurrection was already past (II Tim. 2:17-18). Others gave "heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" and began to "forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods" (I Tim.
From without and within, therefore, the false teachers began to trouble the Ephesian church. But when they came, the elders of the church remembered the words of Paul and began to guard the flock. Like true shepherds they nourished the sheep "on the words of the faith and of the good doctrines," and had "nothing to do with godless and silly myths" (I Tim. 4:6-7). In the face of false doctrine, they fed the flock with the inspired scriptures, using them profitably "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). Confronted by external danger, they followed "the pattern of sound words" which they had heard from Paul, and guarded the truth that the Holy Spirit had entrusted to them (II Tim. 1:13-14). They remembered the apostle's example—how that for three years he did not cease night and day to admonish each one with tears—and they imitated his service. The preached the word; they were urgent in season and out of season; they convinced, rebuked, and exhorted; and all the while they were unfailing in patience and in teaching (II Tim. 4:2). They were not

Lane suggests that this ascetic perversion was linked to the other false teaching about the resurrection's having already occurred. The false teachers, he writes, taught that by virtue of the resurrection "the Christian community had been projected into the Age to come, and that the conditions of life in that age were now in force. The resurrection lay in the past, and therefore Jesus' statement that in the resurrection men neither marry nor give their children in marriage demanded that marriage cease. The prohibition against meats is understandable on the same basis. Had not the risen Jesus indicated by his own example that the food to be taken after the resurrection was fish or honeycomb. Further appeal could be made to Paul's dictum that the Kingdom of God was not meat and drink" (William L. Lane, "I Tim. iv.1-3. An Early Instance of Over-realized Eschatology?", New Testament Studies, XI [January, 1965], 166).
quarrelsome as their enemies, but were kindly to everyone, apt teachers; forbearing, correcting their opponents with gentleness in the hope that God would perhaps grant that they would repent, come to know the truth, and thus escape from the snare of the devil (II Tim. 2:24-26).

In all these ways they followed the example of Paul and served the church with a diligent and thorough proclamation in the face of external trouble. They so guarded the flock against the wolves from without and the perverters from within that for years to come the Ephesian church was known for the purity of its faith. Repeated testimony indicates that the Christians of Ephesus remained steadfast in sound doctrine and rejected the purveyors of falsehood. The apostle John, writing from the city in his old age, admits that many antichrists did indeed come to Ephesus. But he quickly adds:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us (I John 2:19).

The Son of Man among the lampstands also acknowledges that false teachers did not remain long in Ephesus. He commends the church for their careful scrutiny of would-be teachers—

I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false (Rev. 2:2)—and approves their hatred for the perverse works of the Nicolaitans

1The placing of John in Ephesus is done, among others, by Irenaeus, who speaks of "the church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan" (Against Heresies iii.3.4; cf. also ii.22.5; iii.1.1).
Even in the second century the church of Ephesus is still being praised for its doctrinal soundness. Ignatius of Antioch, on his way to a Roman martyrdom in A.D. 110, writes to the Ephesian church:

Indeed, Onesimus himself highly praises your orderliness in God, because you all live in accordance with the truth and because no heresy dwells among you; indeed, you do not even listen to anyone unless he speaks truly of Jesus Christ.

All of this testimony is evidence of the diligent and thorough work of the elders. The words of Paul so profoundly affected them that for years to come they zealously guarded the flock from the external trouble of false teachers.

The elders made a similar long-range response to Paul's second exhortation by guarding themselves from the internal temptation to profit from the ministry. As overseers of the flock they denied themselves every material advantage. They were not lovers of money (I Tim. 3:3), nor men greedy for financial reward (I Tim. 3:8). They did not conceive of godliness as a means of gain (I Tim. 6:5), but having food and clothing, they were content (I Tim. 6:8). At all times they carefully guarded themselves from covetousness, knowing that "those who desire to

1 The doctrine of the Nicolaitans is compared to "the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality" (Rev. 2:14-16). The Nicolaitans seem to have been an antinomian sect that advocated pagan sexual laxity within the church. According to Irenaeus, they led "lives of unrestrained indulgence" and taught that it was "a matter of indifference to practise adultery and to eat things sacrificed to idols" (Against Heresies i.26.3). For a fuller description of their beliefs and activity, see the article by H. Cowan, "Nicolaitans," A Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. III: Kir--Pleiades, ed. by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), pp. 547-48.

2 Ignatius of Antioch Ephesians 6.2.
be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction" (I Tim. 6:9). Realizing that "the love of money is the root of all evil," and that through this craving some had "wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs" (I Tim. 6:10), they heeded Paul's words of warning and followed his example of self-denial.

The elders so successfully guarded themselves against any gain from their ministry that Paul was compelled to give a balancing exhortation to the church. Realizing that the elders were going without any recompense whatever, the apostle instructed the Ephesians through Timothy:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages" (I Tim. 5:17-18).

This, then, is the powerful and lasting effect that Paul's message had on the Ephesian elders. They were so moved by his own example and by his charge to them that for years to come they successfully guarded the flock from external trouble and themselves from internal temptation.

The Rhetorical Analysis

The long-range response to the sermon indicates that Paul thoroughly accomplished his purpose, which was to persuade the elders to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock. In achieving this goal,

1 Demas is one who fell into such a snare (Col. 4:4; Phm. 23-24; II Tim. 4:10).
the apostle was aided once again by the rhetorical choices that he made, for every aspect of his message is adapted to the immediate audience before him. The theme, supporting materials, style, and mood are all deliberately selected and suited to a gathering of elders from Ephesus.

The choice of the theme

The theme of Paul's sermon—"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock"—is appropriate to this audience and occasion from several standpoints. First, and obviously, the theme is designed for Christians. This is not an evangelistic address. It does not focus on the fulfillment of Jewish promises or on the knowledge of natural revelation. Instead, it is a message of exhortation, applicable only to those who have already come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, the theme is particularly designed for the elders of the church of Ephesus. It is not a general exhortation which would have been equally appropriate in any worship service, for it specifically has to do with the position and responsibilities of church leaders. Moreover, it is not even a message which could have been given just as easily to the leaders of a different church, for it concerns itself so fully with the historical circumstances of Ephesus. It is a theme with a very narrow and direct focus, having primary application to a select segment of a certain church.

Finally, Paul's theme is appropriate not only to his particular audience, but also to the spirit of the occasion. This is the last time that Paul and the elders will meet together. He is bidding farewell to the Aegean shores; if he manages to get safely away from Jerusalem, the
the western Mediterranean is to be his field of action. This is the last time that they will see his face. It is not an hour, therefore, to be filled with didactic lectures or argumentative analyses. Instead, it is a time to reflect on their long and intimate association and to look to their separate futures. It is a time for remembrance and for renewed dedication. It is a time for reminders and for exhortations to imitation. And Paul chooses a theme that is fitting for such an occasion.

In all of these ways, therefore, Paul's choice of a theme is eminently appropriate. He is speaking to Christians, leaders of the church of Ephesus, men who have known and loved him for years, and friends who are gathering for the last time. They come expectantly, they part sorrowingly, but they remember his message and they follow his example.

The choice of the supporting materials

To support the development of his sermon Paul relies, almost exclusively on personal examples. He appeals again and again to the elders' full knowledge of his own behavior. They themselves know how he lived among them from the first day that he set foot in Asia. They know that he did not shrink from anything that was profitable, but diligently and thoroughly served the church in the face of external trouble. They see now that he is unhesitatingly bound for Jerusalem, denying the inward temptation to seek his own safety. They can bear witness that he declared the whole counsel of God to them, and is therefore free from the blood of all. They can recall that for three years he did not cease
night and day to admonish each one with tears. They know that he coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing, ministering instead to his own needs through the labor of his hands. The elders are fully aware of all of these things, and the apostle does not hesitate to build his sermon around the knowledge they have.

Paul decides to use personal examples as supporting material for two reasons. First of all, this is perhaps the best way he has of giving them a clear pattern to follow. As Carter and Earle note:

The Jews possessed the Old Testament Scriptures and the instruction and examples they afforded for their directives. Before Paul wrote them, the Gentiles at Ephesus were devoid of any written instruction in Christian righteousness as were the Thessalonians. Hence the importance of Paul's godly example before them, if they were to attain unto correct Christian deportment.

At that time the apostle's own behavior was the only objective standard available by which a Christian leader could measure his own commitment and service. This is one reason why Paul so fully reminds them of his personal example.

But besides this need for a model to imitate, Paul's choice of personal example as supporting material is also appropriate to this audience because of its persuasive potential. His most effective means of persuading the elders to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock is through a reminder of his own character and behavior. Aristotle, as early as the fourth century B.C., recognized that a speaker's "moral character" is a more powerful means of persuasion than either

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his logical arguments or his emotional appeals. Recent studies in communication have verified this observation, demonstrating that "the greater the trustworthiness or expertness, the greater the change toward the position advocated by the communicator." Minnick summarizes the principle thus:

Men are strongly inclined to accept as probably true statements made by persons whom they admire and respect. If the character and personality of the speaker elicit admiration and respect from an audience, the likelihood that he will win belief is increased.

In light of this concept, Paul's decision to use personal examples is clear confirmation of his skill as a speaker. Given this particular audience, there is no more fitting way that he could have backed up his exhortations than by references to his own behavior. For the Ephesian elders had the highest admiration and respect for the apostle. Their immediate reaction to the announcement that they would never see him again shows the extent of their affection and regard for him.

\[1\] Aristotle The "Art" of Rhetoric 1.2.4.
\[4\] Even their choice of words for never seeing him again reveals how much they thought of the apostle. When Paul disclosed that they would "see" his face no more (vs. 25), he used ὅρος, a word which denotes the physical act in general, "seeing as sense-perception" (Wilhelm Michaelis, ὅρος, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. V:
Realizing, therefore, that these men love and trust him, Paul unhesitatingly supports his message by references to his personal example. He wisely chooses that supporting-material which will have the greatest persuasive force with this particular group of listeners.

**The choice of the style**

The third area of choice influenced by the make-up of Paul's immediate audience is the area of style. While the sermon in Acts 13 has a Semitic flavor, and the address in Acts 17 tends toward classical Greek, Paul's message in Acts 20 is couched in words and phrases that are reminiscent of his own letters to Christians. As he speaks to the Ephesian elders he uses the words, phrases, images, and concepts that they had long been accustomed to hear from him.

A full documentation of Paul's stylistic adaptation in this

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sermon would soon become tedious. The following, therefore, are only some of the more conspicuous examples:

Verse 18. --
"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I lived among you all the time" (I Cor. 2:3; Gal. 4:13; Phil. 4:15; I Thess. 2:1-12; 3:4; 4:2; II Thess. 3:7-9).

Verse 19. --
"serving the Lord" (Rom. 1:1; 12:11; 14:18; 16:18; II Cor. 4:5; Gal. 1:10; Eph. 6:7; Phil. 1:1; 2:22; Col. 3:24; 4:12; I Thess. 1:9; II Tim. 2:24; Tit. 1:1).
"with all humility" (Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:3; Col. 2:18, 23; 3:12).

Verse 21. --

Verse 24. --
"I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself" (II Cor. 4:7-12; 6:3-10; 12:9-10; Phil. 1:20-25; Col. 1:24).
"in order that I may finish my course" (I Cor. 9:24-26; Gal. 2:2; Phil. 2:16; 3:12-14; II Tim. 4:7).
"and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 1:4-5; 11:13; 15:31; I Cor. 11:23; II Cor. 3:6; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3-4; 11:23; Gal. 1:1, 12; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23, 25; 4:17; I Tim. 1:12; 4:6; II Tim. 4:5, 11).
"bearing witness to the gospel of the grace of God" (Rom. 3-6, 11; I Cor. 1:3-4; 3:10; 15:10; II Cor. 1:12; 6:1; Gal. 2:21; Eph. 1:7; 2:7-10; 3:2; Col. 1:6).

Verse 26. --
"I testify to you" (Rom. 10:2; II Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:15; 5:3; Eph. 4:17; Col. 4:13).

Verse 28. --
"the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12:4-11, 28; Eph. 4:1-16).

Verse 31. --
"be alert" (I Cor. 16:13; Col. 4:2; I Thess. 5:6, 10).
"night and day" (I Thess. 2:9; 3:10; II Thess. 3:8; II Tim. 5:13).
"admonish each one" (Rom. 15:14; I Cor. 4:14; Col. 1:28; 3:16; I Thess. 5:12, 14; II Thess. 3:15).
Verse 32.—
"I commend you to the Lord" (Rom. 16:25-27; I Thess. 3:11-13; 5:23).
"who is able to build you up" (I Cor. 3:9-17; II Cor. 10:8; 13:10; Eph. 2:19-22).
"and to give you your inheritance among all who are sanctified" (II Cor. 9:8; Eph. 1:14; 3:20; Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:12; 3:24).

Verse 33.—
"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing" (I Cor. 9:3-18; II Cor. 11:7-11; 12:13; I Thess. 2:5).

Verse 34.—
"these hands ministered to my needs" (I Cor. 4:12; I Thess. 2:9; 4:11-12; II Thess. 3:7-12).

The list could be multiplied endlessly, especially through comparisons of such characteristically Pauline words as "profitable," "bearing witness," "Holy Spirit," "bonds and affliction," "be on guard," "grace," and "remember." Throughout the sermon, therefore, the apostle speaks in a style that is appropriate to his audience by choosing terms, phrases, and ideas that have long been familiar to them.

The choice of the mood

Paul's final area of choice concerns the mood of his sermon. He must carefully pick those emotional overtones which will lead most naturally to the acceptance of his message. This is a very delicate and awkward matter, for his message is built totally around his own example and the significance of that example for the elders. With such an emphasis, there is the danger that the apostle might appear proud and overbearing. To counteract this Paul must speak in such a way as to convince the elders of his abiding affection for them. At the same time, however, he must speak with sufficient forcefulness so that they will be impelled to heed his warnings. The apostle, therefore, moves
in both these directions and infuses his message with a spirit of continual love and strong admonition.

A spirit of continual love.—Throughout his sermon Paul speaks in such a way as to remind his audience of his continual love for them. Three facets in particular are worth noting—his language of thoroughness, his modesty in example, and his omission of embarrassing references.

Paul first reminds the elders of his continual love for them through language which emphasizes the utter thoroughness of his activity among them. He cared for them so much that he fully and completely extended himself on their behalf. He served with "all" humility. He did not shrink from "anything" that was profitable. On the contrary, he declared everything ("repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus"), to everyone ("to both Jews and Greeks"), everywhere ("publicly and in various houses"), in every way ("preaching to you and teaching you"). Moreover, his is free from the blood of "all" men, for he declared the "whole" counsel of God, and did not cease "night and day" for three years to admonish "each" one with tears. He coveted "no one's" material wealth; rather, he showed them "always" how to toil unselfishly for the sake of the ministry. Through such language of thoroughness Paul communicates a spirit of continual love. In these reminders of his activity, there is the strong suggestion that he served so completely because he cared so deeply.

Secondly, Paul protects the mood of love by being as modest in the presentation of his example as his theme will permit. The nature
and effectiveness of his message require a heavy emphasis on his own character and behavior. Yet, at the same time, he must avoid an atmosphere of assertive superiority or of overbearing boastfulness. To do this, the apostle describes his activity in negative terms—"I did not shrink from anything that was profitable"; "I do not consider my life of any account"; "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God"; "I did not cease night and day to admonish each one with tears"; "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing." All of these ideas could have been asserted in a bolder, more positive manner. But Paul chooses these negative and more modest-equivalents in order to avoid offense and to preserve the spirit of love.

The third way in which Paul shows his love for the elders is by refraining from any mention of the gift he is taking to Jerusalem. It is obvious from the Corinthian and Roman correspondence that the collection is very much on his mind. It is even the reason for his journey to Jerusalem. But he says nothing of this in his sermon; he only mentions that he is bound in the spirit as he heads for the city. This omission may be illusory; it is possible that the full text of Paul's sermon made mention of the gift and that the reference merely dropped out in Luke's subsequent and condensed report. On the other hand, the silence may have been original, and deliberate on Paul's part. The churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia are explicitly mentioned in the epistles as participating in the collection (I Cor. 16:1; II Cor. 8:1; Rom. 15:26). But nothing is said of any funds from the churches of Asia. It may be that the Asian Christians for one reason or another did
not share in his benevolent work. If so, the omission of any embarrassing reference to the matter is explained by Paul's concern for the feelings of those before him, and by his desire to thoroughly communicate a spirit of continual love.

A spirit of strong admonition.—Paul also strives for an atmosphere of strong admonition in order that the elders will be spurred to action. In addition to a spirit of continual love, he also desires a mood of blunt and direct forcefulness, and works toward that end through the use of asyndeton, emphatic pronouns, and solemn expressions.

Asyndeton is the unconnected paratactic use of words and sentences. According to Black, this particular construction is, on the whole, contrary to the spirit of the Greek language. Most Greek sentences are linked by a connecting particle, and, where asyndeton is found, it is generally employed with rhetorical effect, especially in admonition. Asyndeton, therefore, is a syntactical device which effectively produces a tone of admonition. And since this is the very mood Paul wants, it is not surprising that he deliberately and frequently employs this construction in his sermon to the elders. Asyndeton can be found in verses 29, 33, 34, and 35, and in each instance it is "rhetorically effective" in creating the proper spirit for Paul's message.


3 Ibid., p. 59.
Paul also achieves a blunt and forceful effect through the emphatic use of pronouns. By highlighting certain pronouns through repetition and word order, he stresses the direct and personal involvement of both speaker and listener in what he is saying. This emphasis appears in such phrases as "you yourselves know... how I lived among you" (vs. 18); "bound in the spirit, I am going to Jerusalem" (vs. 22); "I know that you will see my face no more, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom" (vs. 25); "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (vs. 28); "I know that fierce wolves will come in among you after my departure" (vs. 29); "even among your own selves will men arise" (vs. 30); "you yourselves know that these hands ministered to my needs" (vs. 34). Many other personal pronouns appear in the sermon, but these are the ones that Paul particularly emphasizes in order to give a direct and hortatory spirit to his message.

Finally, Paul communicates a spirit of strong admonition by the very solemnity of his expressions. The vocabulary he uses stresses the significance and urgency of his message. Words and phrases such as "plots of the Jews," "bound in the spirit," "bonds and affliction," "free from the blood of all," "did not shrink," "be on guard," "fierce wolves," "not sparing the flock," "to draw away the disciples," "be alert," and "remember" draw attention to the seriousness of the moment and to the need for a resolute and determined response. His appeals, likewise, are made in light of the most awesome considerations: he

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1 The underlined words reflect the special emphasis of the Greek text.
reminds the elders that the Holy Spirit has specifically appointed them as shepherds of the flock; they have been entrusted with the oversight; if they fail in their duty, the flock of God will be ravaged and the disciples will be drawn away. Thus the apostle places the full weight of responsibility on the elders in order to compel them to a zealous vigilance.

The spirit of strong admonition, therefore, as well as the spirit of continual love, is infused throughout the entire sermon. The very atmosphere of the message encourages its acceptance. In this, as in all other areas of his sermon, Paul makes an appropriate choice to meet the need of a particular situation.

**Summary**

Paul's sermon to the Christians in Acts 20 takes place in the city of Miletus as the apostle is on his way to Jerusalem with a collection for the Christians. Prompted by his own uncertain future, and by his affection for those among whom he had labored so long, Paul summons the elders of the Ephesian church for a farewell moment together. His message to them is one of exhortation, based on his own example and his coming departure. The apostle pleads with the elders to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock. They must guard the flock against the external danger of false teachers by means of a diligent and thorough service to the church. And they must guard themselves against the internal temptation to profit from the ministry by means of a spirit of complete self-denial. The immediate response to Paul's sermon is one of great sorrow at the thought of not seeing him again. But the elders
also respond with a prolonged and lasting obedience, as for years to come they successfully guard the flock from error and themselves from covetousness.

Paul was aided in the thorough achieving of his purpose by the rhetorical choices that he made. He chose a theme that was specifically designed for both the hour at hand and the men before him. He selected the particular kind of support material that would have the greatest persuasive impact on his immediate listeners. He spoke with words and phrases with which they had long been familiar. And he incorporated into his message those emotional overtones that would lead to a diligent and permanent response.

In this sermon, as in all others, Paul adapted every aspect of his message to the particular audience before him. Taking account of their unique characteristics, he made those choices which would best enable him to meet their unique needs.
CHAPTER V

PATTERNS FOR PREACHING

To see Paul in the pulpit—this is the aim of this dissertation. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to identify any consistent strains in the preaching of Paul, believing that such strains represent authoritative guidelines for contemporary preachers. Three of Paul's sermons have now been examined in detail, and the time has come for a final perspective. Once again the question is asked: "What are the inspired patterns for preaching contained in the sermons of Paul?" And the answer, according to this study, is as follows: "The effective communication of God's Word requires a persuasive purpose, a single theme, an orderly structure, and a thorough adaptation."

A Persuasive Purpose

The first pattern that appears in Paul's sermons is his consistent desire to persuade his audience. Paul's primary purpose in preaching is not to inform, or expound, or teach, or instruct. Instead, his goal is to persuade—to move his audience toward some specific course of action. Obviously the apostle does inform, expound, teach, and instruct. But these are all subsidiary activities. They are all subordinate to or leading toward his main intention, which is to persuade his listeners to act.

This ultimate thrust toward persuasion is seen in each of Paul's
sermons. In Acts 13 his purpose in speaking to the Jews is not simply to make them "aware" that God has fulfilled His promises and brought Jesus to Israel as the Savior. Paul is not content that his audience merely "know" this spiritual truth. Instead, his purpose is to persuade them to "act" on it. He wants them to accept this God-given Savior in order that they might receive forgiveness of sins and justification from all things. This persuasive intent is clearly apparent in the closing section of the sermon as he stresses the immediate response that his listeners must make:

Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this One forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, and that in him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified in the law of Moses.

Take care, therefore, that there does not happen what is spoken of in the prophets:

"Behold, you scoffers, and be amazed and perish,
For I am doing a work in your days,
A work which you will never believe though someone explains it to you."

His whole purpose, therefore, is to persuade his audience to act on the truth they have heard.

The same thing is true of his sermon to the Gentiles in Acts 17. Paul's goal is not simply that the Athenians have a correct doctrinal knowledge of God as the Creator of the universe and the Father of men. The purpose of his message is not merely to expound the revelation of God in nature and in man's consciousness. Admittedly, it is important that he dispel Athenian ignorance. But Paul's surpassing concern is that the Athenians undertake a specific course of action. The overriding goal of his message is to persuade the Athenians to abandon their idolatrous worship. Whatever exposition he engages in is only a means
to this more vital end. It is only Paul's way of opening their eyes to
the error and emptiness of their own religion. But the focus of the
sermon is on the specific course of action the audience should take—the
Athenians should turn from their idolatry and worship the true and liv­
ing God. This is the persuasive end of the speech.

This persuasive goal in all of Paul's preaching stands clearest
in his sermon to the Christians in Acts 20. In this message his intent
to compel is explicit in the dual imperative, "Be on guard for your­
selves and for all the flock." His whole purpose in speaking is to get
them to carry out this command. Whatever information he gives the el­
ders about past examples or about future troubles and temptations is
only preparatory to this ultimate goal of persuading them to action.

In each sermon, therefore, Paul's primary purpose is a persua­
sive one. This pattern is consistent, not only in his individual ad­
dresses, but also in the general descriptions of all his preaching.
Throughout the book of Acts Luke repeatedly uses the Greek word πέ­
al
("to persuade") to describe the nature and results of Paul's preaching
activity. After the apostle's sermon to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch,
the follow-up activity is recorded in these words:

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 [πέ­] them to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43).

When Paul was in Thessalonica, he went into the synagogue
as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the
scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the
Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus,
whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were per­
suaded [πέ­], and joined Paul and Silas; as did a great many of
the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women (Acts 17:2-4).
The same thing happened in Corinth as Paul “argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded [πειθόμ] Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). In Ephesus he “entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading [πειθόμ] about the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). The objection of the silversmiths to his preaching in Ephesus was that he had “persuaded [πειθόμ] and turned away a considerable company of people” (Acts 19:26). Even King Agrippa sensed the impelling thrust of Paul’s words and remarked, “In a short time you think to make [πειθόμ] me a Christian!” (Acts 26:28). Finally, the book of Acts closes with the apostle in Rome, seeking to persuade the Jews:

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in great numbers. And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince [πειθόμ] them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. And some were convinced [πειθόμ] by what he said, while others disbelieved (Acts 28:23-24).

Throughout all of Paul’s ministry, therefore, the goal of his preaching is not simply to add to men’s knowledge, but to move men’s wills. He himself declares that the primary and consistent purpose of all of his preaching is to “persuade men” (II Cor. 5:11).

This, then, is the pattern for contemporary preachers—to preach with an aim toward persuasion, to speak for the purpose of moving men to action, to press for a definite and tangible response. Phillips Brooks states the pattern thus: “A sermon exists in and for its purpose. That purpose is the persuading and moving of men’s souls.”1 John Henry Jowett describes it more fully:

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In all our preaching we must preach for verdicts. We must present our case, we must seek a verdict, and we must ask for immediate execution of the verdict. We are not in the pulpit to please the fancy. We are not there even to inform the mind, or to disturb the emotions, or to sway the judgment. These are only preparatives along the journey. Our ultimate object is to move the will, to set it in another course, to increase its pace, and to make it sing in "the ways of God's commandments." Yes, we are there to bring the wills of men into tune with the will of God, in order that God's statutes may become their songs.¹

As Nolan Howington explains, "The aim of preaching is more than the elucidation of Scripture. We desire changes in the lives of people."²

This pattern of persuasion, therefore, declares that knowledge for knowledge's sake alone is not enough. It has no use for doctrinal truth that exists in a vacuum, for prophetical insight that has no practical ramification, or for historical exposition that never touches present life. Instead, this pattern recognizes that the Word of God is a lamp to men's feet, and a light to their path. And it insists that all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17).

The practical response, the specific action—this is the ultimate purpose of preaching. A preacher may begin and continue in exposition, but unless he ends in persuasion he is not following the pattern of Paul.


A Single Theme

The second strain in the apostle's preaching is the presence of a single theme. Each of Paul's messages is centered around one simple idea or thought. Each address crystallizes into a single sentence which expresses the sum and substance of the whole discourse. Everything in the sermon either leads up to, develops, or follows from a single unifying theme.

In Acts 13 Paul's theme is that "God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." In Acts 17 he focuses everything on the idea that "God is the Creator of the universe and the Father of men." And in Acts 20 his whole message is synthesized in the words, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock." In each of Paul's sermons, therefore, there is a single thought that encompasses the thrust of the whole message.

This is a pattern that desperately needs to be followed in contemporary preaching. Laymen "complain almost unanimously that sermons often contain too many ideas."\(^1\) The failure to have a single, controlling idea "accounts for much of the pointless preaching of our day."\(^2\) Too many sermons consist of remarks and thoughts that aim either at nothing in particular or at too many things in general. The apostolic example is to concentrate on one single concept and to gear everything

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\(^1\)This is Reuel H. Howe's observation after listening to hundreds of taped sermon discussions by laymen (Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue [New York: The Seabury Press, 1967], p. 26; italics his).

in the message toward it. All competing thrusts are eliminated. All miscellaneous or extraneous paths are avoided, regardless of how original, interesting, or eloquent they might be. Whatever does not contribute to this one unifying idea is unequivocally rejected.

Both rhetoricians and homileticians have long recognized that a single theme is indispensable to effective communication. One of the most basic concepts of public speaking is that every discourse needs to center around a single idea. No textbook is complete without some discussion of this principle. The terminology may differ—central idea, main thought, thesis, proposition, statement, theme—but the point is the same: a good speech "centers on one specific thing, a central idea." This thought is so axiomatic to public address that some authors simply take it for granted:

Little need be said here about the emergence of the central theme. It is assumed that the speech possesses a clearly defined and easily determined thesis or purpose; that this thesis is unencumbered by collateral theses which interfere with the clear perception of the principal one; and that the development is of such a character as to provide for the easy and unmistakable emergence of the thesis through the unfolding of the contents of the speech.


2 Lester Thonessen and A. Craig Baird, Speech Criticism; The Development of Standards for Rhetorical Appraisal (New York: The Ronald
Homileticians are equally insistent on the need for a single all-encompassing idea. Stibbs writes that the "preacher must develop his expository treatment of the text in relation to a single dominant theme."¹ Davis states that "a well-prepared sermon is the embodiment, the development, the full statement of a significant thought."² According to Whitesell and Perry:

The integrating center of a sermon is a good proposition. The proposition promotes stability of structure, unity of thought, and forcefulness of impact. The proposition is the heart of the sermon: in fact, it is the sermon in a nutshell, the gist of the sermon in a single sentence. Its importance for the sermonizer and for the audience can hardly be exaggerated.³

References could be quoted almost endlessly,⁴ but perhaps it is Jowett who expresses the matter most forcefully:

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I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as a crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labour in my study. To compel oneself to fashion that sentence, to dismiss every word that is vague, ragged, ambiguous, to think oneself through to a form of words which defines the theme with scrupulous exactness—this is surely one of the most vital and essential factors in the making of a sermon: and I do not think any sermon ought to be preached, or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.¹

This concept of a central and unifying theme is not only germane to the field of speech, it also seems to pervade many of the arts. In architecture, "A competent designer instinctively chooses a theme, a leitmotif, for a given structure, and allows it to influence all his choice of form and line within that structure."² In music,

One of the most firmly established styles of musical composition is the theme and variations. In this the composer selects or invents a theme with the intention of developing a series of pieces in each of which the opening statement can be recognized.³

And in drama,

All too frequently plot is misconstrued to mean "intrigue," or the "interesting things that happen" in a movie, play or story. However, the writer who fills a script by having interesting things just happen is going off in all directions, none of them right. Plots don't simply happen. They are built into a story somewhat like the studdings in a wall. You can't see them when the house is completed, but they very well better be there or the walls won't stand up, and neither will your story if a plot hasn't been built into it.⁴

⁴Herbert Montgomery, "Plot to Sell," Writer's Digest, March,
Man consistently strives for an encompassing unity. The scholar searches through the centuries for a "philosophy of history." The stargazer peers into the heavens at dots of light trillions of miles apart and sees a "big dipper." In every area of life man grasps for the "wholeness" of a thing. It seems to be, in the words of Guthrie, "a trait of mind."

Surely, therefore, this is a pattern for contemporary preachers. A sermon ought to be the careful and deliberate expression of a single main idea. Paul's pattern for preaching is to focus everything in the sermon on the effective communication of one central theme.

An Orderly Structure

In addition to a persuasive purpose and a single theme, each of Paul's sermons has an orderly structure. There is a logical framework which guides the development of each message.

This is not to say that Paul follows the same schematic outline in all of his preaching. Quite the opposite—he varies his approach each time according to the nature of his content and the needs of his audience. Each sermon is developed quite differently. In Acts 13 the theme is separate from the main points; in Acts 17 the theme is a combination of the main points; and in Acts 20 the theme is one of the main points. Thus, the pattern Paul leaves is not the presence of the

1968, p. 49.

same structure, but the presence of an orderly structure. Whatever arrangement he chooses, he is always clear and easy to follow.

A second glance at the sermon outlines will reveal Paul's organizational excellence. In Acts 13 the sermon is deductive: the main theme is stated early in the message, and the major points amplify and support it:

God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus (theme).

I. God has fulfilled His promise to prepare the nation for the Savior's coming.

II. God has fulfilled His promise to provide the nation with a powerful Savior.

III. God has fulfilled His promise to provide the nation with an eternal Savior.

The sermon in Acts 17 is largely inductive. The theme is not stated at the beginning, nor is it anywhere separate from the main points. It is, instead, a combination of the two main points, and progressively emerges as the sermon unfolds:

I. God is the Creator of the universe (theme).

A. God made the world and all things in it.

B. God is not, therefore, confined in man-made shrines nor served by human hands.

II. God is the Father of men (theme).

A. God created men as His offspring.

E. God ought not, therefore, be thought of as an image.

It is apparent, therefore, that the contemporary preacher need not limit himself to one organizational pattern. Indeed, he must not so limit himself. If he does, he will undoubtedly end up forcing his content and boring his audience.
In Acts 20 the structure is both inductive and deductive. Paul leads up to his theme through a reminder of his example and an announcement of his departure. Then, after stating his theme, he explains it further and develops its implications:

I. You yourselves know my example among you.
   A. You know how I served the church in the face of external trouble.
   B. You see how I am denying myself in the face of internal temptation.

II. Now this example has come to a blameless end.

III. As overseers of the church you must follow this example:
    Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock (theme).
    A. Be on guard for all the flock against external trouble.
    B. Be on guard for yourselves against internal temptation.

Thus, in each of his sermons, Paul leaves an example of clear thinking and careful arrangement. His thoughts do not occur at random, nor does he wander around a point until he thinks he has sufficiently covered it. His flow is always purposeful, his development is always exact, his organization is always coherent. He is not pedantic; his outline does not stick out offensively. But it is always there—an orderly structure to produce an effective sermon.

The importance of clear organization to successful speaking has been demonstrated by several experiments in communication. Smith discovered that when the parts of a speech are presented in random order, the audience is not only unpersuaded by the speaker's message, they are actually influenced against it. He also found that listeners are more
interested in a topic and willing to discuss it when the material is coherently presented to them.  

Studies reported by Thompson, Darnell, and by Thistlethwaite, de Haan, and Kamenetzky suggest that organization also has a major effect on how much a listener will comprehend and retain of a message. Their investigations show that as disorganization increases, audience comprehension and retention tends to decrease. 

Finally, organization not only influences the persuasion, interest, comprehension, and retention of a speech, it also affects the audience's view of the speaker. According to a study by Sharp and McClung, listeners exposed to a disorganized speech think less of the speaker after hearing his talk than before he began to speak. In other words, the better organized the speech, the better liked the speaker. 

All of these considerations, therefore, point to the need for coherence and organization in contemporary preaching. The inspired 


guideline of Paul's preaching and the experimental evidence of communication studies are one in their demand that every sermon be the clear presentation of an orderly structure.

A Thorough Adaptation

The final pattern in Paul's preaching is one that has already been observed in the analysis of each sermon, and that is the total adaptation of his message to the particular audience before him. Every aspect of his preaching is deliberately suited to the hopes, needs, and understandings of his immediate listeners.

Many writers have recognized this skill and versatility in Paul. Robertson declares that the apostle's sermons are never "misfits," and that they are all worth studying "for this adaptation to time, place, and audience." Bruce reports that "on each occasion his style and matter alike are suited to his audience." Jowett points out that "Paul recognised changing assortments of circumstances, and he resolved upon a certain elasticity." And Broadus begins his discussion of the apostle's sermons by noting "the remarkable adaptation of his preaching to the particular audience."

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3 Jowett, The Preacher: His Life and Work, p. 87.

This thorough adaptation can best be appreciated by reviewing Paul's choices regarding the theme, structure, support material, style, and mood for each of his sermons.

The adaptation of the theme

In each of his sermons Paul focuses on a theme that is uniquely appropriate to both the immediate audience and the specific occasion. The content of each message is so singly adapted to the people and time of its utterance that "no one of all the apostle's discourses recorded in Acts would have been suitable to take the place of any other."^1

In Acts 13 Paul's theme is that "God, according to promise, has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." This theme is appropriate to the needs and aspirations of each segment of his synagogue audience. It speaks to the Dispersion Jews and proselytes, tacitly acknowledging their relative indifference to the promises concerning the Messianic kingdom and throne, and focusing instead on their consuming desire for the appearance of the Messianic Savior. Paul's theme also speaks to the God-fearers in the congregation, promising them a full and equal salvation irrespective of race or upbringing.

In addition to being appropriate to all segments of the audience, Paul's message in Acts 13 is also pertinent to the occasion at hand, for the apostle chooses a theme that corresponds to the Scripture

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passages being read in the synagogue that Sabbath. The seder of Deuteronomy 4:25-40 and the haphtaroth of Isaiah 40:1-11 and II Samuel 7:4-17 are uppermost in his listeners' thoughts. And the apostle structures his remarks around these assigned readings so as to capitalize on the preoccupations of the moment.

This same harmony between theme and audience is also found in Paul's sermon in Acts 17. This message is admirably calculated as an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans. After acknowledging both their religious devotion and confessed ignorance, the apostle proceeds with a theme that develops the true knowledge of the living God. He speaks of God as the Creator of the universe and the Father of men, and contrasts this knowledge with the inconsistent worship of images. In every way his theme is appropriately designed to break the hold of idolatry and lead the Athenians to repentance.

In comparing these two sermons, it is obvious that the theme of Acts 13 would have been out of place before the audience of Acts 17, and that the theme of Acts 17 would have been inappropriate for the audience of Acts 13. The Messianic promises of the Jewish nation would have been meaningless to the Athenian Greeks. And a message against the worship of idols would have been virtually irrelevant to the Jews with their scrupulous abhorrence of graven images. Furthermore, the idolatrous Gentile would have misunderstood an address about the Son of God without an accurate and prior knowledge of God Himself. But nothing could have been more fitting for the instructed Jew than to be led from his knowledge of God to a knowledge of Jesus as God's Christ.
Moving to Acts 20, one again finds an adaptation of theme to both audience and occasion. It would have been absurd if Paul had preached evangelistically to the elders as he had to the Jews and the Greeks. What is needed instead is a specifically Christian exhortation regarding the spiritual struggles that will challenge them in the future. Even more particularly, the message ought to concern his hearers' unique position as spiritual leaders in the church. So once again, Paul chooses a theme that is suitable to this specific audience at this special moment. He speaks to them as overseers, and urges them to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock against the troubles and temptations that will confront them in Ephesus. And all the while his message is appropriately acknowledging that this will probably be the last occasion of their meeting together.

This continual and thorough adaptation of theme to both audience and occasion should guide the contemporary preacher in his own choice of sermon subjects. Paul's pattern suggests first of all that the message ought to be appropriate to the needs and knowledge of the immediate audience. It ought to meet the specific hearers at their point of understanding, and lead them to a response that is proper and meaningful for them. Suiting the theme to the listeners means designing each sermon in view of the audience's age, sex, educational background, economic condition, social status, Biblical knowledge, and level of commitment. All of these factors must be considered in order to choose an appropriate theme.

Paul's pattern suggests secondly that the message ought to be
appropriate to the nature of the occasion. If the moment itself has
brought its own preoccupations, these ought to be reflected in the mes-
sage. A Labor Day weekend, a civic event, a national tragedy, a special
gathering—whatever is important and pressing to people should be ack-
nowledged and incorporated into the message they hear.

This is the consistent and inspired pattern in the preaching of
Paul—a thorough adaptation of theme to both audience and occasion. For
a contemporary preacher, the practical ramifications of this pattern are
obvious and unending.

The adaptation of the structure

In addition to a theme, Paul also picks a sermonic structure
that is familiar to his listeners. The methodological framework of his
message is consistent with their accepted patterns of public speaking.
This is especially evident in the sermon of Acts 13, as Paul adapts to
the customary structure of synagogue preaching and moves successively
through a preliminary reference to the seder, an initial text that is
linguistically related to the haphtarah, the standard process of haru-
zin, and a final text which points back to the seder.

This same adaptation of structure to audience patterns and ex-
pectations appears in Acts 17 and 20. Sedwick’s description of the
Stoic methodology in public speeches is remarkably similar to the ap-
proach Paul takes before the philosophically oriented Athenians:

They adapted themselves to the occasion, and used whatever opening
presented itself, and whatever approach seemed most likely to ap-
peal. They dealt largely with the anecdote and the apophthegm;
... they used proverbs and quotations; they drew illustrations
from situations familiar in literature—Homer and the Tragedians—
frequently indulging in parody; they enlivened their discourse with
dialogue and altercations with an imaginary opponent, with illustrative stories such as were in later times technically called exempla. 1

And Munck, in his article on farewell discourses in the New Testament and Biblical literature, demonstrates that the sermon in Acts 20 follows the familiar structure of farewell addresses. 2

These observations suggest that a contemporary sermon ought to be consistent with the logical expectations of its listeners. Today's preacher ought to follow familiar patterns of reasoning, and conform to accepted organizational frameworks. He ought always to choose a structure that will enable his listeners to keep up easily and to respond readily.

The adaptation of support materials

The third area in which Paul adapts to his hearers is in the area of support materials. Whenever he speaks, the apostle selects those amplifying evidences and ideas that are at once the most familiar and the most convincing to his particular listeners. The literature he cites, the people he quotes, the examples he gives, are all chosen in light of the unique characteristics of his immediate audience.

1 W. B. Segwicb, "The Origins of the Sermon," The Hibbert Journal, XLV (1946-1947), 159. Cf. also the logical reasoning of Paul's Areopagus address with the observation by Sattler that "the Stoics advanced the syllogism as the instrument for obtaining certainty" (William M. Sattler, "Some Platonic Influences in the Rhetorical Works of Cicero," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXV [April, 1949], 168).

When he preaches in a synagogue in Acts 13, Paul draws heavily on the Jewish Scriptures. His introduction recalls the sacred narratives of Israel's history; the body of his sermon explains how the ancient covenants have come to be fulfilled; and his conclusion appeals for a response through the words of the prophetic writings. His entire message is saturated with the Old Testament. From beginning to end he chooses that supporting material which is most common to their thinking and most influential to their action.

In speaking to the Greeks in Acts 17, Paul adopts a far different approach. There would be little point in attempting to support a message to the Athenians by references to a book of which they had little knowledge and in which they had little confidence. So instead, the apostle wisely cites the familiar and weighty statements of their own writers. He supports his message with poetical quotations and philosophical allusions from the world of Greek literature, knowing that these are the materials which will have meaning and impact for the cultured pagans.

For the Christians in Acts 20, the most familiar and potentially persuasive support material is personal example. In Acts 13 and 17, references to his own dedication and conduct would have been entirely out of place, for neither of these audiences had any firsthand knowledge of Paul. Such an approach, in fact, might have turned these audiences against Paul: the Jews might have imagined that he was a traitor to his race, while the Greeks could have concluded that a seed-picking babbler was indeed in their midst. But it is different among the elders of
Ephesus. The men in Acts 20 know and love Paul, and will be motivated more by references to his character and behavior than by anything else. For them, nothing could be more potent or proper than for Paul to support his exhortations by reminders of his own personal example.

Paul's effective yet varied use of supports suggests that contemporary preachers ought to approach this matter with imagination and flexibility. The apostle's example indicates that no one type of illustrative or amplifying material should be exclusively preferred. With some audiences the preacher's thorough familiarity with the Bible can be used to great advantage. But with other audiences his Biblical allusions and examples will be meaningless and ineffective.

What is needed is a recognition that all of life is fertile ground for sermonic use. The apostle's versatility suggests that material from every area of human activity can assist in the declaration of spiritual truth. References to current fads, literature, science, songs, sports, and entertainment can all be used to enlighten and convince a particular audience. There is no one approach that is uniformly best for all audiences. Paul's pattern calls for adaptation, for imagination, for flexibility. As far as support materials are concerned, the contemporary preacher ought to amplify and illustrate the message of God with whatever will be most familiar and persuasive to his immediate listeners.

The adaptation of the style

Paul's choice of a style is also consistently influenced by the nature of his immediate audience. If his listeners are Jewish, he
sprinkles his speech with Hebraisms and flavors it throughout with Semitic expressions. If he is speaking to educated Greeks, his words and syntax reflect a more secular and classical style. And when he stands before Christians, he uses the terms and ideas that have long formed a part of his ministry to them. In each sermon there is a conscious effort to express himself in a style that is appropriate to the background of his listeners.

The contemporary preacher ought also be guided in his style by such factors as audience age, education, occupation, and knowledge of the subject. His language ought to vary according to whether he is speaking to teenagers, or to professors, or to athletes, or to housewives, or to union laborers, or to any other group. He should choose those words and phrases which will have an instant and exact intelligibility for his immediate listeners. He should avoid any expressions, even theological ones, that are meaningless to them, unless he intends a clear and full explanation. In all of his preaching he ought to choose those aspects of style that will most clearly and forcefully present God's Word to the particular audience before him.

The adaptation of the mood

Paul's final area of adaptation concerns the mood of his preaching. In every sermon the apostle chooses those intangible yet important overtones which will lead to the acceptance of his message.

An examination of Paul's various choices reveals a similarity among all three sermons. The same two general strains appear in each message. The exact terminology may differ, but the overall atmosphere
is the same, as on each occasion the apostle communicates a spirit of love and a spirit of exhortation.

In Acts 13 the apostle creates an atmosphere of love by his gentle treatment of the Jewish nation. In Acts 17 he conveys an attitude of knowledgeable appreciation through his remarks about Athenian devotion. And in Acts 20 he makes every effort to preserve the spirit of affection by means of tactful omissions and thorough yet modest reminders. In each of his messages, therefore, there is a basic mood of acceptance, the feeling that the speaker appreciates his audience and loves them for what they are.

But there is also, in each of these messages, a strong sense of exhortation. A spirit of urgency is suggested in Acts 13 by the prophetic warning. An attitude of helpful concern appears in Acts 17 through the proclamation of truth that leads to repentance. And in Acts 20, the tone throughout is one of strong admonition lest the church of God should suffer.

The example of the apostle, therefore, is to always convey a spirit of both love and exhortation. It seems that all people share these same basic needs, and that regardless of the audience his adaptation is the same.

This means that the contemporary preacher must first concentrate on communicating a spirit of acceptance to his audience. Obviously this will occur quite naturally if he really has a genuine affection for his listeners. But he can encourage this mood of love further by imitating the example of Paul who is always complimentary, courteous, tactful, and
kind. The apostle is never rude, disparaging, or domineering. He never slights his audience nor ridicules their views. Rather, he commends whatever is positive about them, and interprets their lapses in the best light possible. This is the path of love that leads to a favorable hearing.

At the same time, however, the contemporary preacher must spur his listeners to all godliness. He must warn and admonish, reprove and implore, rebuke and encourage. He must press and plead and persuade, for this is the path of exhortation that leads to an obedient response.

In mood, therefore, as in theme, structure, support material, and style, Paul's pattern is one of thorough adaptation. Every choice he makes is guided by the nature of his immediate audience, and every aspect of his preaching is suited to their unique needs.

The significance of this pattern for contemporary preaching cannot be over-emphasized. The uniform testimony of speech scholars is that successful communication depends on thorough adaptation. Sarett, Sarett, and Foster flatly state, "Effective speech is adapted to the listener and to the speech situation."\(^1\) Kenneth Burke declares, "You persuade a man only insofar as you talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his."\(^2\) Thonssen and Baird assert that this concept has almost become a rhetorical axiom. It announces the fact that, for the speaker, the audience is the most important element in the

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\(^1\) Sarett, Sarett, and Foster, *Basic Principles of Speech*, p. 321.

situation and that, if he is to be effective, the speaker must adjust both himself and his ideas to it. The basic consideration, then, is adaptation, or adjustment to the variables of human behavior as found in a specific group of hearers.

Minnick writes that successful communicators "modify their remarks according to the known peculiarities of a particular audience," and explains:

Such adaptation will generally fit into one of two categories: (1) adjustments in the substance and context of the speech to make it appropriate, interesting, and intelligible to the particular audience, and (2) adjustments in purpose, proof, and format to insure some measure of response from the particular receivers involved.

Effective preaching, therefore, depends on thorough adaptation. In every sermon the theme, structure, support material, style, and mood must be uniquely appropriate to the immediate audience. Paul himself eloquently summarizes the total and complete adaptation that is necessary for the sake of God's message:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law--though not being myself under the law--that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law--not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ--that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:20-22).

This is the apostolic example--"I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." And this is the pattern for contemporary preachers, for in the words of Broadus:


If you do not attempt to imitate Paul in anything else as to preaching, be sure to follow his example in this—that you try to adapt every sermon to that time, that place, that people; and if you repeat it elsewhere, search eagerly beforehand to find out at least some points of specific adaptation to the new occasion and congregation.

Conclusion

These, then, are the patterns for preaching contained in the sermons of Paul—a persuasive purpose, a single theme, an orderly structure, and a thorough adaptation. The apostle's purpose in all of his preaching is to persuade men to action. To accomplish this goal, he develops each sermon around one central thought, organizes his content into a logical framework, and adapts every aspect of the message to the immediate audience before him.

This is Paul's pattern. Let every man who would speak for God determine to follow it always.

1Broadus, Lectures on the History of Preaching, p. 41.
APPENDIX A

THE JEWISH LECTIONARIES

The One-Year Cycle

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2The sabbaths are named from some signature word in the opening of the Hebrew seder.
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**The Three-Year Cycle**

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2. The reader was free to choose from these suggested haphtaroth, or to select a haphtarah of his own if it was appropriate to the seder for the day.

3. Since the special holidays were occasions for public reading, they were incorporated into the three-year lectionary cycle.
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The text of the dissertation has viewed the historical setting of Paul's Athenian sermon as an evangelistic message preached to a miscellaneous and inquisitive crowd gathered on the hill of the Areopagus. Others have a different understanding of the context of this address, believing instead that Paul is making some sort of defense before an Athenian Council.

Many interpret the reference to Paul's being led "to the Areopagus" in Acts 17:19 to mean that he was brought "before the Council of the Areopagus." They argue that it is not a well-known geographical location which Luke has in mind, but rather a powerful Athenian tribunal. They point out, first, that "the Areopagus" was frequently used as a shortened name for "the Council of the Areopagus."¹ Secondly, they reason that the words, "Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus" (Acts 17:22), make better sense when interpreted with respect to persons than with respect to place:

The most specific confirmation of this view is found, in my judgment, in the manner in which references to the Areopagus are introduced. Paul is said to have stood "in the midst of the Areopagus" (verse 22), and following the conclusion of his address to have gone out "from their midst" (verse 33). The prepositional phrase "in the midst of" may be used with reference to places as well as persons: Lk. 21:28 (sic—the reference should be to Luke 21:21) refers to those who are in the midst of Judea; Mk. 6:47 to the boat of the disciples as being in the midst of the sea. But it is exceedingly doubtful that a person or group of persons would be described as being in the midst of a hill. On the other hand, Luke repeatedly speaks of persons as being in the midst of other persons (Acts 1:15, 2:22, 4:7, 27:21; Lk. 2:46, 22:27, 55, 24:36). And the utmost continuity is preserved on this view since Paul is said to have gone forth from their midst.

And finally, they argue that the Greek phrasing of verse 19 (especially the words ἐπιλαμβάνομαι and ἐπὶ) seems to suggest that Paul was forcibly seized and brought before an Athenian court of justice:

Luke often uses ἐπιλαμβάνομαι in the sense "to take", "to lay hold of". In Luke 23:26, for example, we read of the soldiers laying hold of Simon of Cyrene to make him help Jesus bear the cross, and similarly in Acts 18:17, "then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat"; in 21:30 the Jews seized Paul, and drew him out of the temple; and in v. 33 the chief captain took him and commanded he should be bound with chains. Chap. 16:19 presents a parallel to the incident in Athens; there the author uses the verb ἐπιλαμβάνομαι together with the preposition ἐπί (ἐπὶ τοῦ Αἴειδον πάγουν) which, in the Acts, seems to have been specially used when someone was brought to justice: ἐπιλαμβάνουν τοῦ Αἴειδον καὶ τοῦ Σιλαῦ ξιλουσαν ες την ἀγοραν ἐπὶ τοὺς άρχοντας. Cf. 17:6: "They drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, ἐπὶ τοὺς πολίταρχος." The Vulgate evidently accepts the idea of a "laying hold of", for ἐπιλαμβάνομαι is translated by apprehendere (et apprehensum eum ad

Along with this view—that Paul was led to a group of men rather than to a geographical hill—are several explanations as to why the apostle would have been thus brought before the Council of the Areopagus. Some suggest that he was made to stand trial on the charge of introducing a new religion. Reference is usually made to the trial and death of Socrates who was accused, like Paul, of "bringing in strange deities." Lewin is an able representative of those who hold this view:

No people ever showed more courtesy to the forms of worship practised by other nations than the Athenians. They were even solicitous to enrol as their own every god that was adored on the face of the earth, but at the same time it was death for any private person to disturb the religion of the State by the introduction of any foreign god that had not been publicly recognised. Such had been the law in the time of Socrates, and such it was still; for the Romans, when they became masters of the city, allowed the descendants of so illustrious an ancestry to retain their laws and continue their courts of judicature.

The Areopagus, which still retained its ancient authority, or had even extended it, had exclusive jurisdiction of determining what objects of worship should be admitted, and of inflicting punishment when persons made any wanton inroad upon the national creed. Paul, therefore, by propagating the doctrines of one God, and a resurrection from the dead, and that Jesus would be the Judge of all men, had furnished a handle to the disputants, whom he had offended, to bring his life into jeopardy. They might urge with great plausibility that if the gods whom Paul preached were really such, they ought to be recognised by the State; but if they were no gods, the impostor who was obtruding them as such should be punished, and in either case the matter ought to be brought before the Areopagus.

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2 Xenophon Memorabilia i.1.1. Cf. Diogenes Laertius Lives of Eminent Philosophers ii.40; Plato Euthyphro 3B, The Apology 24B; and Josephus Against Apion ii.262-68.

3 Thomas Lewin, The Life and Epistles of St. Paul (2 vols.; London: George Bell and Sons, 1874), i, 260-61. A similar approach can be found in Timothy D. Barnes, "An Apostle on Trial," Journal of
Curtius suggests a second view—that the Areopagus was the chief police commission in first-century Athens, and that Paul was brought before a subdivision whose responsibility it was to keep order in the agora:

At that time the Areopagus was entrusted with various powers to provide for order and good behavior in a city which was always in a state of agitation. It was the supreme police authority, as we can infer from its powers in the matter of buildings and statues, and it is very probable that a committee of the Areopagus, sitting in the market hall, was also entrusted with a superintendence over the market traffic in order to take steps against unlawful and turbulent movements.

A third and final view is that "Paul was compelled to face the council to demonstrate that his appearance among the public lecturers of Athens was unobjectionable." Sir William Ramsay is the leading exponent of this interpretation:


Two questions have to be answered in regard to the scene that follows: why was Paul taken before the Council? and what were the intentions of the philosophers in taking him there? It is clear that Paul appeared to the philosophers as one of the many ambitious teachers who came to Athens hoping to find fame and fortune at the great centre of education. Now, certain powers were vested in the Council of Areopagus to appoint or invite lecturers at Athens, and to exercise some general control over the lecturers in the interests of public order and morality. There is an almost complete lack of evidence what were the advantages and the legal rights of a lecturer thus appointed, and to what extent or in what way a strange teacher could find freedom to lecture in Athens. There existed something in the way of privileges vested in the recognised lecturers; for the fact that Cicero induced the Areopagus to pass a decree inviting Cratippus, the Peripatetic philosopher, to become a lecturer in Athens, implies that some advantage was thereby secured to him. There certainly also existed much freedom for foreigners to become lecturers in Athens, for the great majority of the Athenian professors and lecturers were foreign. The scene described in vv. 18-34 seems to prove that the recognised lecturers could take a strange lecturer before the Areopagus, and require him to give an account of his teaching and pass a test as to its character.

When they took him to the court to satisfy the supreme university tribunal of his qualifications, they probably entertained some hope that he would be overawed before that august body, or that his teaching might not pass muster, as being of unsettling tendency (for no body is so conservative as a University Court). ¹

While these three views differ as to why Paul was brought before the Council—whether for a heresy trial, or on a charge of creating a disturbance, or for an inquiry into his qualifications as a teacher—they all do agree that the words "the Areopagus" refer to a judicial court and not to a geographical hill. Proponents of these views usually go on to suggest that the actual delivery of the sermon took place in

¹ Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen, pp. 246-47. Cf. also his Bearing of Recent Discovery, pp. 97-98; The Cities of St. Paul: Their Influence on His Life and Thought (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), pp. 229-30; and "St. Paul in Athens—I," The Expositor, Fifth Series, II (1895), 263-72. Gärtner suggests that this "informal interrogation" was not done by the Council as a whole, but by its "education commission" (The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation, pp. 57-65).
the Stoa Basileios, a large hall in the agora where the Council usually conducted its business. Ramsay most strenuously rejects the hill-top as a satisfactory spot for the address, arguing: (1) "The top of the little hill is a most unsuitable place from its small size and its exposed position"; (2) "It is inconsistent with the patriotism and pride of the Athenians that they should conduct a foreigner for whom they expressed such contempt to the most impressive seat of Athenian religious and national history, in order that he might there talk to them"; and (3) "The scene and the speech breathe the spirit of the agora, and the open, free, crowded life of Athens, not the quiet atmosphere of the philosophic study or class room." A few, however, still locate the address on the famous Athenian plateau, believing that Paul is speaking to the Council of the Areopagus in session on the Areopagus hill.

In summary, the alternate interpretation of the historical setting of Acts 17 is that Paul was taken to another part of the agora and there put before the Council of the Areopagus for some judicial purpose.

There are many reasons why this interpretation has not been...

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followed in the dissertation. A close examination of all the factors leads instead to the viewpoint adopted in the text—that the sermon was given on a famous hill to a miscellaneous crowd of philosophers and citizens. The place to begin is with those considerations which point to the hill rather than the agora as the correct location of Paul's address.

First, even if the sermon were given to the Council, it would have been given on the hill where the Council regularly assembled, and not in the agora. The belief that the Council met in the Stoa Basileios rests on very disputed evidence. There is far more evidence that just the opposite is true—that the Council held its sessions on the hill itself.¹

Moreover, contrary to Ramsay, the hill did have sufficient room for a large gathering. Ramsay himself admits that the plateau could accommodate nearly a hundred people.² Manatt goes even farther in insisting that

there was no lack of room; our own eyes witness that. On the highest platform facing the Acropolis there is comparatively level standing-ground for at least five hundred people—the court in historical times could hardly have numbered more than ninety members,—and the gradually descending steps to the west afford ample room for thousands more.³

¹Barnes, "Apostle on Trial," pp. 408-10; Irving J. Manatt, "Biblical and Historical Criticism: Must We Give Up the Pauline Areopagus?", The Andover Review, XVIII (November, 1892), 528-30. Pausanias' description of the Areopagus likewise implies that the Council was still meeting on the hill in his day, a century after Paul (Description of Greece i.28.5).


³Manatt, "Must We Give Up the Pauline Areopagus?", p. 538.
And finally, it is merely a subjective opinion to feel that such a thing would be "inconsistent with the patriotism and pride of the Athenians." Others believe just as strongly that the Areopagus was a suitable place for the spirit of the occasion. They argue that the religious associations surrounding the hill made it an appropriate spot to listen to some new teaching about foreign divinities. Even so, it is not necessary to believe that Paul was conducted to the tribunal area on the hill's plateau. There are other spacious spots on the Areopagus to which he might have been taken. Mathews follows a tradition of the Greek Church saying that Paul gave his sermon on a slope just below the plateau to the northwest. He describes it as the nearest point on the hill to the agora, acoustically ideal, and sheltered from the sun. Dibelius prefers a ridge southeast of the plateau.

Thus, whatever the purpose of Paul's sermon—whether a defense of some sort to a Council, or an evangelistic thrust before a miscellaneous audience—it is almost certain that it took place somewhere on the Athenian hill known as the Areopagus.

The question remains then, What was the purpose of Paul's sermon? Was it a defense before a Council, or was it an attempt to win the

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1 Manatt claims that the hill was the only fit rendezvous from the Athenian standpoint (ibid., pp. 538-39). Cf. also above, p. 129, n. 1.


general Athenian populace to Christ?

While it is true that there was at least one member of the Council among Paul's listeners, there are several reasons for concluding that Paul's address was a missionary sermon to a mixed audience, and not a forced appearance before a Council. These reasons center around: (1) the lack of judicial proceedings; (2) the tenuous evidence of the individual proposals; (3) the exegesis of certain Greek phrases; (4) the intent of the author in Acts 17:21; and (5) the content of the sermon itself.

First, there is nothing in the entire episode to indicate judicial proceedings—no accusation, no cross-examination, no discussion; no sentence, no hint of a trial of any kind. Barnes tries to get around the force of this objection by arguing that it presupposes an anachronistic notion of what constitutes a criminal trial. The almost uniform practice of the Roman world was an informal process, with hardly any rules to circumscribe either procedure or penalties or the nature of the charge.²

But Conzelmann's rebuttal is decisive: "The literary style of Luke rules that out: wherever he reports a trial he is absolutely unambiguous."³ Even Barnes himself is forced to admit that "the author evidently does not intend his readers to understand the outcome of Paul's

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¹Dionysius, the Areopagite, is mentioned as one who believed as a result of this sermon (Acts 17:34).

²Barnes, "Apostle on Trial," pp. 413-14.

speech as an acquittal after trial."¹

Second, not only does the whole scene lack any overtones of a tribunal, but each individual proposal as to the nature of the inquest—a heresy trial, a charge of creating a disturbance, or an educational inquiry—rests on tenuous grounds. For instance, while it may be true that the Council of the Areopagus was the chief governing body of Athens,² it is not clear that it therefore had jurisdiction over heresy trials. Aristotle seems to suggest otherwise: after writing that "charges of impiety" were tried in the court of the King, he goes on to add: "Trials for deliberate murder and wounding are held in the Areopagus; and for causing death by poison, and for arson; for these only are tried by the Council."³ Manatt further substantiates this lack of jurisdiction by examining the famous heresy trials of antiquity. He concludes that "it was not the Areopagus, but the heliasts, who would exercise regular jurisdiction in cases of impiety."⁴

The other two proposals are equally vulnerable. There is no evidence of an uproar or a disturbance in the narrative to substantiate

¹Barnes, "Apostle on Trial," p. 418.
²Ibid., pp. 411-14.
³Aristotle The Athenian Constitution 57.2-3. Italics mine.
⁴Manatt, "Must We Give Up the Pauline Areopagus?", pp. 530-34. Ramsay concurs: "Accusations of impiety and of the introduction of foreign and unlawful religion were tried before the popular courts, and never before the Areopagus" (St. Paul in Athens--II," p. 271). Cf. Lake and Cadbury: "Socrates was of course really tried before the court of the 'King Archon' before a special jury probably numbering 501" (English Translation and Commentary, Vol. IV of The Beginnings of Christianity, p. 212).
a charge of disorder. And if such a charge was being made, it is difficult to imagine a speech further from the point than Paul's sermon. As to the suggestion of an educational inquiry, Ramsay himself concedes that "there is an almost complete lack of evidence what were the advantages and the legal rights of a lecturer thus appointed, and to what extent or in what way a strange teacher could find freedom to lecture in Athens."  

Third, there is no reason exegetically to conclude from certain Greek phrases that Paul was forcefully dragged before a Council. The statement, "They took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus" (Acts 17:19), does not have to be interpreted hostilely on the basis of ἐπιλαμβάνομαι. Several times Luke uses this verb to express a friendly action. In each use of the verb in the New Testament "it can be determined by the context whether it is used in a favorable or an unfavorable sense."  

And there is nothing in this context to indicate any animosity or any desire to forcefully arraign Paul. The action in taking hold of

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1 Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen, pp. 246-47. He makes similar admissions in "St. Paul in Athens--II," p. 265, declaring that the key questions are "involved in the utmost obscurity," and that "we cannot answer these questions with any approach to accuracy." His one example from Cicero is not conclusive, for, as Barnes points out:

"When Cicero persuaded the Areopagus to ask the philosopher Cratippus to stay to teach in Athens, the reason was not that the Areopagus had any special control over the lectures of philosophers, but that Cicero considered an invitation from the Areopagus the most likely to influence Cratippus" (Barnes, "Apostle on Trial," p. 413).

him is nothing "more than a friendly guidance of him to a more convenient place of discussion."\(^1\)

Similarly, it is not necessary to argue that the clause, "Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus" (Acts 17:22), makes better sense interpreted with respect to persons than with respect to place. Twice in Luke (Luke 21:21; 22:55) and several other times in the New Testament (Matt. 14:24; Mark 6:47; Rev. 4:6; 5:6; 7:17; 22:2) the prepositional phrase "in the midst of" is used with reference to a place. The same sense can be easily accepted here—that Paul was standing on the summit of a hill as he gave his sermon.

A fourth and very persuasive reason for rejecting the view that this is a defense before a Council is Luke's own explanation in verse 21 for the Athenian behavior. He attributes their request for additional discourse solely to their passion for "telling or hearing something new." The whole proceeding, Luke intends to say, evolved not out of some violated law or required examination, but out of the notorious and incessant curiosity of the Athenians.

Finally, the content of the sermon itself effectively militates against this alternate interpretation. Paul's address is not a "defense" of any sort. Rather, it is a bold attempt to win the Athenians away from idolatry and to the living God. Paul had been aroused out of his intended rest when he saw that the city was a veritable forest of idols. He began to preach Jesus and the resurrection. The ever-inquisitive Athenians, hearing only bits and snatches in the crowded

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\(^1\) Lewin, The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, I, 262.
agora, led him to the seclusion of a nearby hill. There on the Areopagus the apostle attempted to turn the Athenians from the worship of these idols to the worship of the true God. The very content of his sermon is evangelistic, not apologetic.

When all of these factors are carefully weighed, it seems best to conclude that the sermon of Acts 17 was preached on an Athenian hill to a mixed and curious audience in hopes of leading them out of idolatry.
Much has been written about the altar of Acts 17:23 and about its inscription "To the Unknown God." The discussion has centered around two questions: (1) What is the evidence for the existence of such an inscription? and (2) Why would such an altar be erected?

Many strands of evidence point to the existence of such an inscription. Pausanias says that on the way from Phalerum to Athens there were "altars of the gods named Unknown," and that at Olympia, in the immediate vicinity of the great altar of Zeus, there were other altars, including "an altar of Unknown Gods." Philostratus counsels that it is a "proof of wisdom and sobriety to speak well of all the gods, especially at Athens, where altars are set up in honor even of unknown gods." And the reconstructed inscription on an altar found in the sacred precincts of a temple in Pergamum reads, "To unknown gods."

The fact that the plural appears in all of these instances has caused some difficulty. Kirnopp Lake expresses the attitude of many when he says, "It is doubtful whether there ever was an inscription

1 Pausanias Description of Greece i.1.4; v.14.8.

2 Philostratus Life of Apollonius of Tyana vi.3.

which read exactly δύναται θαν. 1 Jerome goes so far as to say that the
inscription Paul saw was in the plural, but that the apostle stated it
in the singular for the sake of his argument. 2

There are several reasons, however, for rejecting the idea that
a singular inscription never existed. First, the very fact that Paul
cites the inscription in the singular is sufficient evidence for its
existence. It would have been extremely foolish for him to try to "put
one over" on his audience by changing an inscription that they were all
familiar with. Such an attempt would have left him thoroughly discred-
ited in the eyes of the Athenians. Moreover, in the larger scope,
"Luke's whole apologetic purpose would be thwarted if his educated non-
Christian readers should at any point in the speech have cause to sus-
pect that Paul was arguing from an assumption which the Athenians did
not accept." 3 The sermon could not have been effective, either with the
immediate audience or with the subsequent readers, unless Paul was his-
torically correct in his statement.

Second, the language of Bausanius and Philostratus is suffi-
ciently general to comprehend an altar with the singular form of the

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1 Kirsopp Lake, "The Unknown God," in Additional Notes to the
Commentary, ed. by Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, Vol. V. of The
F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (5 vols.; London: Macmillan and

2 Jerome Comment. in Titum 1,12, cited in English by Giuseppe

3 J. C. O'Neill, The Theology of Acts in Its Historical Setting
inscription. If there were two or more altars, each bearing an inscription "To the Unknown God," these would well be referred to collectively as "altars to unknown gods."

Third, there is evidence in other places of dedicatory inscriptions to a single deity who for some reason or other had not been identified. Ricciotti mentions one such extant altar on the Palatine hill in Rome, inscribed to an unknown god or goddess.¹

Finally, there is Athenian support for a singular inscription from the well-known story by Diogenes Laertius concerning Epimenides the Cretan, who, when summoned during a plague around 600 B.C., advised that white and black sheep should be driven from the Areopagus and that where they came to rest the Athenians should sacrifice "to the appropriate god" (τῷ προσήκοτι θεῷ). As a result the plague was stayed, and Diogenes reports that even in his day (in the third century A.D.) "anonymous altars" could be found in the vicinity of Athens.² Though the account is silent concerning any inscriptions on these anonymous altars, it at least points to a particular occasion when more than one altar was erected to a single, unknown god.³

Thus, the fact that the archaeologist has not yet dug up the

³Lake thinks that there was an inscription on these altars, and that Paul's citation is a paraphrase of it:
"The story of Diogenes Laertius suggests that the singular may have been used in the formula τῷ προσήκοτι θεῷ, meaning 'to the unknown god who is concerned in the matter'; ἄγνώστῳ θεῷ would be a loose but not very inaccurate paraphrase" ("The Unknown God," p. 242).
exact singular inscription "To the Unknown God" is no proof that such an inscription never existed. On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that the Athenians knew the inscription well and that Paul quoted it accurately.

The answer to the second question—Why would such an altar be erected?—is a bit conjectural. It may be that the altar was dedicated at the time of some special emergency, such as the plague described by Diogenes Laertius, when the Athenians did not know which god was responsible.

Another story along this line comes from Herodotus who tells of an Athenian runner sent to Sparta before the Battle of Marathon. On the way the runner met Pan who lamented, "Why is it that ye take no thought for me, that am your friend, and ere now have oft been serviceable to you, and will be so again?" Whereupon, Herodotus records, the Athenians founded a temple to Pan beneath the Acropolis. To this, the ninth century Isho'dad adds that when the Athenians erected the well-known altar to Pan, they also erected one more altar and dedicated it to the Unknown God lest they unknowingly neglect another deity:

The Athenians were once upon a time at war with their enemies, and the Athenians retreated from them in defeat; then a certain Demon appeared and said unto them, I have never been honoured by you as I ought; and because I am angry with you, therefore you have had a defeat from your enemies. Then the Athenians were afraid, and raised to him the well-known altar; and because they dreaded lest this very thing should happen to them, having secretly neglected [one] who was unknown to them, they erected for themselves one altar more, and wrote upon it, Of the Unknown and Hidden God; and when they wished to say this, that though there is a God in whom we do not believe, we raise this altar to His honour, that He may be reconciled to us,

1 Herodotus History vi.105.
although He is not honoured as known; therefore Paul did well to take a reason from this, and said before them, This hidden God to whom ye have raised an altar without knowing Him, I have come to declare unto you.¹

Hackett, in a similar vein, locates the origin of the altar in the Athenian desire to embrace as many gods as possible, or at any event to safeguard themselves against forgetfulness of any in the long ranks of the deities:

The most rational explanation as it seems to me, is that these altars had their origin in the feelings of uncertainty, inherent after all in the minds of the heathen, whether their acknowledgment of the superior powers was sufficiently full and comprehensive; in their distinct consciousness of the limitation and imperfection of their religious views, and their consequent desire to avoid the anger of any still unacknowledged god who might be unknown to them. That no deity might punish them for neglecting his worship or remain uninvoked in asking for blessings, it appears that they not only erected altars to all the gods for whom they had names, but distrustful still lest they might not comprehend fully the extent of their subject and dependence, they built them also to any god that there might be, although they knew him not.²

Some understand the altar more specifically as a testimony to the existence of the one true God. Carter and Earle, for instance, view it in terms of the High-God Theory, which maintains that "all people, including the most primitive, have a concept of a Supreme Being, above and beyond their polytheistic concepts."³ Lewin goes so far as to


suggest that "there is a reasonable probability that by 'the Unknown God' was actually meant Jehovah":

Since the conquest of Alexander the Great an intimacy had subsisted between the Jews and the Greeks, and in particular, the Athenians had entered into a treaty with that singular people, and had greatly honoured Hyrcanus the High Priest; and it is scarcely credible that the Athenians, who adopted the gods of all foreigners, should have excluded Jehovah, whose mighty acts could not but be familiar to the neighbouring nations. Had Jehovah, like the false Gods, been worshipped as an idol, the Athenians would have erected to him a statue and a temple; but the Jews religiously abstained from uttering any name, and adored him only as a Spiritual Being. Dion Cassius speaks of the God of the Jews as θεόλογον, "not to be expressed;" and the Emperor Caligula, in his answer to the Jews, calls him τὸν δικαιοκρατο­μαστόν θεόν, "him that may not be named by you;" and Lucan and Tre­bellius Pollio call him "incertus Deus;" and Justin Martyr relates, that among the heathen the God of the Jews was commonly called Πάγκρυφος, or All-hidden. No wonder, then, that the Athenians should inscribe an altar to him as "The Unknown God."1

Exactly how and why the altar came to be erected may never be known. But whatever the explanation of its origin, the fact of its ex­istence indicated an awareness of the inadequacy of Athenian religion. It was an expression of their anxious, scrupulous ignorance, and it pro­vided Paul with a starting point for his proclamation of the living God.

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