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June 27th: Daniel 6 & Acts 21:17-36

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Daniel in the lions' den. Paul taken in the temple.

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Transcript

Daniel chapter 6. It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom, and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel, unless we find it in connection with the law of his God. Then these high officials and satraps came by

agreement to the king and said to him, O king Darius, live forever.

All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the councillors and the governors, are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked. Therefore king Darius signed the document and injunction.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber, open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his god, as he had done previously. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his god.

Then they came near and said before the king concerning the injunction, O king, did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing stands fast according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked. Then they answered and said before the king, Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day. Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel, and he laboured till the sun went down to rescue him.

Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed. Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, May your god, whom you serve continually, deliver you.

And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lord's, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

Then at break of day the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living god, has your god, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions? Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever.

My god sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him, and also before you, O king, I have done no

harm. Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his god.

And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions, they their children and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth, Peace be multiplied to you.

I make a decree that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble in fear before the god of Daniel, for he is the living god, enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders, in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. Daniel chapter 6 is the penultimate chapter of the Aramaic section of the book, as we have already noted the Aramaic chapters, chapters 2 to 7, have a chiasmic or book-ended pattern, which can help us to get a firmer grip upon their more particular and their overarching themes. Chapter 2, the first dream of Nebuchadnezzar parallels with chapter 7, the four beasts mapping onto the four parts of the image.

Chapters 4 and 5 both concern the humbling experienced by two contrasted kings. And chapters 3 and 6, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, and Daniel and the lion's den, both involve idolatrous decrees, resisted by faithful Jews, who were then miraculously delivered from a death sentence. Chapter 6 begins and ends with a decree.

The first decree is an idolatrous decree, and the second decree, a decree honouring the Lord and his sovereignty. Although themes of Babel are not now prominent in the ways that they were during the period of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in chapters 1 to 5, the theme of the competing sovereignty of the Lord and human rulers continues to drive the narrative in this, the final narrative chapter of the book. It is important to appreciate that the book of Daniel isn't merely dealing with the specific events that befell Daniel and his friends, but raises more generalisable issues of the relationship between the rule and sovereignty of the Lord and those of great human empires, something that will be represented in visionary form in the chapter that follows.

The pretensions of empire, whether expressed in the hubris of egotistical kings like Nebuchadnezzar or in the divinised legal systems of the Medes and the Persians, are no match for the rule of the creator god. At the end of chapter 5, Darius was said to receive the kingdom at the age of 62. That we have the age of a pagan king given in such a manner is itself very strange, especially as it is seemingly entirely incidental to the narrative.

It doesn't serve as a chronological reference point, for instance. This raises the possibility that the number was recorded for us less for the narrow purposes of historical record than for the purpose of highlighting matters of symbolic significance. As we previously saw, Darius' age suggests that he represents a new balance as his age corresponds to a particular rendering of the weight in shekels of the weights of the handwriting on the wall.

One minor worth 60 shekels, one shekel and two half-weights, in this case taken as two half-shekels, 62 shekels in total. We can go further though. In chapter 9 verses 24-27, Daniel receives a revelation in the context of his reflections concerning the completion of the 70 years foretold for the desolations of Jerusalem by the prophet Jeremiah.

70 weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word, to restore and build Jerusalem, to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

And after the sixty-two weeks an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed, and he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering.

And on the wing of abomination shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator. The fact that the very specific number 62, a number that only appears once in scripture outside of the book of Daniel, in 1st Chronicles chapter 26 verse 8, with no apparent significance in that context, appears twice in a few chapters, seems to be quite noteworthy. It raises the possibility that we ought to read the events of chapter 6 as a preview of the 70th week of the prophecy of chapter 9, and perhaps also as a microcosmic representation of the 70th year of the desolations of Jerusalem under Babylon that it magnifies.

I believe that attempting to read chapter 6 in light of this proves fruitful and illuminating. Before we enter into a consideration of the substance of the passage, it is important to consider the figure of Darius, whose identity is a cause of considerable debate among commentators. Indeed, the figure of Darius is one of the reasons why perhaps a majority of academic commentators consider the book of Daniel to be a much later work of historical fiction, rather than as a historical account faithful to the actual events.

While we won't settle the questions surrounding his identity here, it is worth taking the time to reflect upon the various pieces of evidence and other considerations that must factor into our determination of Darius' identity, along with some of the chief

identifications that have been advanced. To begin with, there are a number of pieces of biblical evidence that need to be considered. Darius is identified as being a Mede by descent in chapter 9 verse 1 as the son of Ahasuerus, representing the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians.

Second, Darius is 62 years old when he receives the kingdom. Third, we have chapter 6 verse 28, so this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. This verse could be read either as referring to Darius and Cyrus as two successive kings, in whose reigns Daniel served, or as an identification of the two figures, during the reign of Darius the Mede, who was the same figure as Cyrus the Persian.

Alternatively, perhaps Darius could be understood as a vice-gerent or co-regent of Cyrus, or vice versa. Fourth, Darius clearly enjoyed considerable authority. He claims the prerogative to address all peoples, and he establishes a regime overseen by 120 satraps.

Fifth, we need to square the character of Darius as seen in this chapter with whatever character with which we choose to identify him. We might also need to account for Darius' seemingly deep attachment to Daniel revealed in this chapter, which might be a little surprising if they have only recently become acquainted and just for a short period of time. Sixth, there is the evidence in biblical prophecy that suggests that the Median kingdom initially enjoyed a greater prominence in the Medo-Persian empire before the Persians became dominant, and furthermore that it was the Medes in particular that overthrew Babylon.

Jeremiah chapter 51 verse 11 reads, Sharpen the arrows, take up the shields. The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it. For that is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance for his temple.

Verse 58 of the same chapter, Prepare the nations for war against her, the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies, and every land under their dominion. Similarly, in Isaiah chapter 13 verses 17 to 19, Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. Their bows will slaughter the young men.

They will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb. Their eyes will not pity children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.

In the book of Daniel, as James Bajan remarks, there is a notable shift from a Median prominence in the Medo-Persian empire to a Persian hegemony. In Daniel, to this point, the Medes have been listed first. The rise of the Persians to dominance in the empire is seen in the raising up of the bear-like beast on one of its two sides in chapter 7 verse 5.

In chapter 8 verse 3, the Medo-Persian empire is represented in a ram with two horns, with one later gaining primacy over the other, representing the Persians.

Later on in the prophecy of Daniel, Persia is spoken of by itself without reference to the Medes, perhaps suggesting that a Persian hegemony within the empire would be established quite soon. Finally, there is the apparent great significance that the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede had for Daniel, connected with the fulfilment of prophecy concerning the end of Israel's captivity, an event which was, in 2 Chronicles chapter 36 verses 20-23, connected with the time of the establishment of the kingdom of Persia. These elements of the biblical account, however, conflict with the picture that most historians have drawn from the various evidence that we have from other sources.

For many of the relevant sources, there is no record of such a Median king taking over Babylon. There is a later King Darius, a successor to Cyrus the Great, mentioned in the context of the rebuilding of the temple, but he is described as a Persian and comes some time afterward. Andrew Steinman, in his treatment of the question, notes that some sceptical scholars have speculated that the story of chapter 6 was a fictional one, originally set in the reign of Darius the Great of Persia, later incorporated into the book of Daniel, with the king being reimagined as an invented king that was designed in part to fulfil the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the Medes overthrow of Babylon.

Before venturing further into the details of the question, it is important to bear in mind the danger of overconfident pronouncements on such historical questions. Belshazzar was long declared to be a figment of later historical imagination rather than an actual historical figure, before evidence surfaced vindicating the biblical account in its assertion of his historicity. There are many ways in which the discovery of new evidence could change the picture that we have of this period.

Many of the reconstructions are fairly tentative on certain points. We also need to bear in mind the fact that dominant interpretations of the existing evidence can themselves be very contestable. Some of it, for instance in this case, derives from propagandist accounts given by kings of the scope of their own power and should be taken with a generous helping of salt.

Furthermore, it is important to recognise that the biblical texts themselves are key historical evidence, not merely dubious accounts that must be granted no weight beyond what can be corroborated by other sources. The fact that the reliability of the text on certain points has been vindicated against previous consensus among scholars, for instance, should encourage us to insist that more weight be placed upon the evidence that the text provides for things that cannot yet be corroborated when we deal with non-Christian or liberal scholars. Other scholars have attempted to identify Darius the Mede with other known characters of history.

Gubaru, the general of the Persian army that conquered Babylon in 539 BC, who then

became its governor, or perhaps vassal king, has been one popular historical contender. However, Gubaru's period of office was under a month, far too short for all of the events associated with it in the Book of Daniel. Gubaru would need to have had time to appoint 120 satraps for Daniel to stand out to him from the other high officials and to establish the law concerning the 30 days of exclusive intermediation.

This is not to mention all of the other things that Daniel and others did during this period. As Steinman argues, it strains credulity that all of this occurred in a single month. Besides this, as a mere governor or vassal king, Gubaru would not seem to have enjoyed the sort of authority that Darius claimed to exercise in this chapter.

Another possible and ancient identification is of Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian. The identification would read chapter 6 verse 28 as speaking of them as the same figure, rather than as two successive kings. The theory, based in part on the histories of Herodotus, is that Darius was the name given to Cyrus at his birth by his mother, Mandane of Media, the daughter of the last Median king, Asterges, and the queen consort of Cumbyes I, the king of Persia.

Cyrus then joined together the kingdoms of Media and Persia in his own person. Steinman suggests that Asterges is the same figure as Ahasuerus, of whom Darius is said to be the son, in chapter 9 verse 1. Alternatively, it may be a Persian royal title enjoyed by one of Cyrus' ancestors. It's important to note that royal names and titles were often held by several different figures over the history of these kingdoms, and that one person might have gone by a number of different names.

We see something similar in modern royalty. King George VI, for instance, had Albert as his primary name at his christening, but bore the name George on the throne. He was one of six monarchs to be called George.

Prince Albert of York is the same person as George VI, but George VI should not be confused with any of the previous Georges. Things become more complicated when the rule of two kingdoms are joined together. James VI of Scotland, for instance, was James I of England.

An identification of Darius the Mede and Cyrus has the benefit of making sense of the prophetic importance of the first year of his reign, and also of his significance as a figure more generally. It still, however, leaves us with questions about the seeming discrepancies in the description of the relative prominence of the Medes and Persians at the time of the overthrow of Babylon. Other positions exist.

Some scholars identify Darius with a different gubaru, a man appointed by Cyrus to rule over Babylon. A few others identify him with the son of Cyrus the Great. Carl Friedrich Kiel, Paul Tanner and Bajon all make the case for the identification of Darius as Syaxeres II, the son of Astages, the brother of Mandanae, the uncle of Cyrus the Great, and a

Median king.

Josephus, Saint Jerome and John Calvin are among many who advocated for this position historically. The existence of Syaxeres II is disputed, however. He is not mentioned in Herodotus' histories, but is prominently mentioned in Xenophon's work.

Our understanding of the movement of the Medo-Persian Empire to a Persian-dominated empire will be greatly shaped by our determination of the existence or nonexistence of this figure. If he existed, he was the senior ruler in the Medo-Persian confederacy, with his nephew Cyrus, who led the campaign against Babylon, taking his place at the time of his death. According to Xenophon, Syaxeres gave Cyrus his daughter and the kingdom of Media with her.

Kiel suggests that he would have been called Darius as a Persian title that he bore as the king of the united kingdom of the Medes and Persians. This would fit very neatly with the biblical account. There are other historical texts and artefacts that lend support to the idea that the Medes and Persians were equal partners, or even that the Medes were the senior partners in a confederacy, some time after Cyrus and Persia were supposed to be dominant within the prevailing academic historical account.

This account of the history, however, conflicts with that of Herodotus, which historians generally prefer. The chapter begins with Darius setting up a new regime, 120 satraps, 3 high officials, and Darius himself makes 124, 62 times 2. 62 was once some of the weights mentioned in the writing on the wall, and also the age of Darius when he received the kingdom. Daniel swiftly distinguished himself from the other high officials and satraps on account of his gifting by the spirit of God.

So gifted was Daniel that the king wanted to make him the administrator of the whole kingdom. This, unsurprisingly, led to great envy among the other high officials and satraps, and they sought to find some way to bring Daniel down. The officials and satraps sought to find some dirt on Daniel, however Daniel proved to be without corruption when they surveilled him.

The only hope that they had to bring Daniel down was through his piety as a faithful worshipper of the Lord. Recognising this, the high officials and satraps conspired together and went to the king, proposing a policy that he be the universal mediator of the kingdom for a month. For that period of time he should be the only intermediary between the people and the gods.

It is likely that the high officials and satraps presented this as a matter of political prudence. A religious vacuum had been created as Nabonidus had gathered all the idols and images from the various cities into Babylon as the Medo-Persians had advanced against him. Presenting Darius as the cultic focal point for 30 days before things were restored to normal could help to unite the kingdom under his rule.

Just as the people of Israel were to be bound together by the unified and single cult focused upon Jerusalem, so the people of the Medo-Persian empire were supposed to be bound together with this cult that was focused upon Darius as the universal intermediary for this period of time. The high officials and satraps likely represented this as a consensus decision that they had arrived at all together, although it is hard to believe that Daniel was present. They present this in terms of the law of the Medes and the Persians which cannot be revoked.

The law here is a sort of divinised entity. Kings may come and go, even great priest kings, but the law will endure unchanged. Ironically, if the law of the Medes and Persians is like the genome, there seems to be a sort of epigenome that arises in order to determine when the law will be enacted and enforced or not.

The law, which is seen as a great symbol of the power of the people who make it, ends up being a power that exercises rule over them. Darius will find himself trapped by the law of his own creation. When Daniel discovers that the law has been ratified, he goes back to his house and continues his religious practice.

Daniel's habitual practice involves three occasions of prayer every single day. Many have regarded these times of prayer as corresponding with daily rituals in the temple. Even after the temple is destroyed and people are exiled far from Jerusalem, there are people who continue patterns of piety that look back to the life of Israel within the land.

The fact that Daniel's worship is oriented towards Jerusalem is important evidence of this. Daniel does not make a scene of public disobedience here, but he does not divert from his usual practice. He has an existing pattern of piety and he continues in it.

Had he not such an existing pattern of piety, it would have been much easier for him to compromise at this point. The fact that the conspirators knew that Daniel would continue in his religious devotion, irrespective of the threat of being thrown to the lions, testifies to Daniel's fearless character and his unswerving commitment to the Lord. The conspirators, having caught Daniel in the act as they had hoped, inform the king and remind him that the law cannot be revoked.

Daniel must be thrown to the lions, there is no way of stopping it. The king presumably recognises at this point that he has been trapped, that his advisors and those ruling under him have manipulated him for the sake of their own envy. The law, which should have been the means of his power, ends up being a power against him.

He is powerless to prevent the sentence from being enacted, even though he might try. The conspirators eventually insist that the sentence be carried through and the king has to comply. He commands that Daniel be placed in the den of lions, but he declares his fervent desire that Daniel be saved from their mouths by the Lord whom he trusts.

Perhaps he had heard the story of Daniel's three friends being saved from the fiery furnace earlier. Daniel is placed in the den, a stone is placed over the entrance of the den and the stone is sealed with the king's signet so that it might not be removed. The king, who has a deep sympathetic concern for Daniel, does not want to see him destroyed and so he fasts and cannot sleep that whole night.

The next morning he goes to the den and calls out to Daniel, hoping against hope that he is still alive. Answering the king, Daniel declares that the Lord shut the mouths of the lions, sending his angel to protect Daniel from them. Just like his three friends in chapter 3, when he is taken out, no harm is found to have come to him.

The evil of the conspirators, however, comes back upon their own head. They are thrown into the den of lions with all of their families. The lions immediately devour them.

We earlier noted the way that the number 62, the age of Darius as he came to the throne, connects this chapter, concerning the first year of his reign, with the prophecy of chapter 9. That prophecy relates to the end of the 70 years of the exile. It also relates to the 70th week of years that is foretold. Concerning the first, we should recognise that the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire is the sign that the exile in Babylon has come to an end.

As a beast, the Babylonian Empire is represented as a lion, and the deliverance of faithful Daniel from the den of lions is a microcosm of the deliverance of his people from exile. While they were in exile, the mouths of many had sought to devour them, and yet the Lord preserved his people from the mouths of all of the lions. They will be brought out of the Babylonian den of exile and returned to the land.

Beyond this reference to the end of the 70 years, we should also recognise its relationship with the end of the 70 weeks of years. In this respect, it foreshadows the resurrection of Christ. Christ would be placed in the den of the great lion, the realm of the grave in which Satan himself prowls.

A stone would be placed over the entrance to his tomb and it would be sealed. However, when a new morning dawned, he would emerge unharmed, having overcome death itself. A question to consider.

How might this chapter help us to read the vision of the beasts in the chapter that follows? Acts chapter 21 verses 17 to 36 When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all

zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.

What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow.

Take these men and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.

Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them, and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled, and the offering presented for each one of them. When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd, and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place. Moreover he even brought Greeks into the temple, and has defiled this holy place.

For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut.

And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

Then the tribune came up and arrested him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was, and what he had done. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another.

And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd. For the mob of the people followed, crying out, Away with him.

Paul, in the second half of Acts chapter 21, on his return from his third missionary journey, has just arrived in Jerusalem from Caesarea. He has been accompanied by some Christians from Caesarea, and a company of Gentiles and others that he had brought with him. This is presumably near the time of Pentecost, as it had been Paul's intention

to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, perhaps as a symbolically appropriate time to present the Gentile believers as first fruits of the harvest field of the nations, and to present the gift that had been gathered among the Gentiles for the poor Christians in Jerusalem to the church there.

It had been foretold that suffering and persecution awaited him in Jerusalem, and many of the disciples had tried to discourage him from going there on his journey back, but the Holy Spirit was constraining him to go, so he wasn't going to turn aside. Luke has been framing Paul's journey towards Jerusalem as a playing out of the pattern of Christ's life in Paul's own. Paul is walking in the footsteps of his master.

However, there are other matters more immediately at play. The Gentile mission had been rapidly growing, and the appropriate relationship between Jews and Gentiles was an issue of great concern, and has been throughout the book to this point. The more that the Gentile mission expands, and the more that pagan Gentiles convert and come into the church, the more that the relationship between Jews and Gentiles would be a cause of concerns, suspicions and tensions.

A very great deal depends upon Paul's relationship with the Christian leaders in Jerusalem. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would largely have been pious Jews who followed Jesus. The rising numbers of Gentile Christians, who by now would have been far more than a merely peripheral group around a Jewish movement, would have caused tensions for Judean Jewish Christians, who might have been wondering what implications the rise of a Jew-Gentile church had for their relationship to their Jewish heritage.

The situation had been exacerbated by rumours that had been spreading concerning Paul, that he had been opposing Jewish practices and traditions among the Diaspora Jews, that he was intentionally Gentilising the church. If the issue of Judaising was the pressing problem when the first Gentiles were converting, now that great numbers of Gentiles are converting, the fear of Gentilising is the more pressing one. As Craig Keener makes clear, at issue here is the spirit of the Jerusalem Decree.

The Jerusalem Council had determined to ensure that the Gentile converts would be free to live as converted Gentiles. Implicit in this agreement was the reciprocal recognition of Jews by Gentiles. The Jews should not Judaise the Gentiles and the Gentiles should not Gentilise the Jews.

Also at stake was the witness of the church to the observant Jews in Jerusalem and elsewhere, who had heard the slander that Paul was a subversive Gentiliser. John Barclay, cited by Keener, offers three helpful categories for thinking through some of the issues at stake. The first is that of assimilation, which is integrating into Greco-Roman society and abandoning distinctive Jewish customs.

The second category is acculturation, which is the acquisition of the language and

literary heritage of the majority culture through education and other means. And the third is accommodation, which refers to the ways in which Jews could express their own faith in terms of the values, ideals and forms of Hellenistic culture and literature. In terms of these three categories, Barclay argues that Paul was highly assimilated on account of his eating and associating with Gentiles.

He was only moderately acculturated. His canon was clearly scripture and while he had some knowledge of rhetoric and a rudimentary awareness of Greek literature and philosophy, he does not seem to have been especially knowledgeable in these areas and he operated principally in traditional Jewish categories. Finally, he wasn't very accommodated.

For Paul, the Gentile world was a sinful one and he clearly sets himself against it and its moral values. Paul doesn't try to transpose scriptural, conceptual structures and language into those of the wider Gentile society. His approach on issues such as sexuality, idolatry and scripture are manifestly those of an observant Jew.

Paul's assimilation was, as we see elsewhere, for the sake of mission, as he puts it in 1 Corinthians 9 19-23, for though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 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 outside the law of 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 people, that by all means I might save some.

I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them and its blessings. Paul doesn't seem to have completely abandoned Jewish practices, however he is prepared to put such practices to one side for the sake of mission. Although this does not mean that he is requiring Jews in general to lay aside their culture, it does serve to relativise those practices in a way that would have led many to view Paul as a serious compromiser or even as an apostate.

Especially as claims about Paul were exaggerated through the spread of rumours concerning him, this would cause particular problems for the Jerusalem Christians as they related to the Jews around them. They were presenting themselves as pious and observant Jews and yet they countenanced Paul's supposedly Gentilising mission. Meeting with James and the elders, Paul and his companions were welcomed and recounted all that God accomplished through them, leading the elders to glorify God.

However James and the elders are concerned to deal with the rumours that have been spreading, which have been dismaying observant Jewish Christians and harming their

witness among their fellow Jews. Paul has seemingly come to Jerusalem with the express aim of strengthening relations between Jews and Gentiles within the church. The collection for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem has been a repeated issue of concern in his epistles, as a very practical expression of the union of Jews and Gentiles that he proclaims.

Now he arrives in Jerusalem, it seems as if this great unifying gesture of Paul and the company of Gentiles that he has brought with him, bringing the gifts of their various churches, is in danger of being entirely in vain, as unsettling rumours concerning him are provoking deeply damaging distrust in the very place where he is seeking reciprocal recognition and love. We should also consider the tensions that have been rising in Jerusalem for some time. Jewish nationalism had become much more pronounced and there were a number of instances of serious violence.

News will have gotten around that Paul is now in the city and people's eyes will be trained upon him and upon the Jerusalem leaders in their handling of him. Without compromising the understanding of salvation that had been presented by the Jerusalem Council, the Jerusalem leaders want Paul publicly to perform an action that manifests the fact that he honours Jewish customs and isn't a Gentiliser. The leaders make clear that this is not in any sense meant to compromise the statement they made at the Jerusalem Council.

Such Jewish practices are not being required for standing before God, nor do they themselves believe that the claims of Paul's accusers really have great substance to them. Although Paul may be more assimilated in the context of the Gentile mission, this does not mean that he ceases to regard himself as a Jew or that he has just shrugged off Jewish customs. In 16 verse 3, Paul himself circumcised Timothy in order to respect Jewish scruples.

Jewish customs may not be required for standing before God, but they have a continuing cultural significance and more than that represent a sort of religious practice, in a somewhat older sense of that term religious. Like the monastic might adopt religious orders as a form for their Christian piety, for these Jewish Christians Jewish practices may have been regarded as a context for the practice of their Christian faith. The practices are not incumbent upon everyone, they don't establish the person who adopts them on a special footing with God, but they do represent a framework of piety that can assist them in their spiritual practice, in their growth, in their witness and in their enjoyment of faithful community.

The Jewish leaders propose a plan, there are four men under a vow and Paul should pay their expenses and join with them in purifying himself, thereby demonstrating his respect for and support for the continued practice of Jewish customs. The exact nature of the vows of the men in question is not entirely clear and a number of suggestions have

been advanced. Daryl Bach lists four of these, first Paul is being purified for travelling in Gentile areas whereas for the others it is in connection with a Nazarite vow, second Paul is sharing in the end of the men's vow for the remaining week, third the four men have contracted uncleanness and need to be cleansed, or four Paul's cleansing is for his own vow mentioned in chapter 18 verse 18.

The text doesn't seem to settle the question for us and while a few of these options are possible none is without its attendant questions or problems, the men performing a Nazarite vow does seem more likely though. Paul seems to be entirely willing to comply and he initiates the process of purification with these four men in the temple. The purification period is almost over when some diaspora Jews from Asia recognise Paul in the temple and stir up the crowd against him.

It is likely that this was during the feast of Pentecost for which Paul had wanted to be back in Jerusalem and that the Jews from the province of Asia were visiting for that. Paul had been the cause of ructions in the Jewish community in Ephesus, a number of people had split off from the synagogue there and joined his school. While the Judean Jews had their issues with and their suspicions of Paul they were unlikely to be quite as fiercely opposed to him as the Jews from the province of Asia.

They accuse Paul of two things, the first charge is that he teaches everyone everywhere against the people and the law and the temple. The accusation here is similar to that made against Stephen in chapter 6 verses 11-14. The accusation that he taught against the people might have arisen from his assimilation with Gentiles in certain contexts.

The second charge is that he has brought Trophimus, an Ephesian Greek, into the temple, defiling it. This was a mistaken charge, albeit one that they seem to think was accurate. A Gentile was not supposed to enter the court of the Israelites in the temple.

Hearing these charges, the whole city was stirred up. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple. Word of the mob and the commotion reached the tribune, who led a cohort of a thousand men.

He took a large contingent of soldiers with him, as he was accompanied by centurions, we might surmise that at least 200 men would be present, as bark reasons, and he rushed to defuse the situation. When the Jews saw the soldiers coming, they stopped beating Paul. The tribune tried to discover the cause of the commotion, but he could not get a clear picture from the crowd.

The crowd was confused, they didn't agree among themselves. Unable to discover the cause, the tribune removed Paul from the scene. The soldiers actually have to carry him up the steps because the crowd is so violent.

Much as they had done with Christ, the crowd followed, crying out that Paul should be

executed. The description of the confused violent mob here is also very similar to the violent mob of chapter 19 in Ephesus. A question to consider, the limitations of ancient channels of communication made inaccurate and hostile reports and rumours a very real danger, instilling distrust and stirring up anger in situations where the record often could not be set correct swiftly or straightforwardly.

Are there any lessons that we can learn from the New Testament Church's handling of and defusing of rumors?