

## Men's Group 29th October 2013

It's difficult to know quite what speed to go in a 'long' book like Acts. It has been pointed out to me that we skated over a lot of things in the second half of last week's meeting, so perhaps it's good to go back a bit to Acts 10 where we have several important issues.

### Acts 10. 9 – 16

First there's PETER'S VISION.

The vision seems to me to have a natural, obvious interpretation; and then another, slightly different one alluded to by Luke through Peter in verse **28**. They are related but slightly different. **What is the meaning of the vision?**

### Acts 10. 34 - 43

The next thing we have is **Peter's speech**. I find this a fascinating speech because the portrayal of Jesus is different from the conventional evangelical view of Jesus—you just never hear of Jesus spoken of in the way that Peter speaks of him here! If you tried it you'd be branded a heretic, not only in St George's but elsewhere.

For example:

*<sup>38</sup>how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

In the early centuries of the Christian church discussion of the exact nature of the Christ and the relation to the Father were extensive and lively. Now sadly we are crushed under the iron hand of the Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity—anyone who disagrees with Augustine is automatically labelled as a heretic. But if we look at passages like this at face value with an open mind what might we learn?

What was the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life?

How does this relate to us today?

### Acts 10. 44 – 48

And then there's **what happened after the speech**.

We've talked a lot about receiving the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit etc. Unavoidable I think since the book of Acts also talks all the time about this subject. A dynamic, on-going and existential experience of the Holy Spirit, it seems, is one of the central pillars of being a Christian. Do we, as individuals, have this experience? Do we WANT this experience?

How, at that time, did you know whether someone had received the Spirit or not?

### Acts 11. 1 – 19

Continuing this theme in Peter's reprise of the whole incident to the Jerusalem church:

In **verse 17** we are told that God has given the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles in verse 17. In **verse 18** this is seen as equating directly to 'God giving them the repentance that leads to life'

Are these two things the same, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the repentance that leads to life? What about today? Is it the same?

## Acts 11. 19 - 26

### Chronology

Paul's conversion seems to have come very soon after the death of Stephen, maybe AD 37.

Paul in Damascus for 3 years, then via Jerusalem to Tarsus in Turkey; from there he moves to Antioch (? early 40's).

**Acts 11.19** takes us back to AD 37 onwards with the establishment of the Antioch church. If Paul moved to Antioch in AD 41 – 42, the church had been functioning there for 3 or 4 years.

Barnabas we've already seen as the man who introduced Paul to the apostles in Jerusalem, and he was obviously close to Paul at this time, though later as we will see they have a dramatic split. Their travel to Jerusalem in 11.25 is a little historical interlude which may have been more important at the time than it seems now. They return in 12.30 with John Mark, who features in Paul's later break with Barnabas.

## Acts 12. 1 - 17

Another miracle story. The story of Rhoda refusing to open the gate for Peter is interesting from the point of view of historicity

Bart Ehrman gives three criteria for evaluation of historicity—things that to an impartial analyst would indicate that something is likely to be genuinely historical, thus:

- Is it situationally/culturally consistent? Does it fit with what might be expected to happen in that situation?
- Is it attested by multiple independent sources?
- Would it be advantageous or disadvantageous to the church to invent the story? If the latter, then the story is most probably true.

A classic of this latter category would be Peter's denying Jesus three times. But Rhoda keeping the door locked fits probably into this category also.

**James** in **verse 18** is presumably James the brother of Jesus rather than James the Apostle. The leadership of the Jerusalem church at this time seems in the process of passing from Peter to James, a process that may have been accelerated by Peter's vision—now he may be more focussing on international ministry.

## Acts 12. 20 -23

The sudden death of Herod Agrippa I in AD 44 is well attested from other sources, including Josephus, *The Jewish War*. Luke sees this as an act of God. This is obviously a subjective commentary rather than objective history, since Luke claims no supernatural input for his writing.

In some ways the incident is reminiscent of Ananias and Sapphira and their sudden deaths.