

Acts 28,28 — Why?

Acts 28 tells a story of Paul's encounter with certain Jewish leaders⁽¹⁾ in Rome. After a day of explaining Jesus through the use of the Jewish Scriptures, Paul watches these and still other Jews disperse, discontent among themselves as to the truth of Paul's exegesis of the Jewish scriptures in relation to the Kingdom of God and the 'things' of Jesus. As Paul sees them go, he, apparently in anger⁽²⁾, cites Isaiah to the effect that those who do not accept his preaching have hardened their hearts, closed their eyes and ears; they did this so that (with the result that) they should not understand⁽³⁾ and turn back (to God), who is assuredly ready to heal. Upon the close of this quotation, used by Paul (and Luke) to show why certain Roman Jews did not accept Jesus as the Jewish Scriptures intended they should⁽⁴⁾, Luke gives further words to Paul⁽⁵⁾. Thus, v. 28, and not the citation from Isaiah, closes Paul's reflection on the response of certain Jews to his preaching. This fact, in turn, suggests that we look closely at this v. 28 so as to better

⁽¹⁾ Throughout this essay we will insist on the clarity of Luke that he so orders his story that we are to think that the object of Paul's remarks in Acts 28,26-27 are 'certain Jewish leaders'; note the indefiniteness of the number: ἤλθον πρὸς αὐτὸν...πλείονες (v. 23). (In this regard, 28,28 is similar to 13,46, where again there is no affirmation that 'all Israel' is the object of Paul's criticism and/or decision). There is no visible attempt to freshly apply the Isaiah citation to the 'people of Israel'. Thus, though Isaiah speaks of "say to this people", the Pauline application intended is, from context, not all Israel, but 'certain Jewish leaders'.

⁽²⁾ That Paul speaks with emotion is not a reason to think that Luke reports Paul's words with the same emotion. Luke, despite his adjustments with the historical nature of events, cannot be said to 'be angry' because Paul is shown to 'be angry' (if anger truly describes Paul at this moment).

⁽³⁾ In accord with Acts 5,31, this 'refusal to understand' involves the rejection of μετάνοια and subsequent forgiveness of sins that God intended for Israel.

⁽⁴⁾ This citation from Isaiah offers no argument or evidence that Israel is now condemned or abandoned by God; consequently, this citation can hardly be called the 'final Lucan word' about Israel. It emphasizes that the attitude which describes the unbelieving Jewish leaders in Rome is well illustrated by Isaiah's words to 'their Fathers'; there is no mention here of the people Israel.

⁽⁵⁾ "28 ist Fazit in Lukanischer Diktion", H. CONZELMANN, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (HzNT 7; Tübingen 1963) 160.

appreciate why it, and not the Isaian citation⁽⁶⁾, completes Paul's thought and reveals his true intention here.

1. Acts 28,28 – important elements

Most all elements of this verse are important: “therefore”, “you must know”, “this salvation”, “was sent”, “to the nations” — “and they will listen”. They yield, we will argue, a conclusion that Paul attempts to motivate his fellow Jews to conversion.

First of all, v. 28 is a logical conclusion (οὖν) to the citation from Isaiah. To Paul's way of thinking, v. 28 follows in some logical fashion from the facts of that citation. Something should be gained, in other words from the statement of the Spirit about “your fathers”, words which Isaiah is to direct “to the people” and which are now applicable in turn to the disagreeing Jews of Rome⁽⁷⁾.

What is to be gained from the Isaiah citation is knowledge, and it is imperative⁽⁸⁾ that Paul's listeners (ὐμῖν) learn: “you must know”. The knowledge necessary for these Jews to know is expressed: God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles. Thus, the attitude expressed by Isaiah and applied to certain members of his audience by Paul must result in, or be followed by this audience's knowing, apparently for the first time, the fact that divine salvation has been offered to the Gentiles.

⁽⁶⁾ Cf. A. WEISER, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (ÖTBK; Göttersloh 1981-1985) II, 683: “Nach Auffassung der meisten Exegeten bringt Lukas am Schluss — anders als Paulus Röm 9–11 — zum Ausdruck, dass sich die nicht an Jesus glaubenden Juden selbst ausserhalb Israels gestellt haben... Mit der Umkehr Israels als des *gesamten Göttesvolkes* rechnet Lukas nicht mehr”. However here WEISER does not exclude, “der Umkehr einzelner Juden”, 683. WEISER represents the thinking of earlier exegetes about Acts 28,26-27, but each “...mit unterschiedlichen Akzenten z. b. Conzelmann (*Die Mitte der Zeit*, 177); Eltester (*Israel*, 124f.); Gnilka (*Verstockung*, 143; 149f); Haenchen (*Apg.* 112 [allerdings zu einseitig: “die christliche Mission seiner Zeit wendet sich nur noch an die Heiden”]); Jervell (*Israel*, 71); Lohfink (*Sammlung*, 93); Prast (*Presbyter*, 329); Roloff (*Apg.* 375); Schneider (*Apg.* II 420); Wilson (*Gentiles*, 226-233, 251) 683-684”.

⁽⁷⁾ E. HAENCHEN, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen 1959) 647-648: “...damit wird hier (wie in 13,48, 18,6) der Übergang der rettenden Verkündigung von den Juden zu den Heiden begründet”; but nowhere in his commentary does Haenchen explain why this past fact is told to this limited number of Jewish leaders in Rome, who are confronted with the Pauline preaching only now. Later, we will show differences between 28,28 and the earlier 13,48 and 18,6.

⁽⁸⁾ γνώστων οὖν ἔστω is a formula used elsewhere in Acts by Luke (Acts 2,14; 4,10; 13,38); he means thereby to indicate emphasis and new knowledge.

The clause which describes this knowledge is signalled by ἀπεστάλη, whose most prominent feature, as far as this essay is concerned is its tense, the aorist tense. The use of this time element means that in consequence of the applicability of Isaiah words to Paul's audience, this audience should now know something that has happened in the past⁽⁹⁾. In addition to the tense of this verb we note its theological significance and its voice. In regard to the former, the meaning of ἀποστέλλω in Luke's work conveys the divine origin and forceful direction of salvation to human beings; salvation offered by Paul is removed from Paul's domain⁽¹⁰⁾ and placed clearly where it belongs, in the mind and will and heart of God. In regard to the latter, there is no doubt that Paul means to emphasize the divine sending by use of the divine passive. Most important, however, is the tense of this verb, which indicates that Paul's audience is to know, given their own attitude, something about the past⁽¹¹⁾.

The term τὸ σωτήριον is rarely used by Luke. Yet, its contexts relate to this Acts passage. Luke 2,30⁽¹²⁾ and 3,6 are the only texts, but each of them signals reference to people beyond Israel. John the Baptist, interpreted by Isaiah, is to so preach as to allow all flesh to see the salvation of God. No doubt, when these words are applied to John, they refer to all Israel; but the context of Luke suggests that behind this effort of John is to be seen the wider, indeed widest offer of salvation, that to the nations, a preaching to the end of the earth. In Luke 2,30, Simeon traditionally divides the world into two groups, Israel and the Gentiles. Each of these in its own way will know the salvation of God. Thus, in these two short texts, Luke asks his reader to be aware of the universal nature of the salvation God has offered mankind; thus, in this way Luke prepares us for the completion of these prophecies: "God's salvation" has been sent to "the Gentiles".

⁽⁹⁾ "...the commissioning had already taken place", R.C.H. LENSKI, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Columbus, OH 1944) 1130.

⁽¹⁰⁾ As well, from every other human being's control.

⁽¹¹⁾ With regard to the tense of ἀπεστάλη and the message of this verb, we note the comment, "Und es ist nicht ein Ergebnis der Wegerung des ungläubigen Judentums", J. JERVELL, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (KeKzNT 3; Göttingen 1998) 629; cf. also B. WITHERINGTON, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI 1998) 806: "...not turning from the Jews to the Gentiles".

⁽¹²⁾ "The formula [τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ] may be a borrowing from Isa 40:5 (LXX)... quoted in Luke 3:6", FITZMYER, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB28A; New York 1985) II, 796.

The salvation of which Paul speaks is from God, but is also “this” salvation. “This” salvation most likely refers back to the day-long Theological and Christological discussion when Paul witnessed to Jesus from the Law of Moses and the prophets (v. 23)⁽¹³⁾. This demonstrative adjective has v. 23 as its closest referent. It is a salvation that has to do with Jesus that has been sent to the Gentiles, and it is this salvation that Paul’s audience, in view of its attitude, must be made to know.

From all that has been said, it is clear enough who are the recipients of this salvation that God has sent. All of Acts keeps us keenly aware of these recipients, as well as the struggle to bring salvation to them. Given the affirmation of v. 28, and earlier statements of Jesus and of Acts, there is no doubt of the divine intention that salvation be offered both to Jew and Gentile, with no suggestion, in the phrasing of v. 28, that salvation has been sent to the Gentiles only after it was refused by Israel⁽¹⁴⁾. As is clear from Luke’s presentation in limited, chosen sections of Acts, salvation came “first to the Jew”. But generally the Gospel and much of Acts presents the divine intention of σωτήριοι in what we might call simple parallel fashion: “...Your salvation which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,... to the Gentiles and... to your people Israel” (Luke 2,30-32); “my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1,8). Actually, it is only with the narration of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles, beginning in Acts 13, that “to the Jew first, then to the Gentile” becomes a literary and theological principle⁽¹⁵⁾. Acts

⁽¹³⁾ However, “Das Demonstrativum zeigt, das an ἰάσομαι (V 27)... angeknüpft ist... Dies übersieht Hauser ..., der an einen Rückverweis auf 28,23b denkt. Eher könnte man auf alles verweisen, was das Lukanische Werk über σῶζω, σωτήρ, σωτήρια κτλ bisher gesagt hat”, G. SCHNEIDER, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (HTKZNT 5.2; Freiburg 1982) II, 419, n. 87.

⁽¹⁴⁾ “J. Dupont ha messo in luce che la missione presso i gentili non dev’essere intesa come una conseguenza del rifiuto dei giudei. Questo rifiuto come pure l’entrata dei pagani nella chiesa sono visti come compimento delle Scritture: ‘I due fatti non si spiegano dunque l’uno mediante l’altro, ma l’uno e l’altro a partire dal disegno di Dio manifestato dai profeti’ [“La conclusion des Actes...”, *Les Actes des Apôtres*, a cura di J. Kremer (Gembloux 1979) 403]”, G. ROSSÉ, *Atti degli Apostoli* (Roma 1998) 887.

⁽¹⁵⁾ It is clear that the plan of God, executed in the first instance by Jesus and then by his witnesses, moves from Israel to ‘the end of the earth’, but this pattern is never, until Paul’s time, expressed in terms of “to the Jew first, then to the Gentile”, or better, “to the Gentile only after refusal from the Jew”. Luke 14,23, “Go out to the highways and hedgerows and make people come in”, may seem to

28,28 follows the usual Lucan practice that speaks only of salvation to Jews and Gentiles.

2. *Acts 28,28 in regard to Acts 13,46 and 18,6*

Often in regard to the movement “first to the Jew, then to the Gentile”, Acts 28,28 is placed as the third of a triad of texts; the first two texts are Acts 13,46⁽¹⁶⁾ and 18,6. But these two texts differ from Acts 28,28, precisely because of implications from the aorist tense ὄψεσθῶλη. The Jews of Acts 28 are to learn a past fact, not a fact which merits the present tense⁽¹⁷⁾ or future action. Too, these two texts speak directly of Paul’s personally turning from Jew to Gentile; Acts 28,28 does not describe a personal decision of Paul, but has to do with information that it is necessary for these Jews to know. Finally, whereas in Acts 28,28 there is the assurance that the Gentiles ‘will listen’⁽¹⁸⁾, there is no such concern with the stories of Acts 13 and 18⁽¹⁹⁾. Indeed, these observations regarding Acts 13,46 and 18,6 underline how different Acts 28,28 is from them, and thereby suggest a peculiar meaning for this last verse⁽²⁰⁾.

refer, by virtue of Lucan creativity, to the Gentiles, but such a reference is not clear, nor is it clear that Jesus thought in the manner of the banquet host of the parable (14,15-24).

⁽¹⁶⁾ At Acts 13,47, Paul cites Isaia 49,6: “I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth”. Note that the point of the quotation is not to emphasize “first to the Jew, then to the Gentile”, but only movement to the end of the earth. The essence of the mission is to fulfil the saving will of God; that it happens “first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” is secondary.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Misguided is the opinion: “But the book of Acts is at an end, and so is the cycle [alternating pattern of rejection and mission]”, J. SANDERS, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (SCM; London 1987) 299.

⁽¹⁸⁾ In the usual Lucan sense of ‘listen favorably’ or ‘will obey’ (Lk 5,1,15; 8,8,21; 9,35; 10,16; 11,28; 14,35; 15,1; 21,38; prob. 23,8; Acts 4,19; prob. 8,6; 9,21; 13,7.4.48; 15,7; 18,8.26; 21,20).

⁽¹⁹⁾ Instructive is the presentation of Peter in Acts, in the sense that nowhere is rejection of his preaching by Jews the sign that he is now to turn to the Gentiles. Even when Peter, in paradigm fashion, goes to, preaches to and baptizes Cornelius, he is the passive, even unwilling instrument of God of the offer of salvation to the Gentiles. It is in the Pauline experiences, beginning with Chapter 13, that one first finds narrative expression of the principle, “To the Gentiles, because Jews have refused to believe”.

⁽²⁰⁾ “The importance (of the mission at Antioch) is underscored by the similar pattern of events found in later scenes (cf. ... 28:23-28)”, R. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MN 1990) II, 175.

3. Acts 28,28 — *its reason for being*

From the above, we ask what might be the purpose of Paul's final words captured in v. 28; another way of putting the question is to ask why it is necessary to have a conclusion (οὖν) to the Isaiah citation of vv. 26-27⁽²¹⁾.

The answer we suggest here is that v. 28 means to be a spur or incentive to the Roman Jews to repent so as to enjoy God's healing⁽²²⁾. This is the best explanation for the necessity of information to the effect that the Gentiles have already received the word of God about salvation. To what other purpose would such necessary information serve⁽²³⁾? Certainly we cannot confuse this verse with Acts 13,46 and 18,6. Each of these verses means to show a reason for Paul's movement to the Gentiles, and exhibits the Pauline teaching "first to the Jew, then to the Gentile"⁽²⁴⁾. Such is not the case at 28,28⁽²⁵⁾. The verse, and the preceding description of the heart, ears and eyes of

⁽²¹⁾ These verses, even in the book of Isaiah, are not condemnatory. They seem to function as a kind of warning which is based on, and includes the revelation to, Israel of its true state in its relationship with God. The prophet is not satisfied to describe the negativity of Israel, but ends with the ever-present assurance that "I will forgive". As usual, both Israel and the mercy of God are revealed in prophecy. Paul does not waver from the intentions of Isaiah.

⁽²²⁾ "Paul is asking the Jews [of Rome] whether they too would exclude themselves as those fathers of old had done. When even the Gentiles hear, will they fail to hear?", C.K. BARRETT, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburg 1998) II, 1248.

⁽²³⁾ If one supposed that vv. 26-27 did not address the Jewish leaders of Rome, but were a generalization of their refusal, then one might think that Paul is, with these verses, criticizing all Israel; then one would understand v. 28 to say that the past offer of salvation to the Gentiles flowed from the past refusals of Israel to accept "this salvation". However, vv. 27-28 are addressed to the Roman Jewish leaders, and only to them; thus, the logic expressed a moment ago fails.

⁽²⁴⁾ Rom 1,16; 2,10: Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνι. Though this formula is missing in Acts, its sense is clear in Acts 13,46 (ὕμῖν ἦν ἀναγκαῖον πρῶτον... ἰδοὺ στρεφόμεθα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη) and in 18,6 (καθαρὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν εἰς τὰ ἔθνη). As said before, this contrast is not visible in 28,28. It is not the purpose of this essay to veer from the ordinary understanding of Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνι, but the phrase can be understood in such a way as to avoid the idea that the Gentile is evangelized only because of rejection of the message by the Jew.

⁽²⁵⁾ It is difficult to accept the statement: "As before in Pisidian Antioch (13:46), Corinth (18,6), and Ephesus (19,8-10) so here again in Rome — and this time with a note of solemn finality — that henceforth the Gentiles will have priority in hearing the word of life and that, unlike the Jews as a whole, they will accept it", F.F. BRUCE, *The Book of the Acts* (NCINT; Grand Rapids, MI 1988) 509.

Roman Jews, does not lead to a movement to the Gentiles; that movement has already taken place, and without explanation. V. 28 means not to explain a Pauline decision of missionary tactic, but to offer a description of state of soul. And how would that knowledge of the past serve, if not as urging the Jews of Rome to repent?

4. *Acts 28,28b – wording and emphasis*

Verse 28 ends with the assurance: αὐτοί⁽²⁶⁾ καί⁽²⁷⁾ ἀκούσονται. The position of the wording suggests emphasis somewhere in the verse. Accepting the suggestion of NJB and NAB, that Luke is here intending “also”⁽²⁸⁾, we see Paul implying a possible association of the Jews with the Gentiles in a future acceptance of “this salvation from God”: “they too will listen”. But what purpose would this union of Jew with Gentile serve in Paul’s address to his audience? Certainly it is not to underline contrast, but serves to encourage the Jews to receive the message of salvation. Paul here is not offering a spiteful condemnation of Roman Jews; that type of thinking might be part of Acts 13,46 and 18,6⁽²⁹⁾, but Acts 28,28, as we have said, is not simply a third text in imitation of the two earlier texts of Acts 13 and 18⁽³⁰⁾. Acts 28,28b, then, can serve as part of the motivation Paul uses for a possible future reception of the word of God among the Roman Jews.

Indeed, this understanding makes the connection with Acts 28,30 smooth. Paul here is depicted as speaking to “all who came to him”; this notice is without distinction between Jew and Gentile, and offers

⁽²⁶⁾ That the subject of the verb in 28,28b is presumed from 28,28a is argument that the two parts of v. 28 are tightly bound one to the other, and so should be treated together, despite editorial semi-colons, hyphens and periods.

⁽²⁷⁾ This word has been variously understood and interpreted. A minimal understanding is as a simple connective of the two sentences that make up the verse; in this view, one either understands the word to mean: “and they will listen” ASV, NIV, or “they will listen” (with the καί untranslated) ESV, NRS, RSV, NJB, NAU. But the position of καί suggests that we have here a certain degree of emphasis, so as to mean: “they will also listen” NJB, NAB.

⁽²⁸⁾ It is possible to understand καί as the second part of the terms of contrast, the first part of which is implicit: “(you have rejected)... but they will listen”. This seems a less likely interpretation.

⁽²⁹⁾ For a discussion of these verses within their broader contexts, cf. R.F. O’TOOLE, “The Christian Mission and the Jews at the End of the Acts of the Apostles”, *Biblical Exegesis in Progress* (eds. J.-N. ALETTI – J.-L. SKA) (AnBib 176; Rome 2009) 387-388.

⁽³⁰⁾ These texts are clearly meant to underline Paul’s departure from certain Jews and so to offer the faith to certain Gentiles.

no refusal to talk to Jews who had already visited with Paul in 28,13-28⁽³¹⁾. Indeed, though clearly the final two verses serve as a closing summary, they do not wholly intend a separation in thought from what went before them, but rather suggest the possibility of continuity with these prior verses.

Verse 28,28 is informational; certain Jewish leaders are to learn what has happened in the past. However, we have said this knowledge has a purpose beyond that of information: it is meant to spur them on to repentance. But is it reasonable to expect that news of salvation already sent to the Gentiles was thought to inspire, exhort repentance? There are two examples to offer in which we can see an emphasis on an urging to repentance, one from Paul and one from Jesus.

5. Acts 28,28 in relation to Rom 11 and the Gospel of Luke

Rom 9–11 is a somewhat tortuous reflection on the loss of Israel and what its ultimate, final state will be before God. This reflection involves the baptism of the Gentiles, a factor which was very visible in Paul's time and indeed an object of his dedicated preaching. In this three-chapter discussion Paul offers a remark which is very much to the heart of this present essay. At Rom 11,11-12 he says, "What I am saying is this: Was this stumbling to lead to their final downfall? Out of the question! On the contrary, their failure has brought salvation for the gentiles, in order to stir them to envy"⁽³²⁾. This text strongly shows that many years prior to the writing of Acts there had been placed in the tradition the thought that the transgression of Israel should eventually serve as a spur to Israel's repentance and acceptance of "this salvation". It would not be surprising, then, to read in Acts a continuation of this same kind of purpose following upon criticism of Israel⁽³³⁾.

⁽³¹⁾ FITZMYER, *Acts*, 797 affirms that πάντας (Acts 28,30) "is almost certainly to be understood as 'all individuals' (so DUPONT, "La conclusion", 376-380; SCHNEIDER, *Apg* 2.419-20; GNILKA, *Verstockung*, 154)." Granted that the fuller phrase πάντας τοὺς εἰσπορευομένους πρὸς αὐτόν can only be understood as referring to individuals (Jew or Gentile), the above comment seems unnecessary, unless it means to say that Luke is here admitting to an abandonment of Israel as a people — an affirmation we do not find expressed in Acts 28.

⁽³²⁾ Cf. Rom 10,19: "I shall rouse you to jealousy with a non-people" (εἰς τὸ παραζηλώσαι αὐτούς).

⁽³³⁾ It is noteworthy that in Rom 11,8 "Scripture says: God gave them a spirit of stupor, blind eyes and deaf ears" and in 11,10: "David says: Let their eyes be darkened so that they may not see". Thus, not only does Paul speak of Israel's

At one point on his journey to Jerusalem Jesus was asked if there are few who will be saved (13,23). Jesus does not answer in terms of ‘many’ or ‘few’, but, as was his wont, uses the question to offer salvific teaching. He begins, and this is notable for the rest of his words, with an exhortation: “Try to come in through the narrow door” (13,24). Jesus continues with a parable which focuses finally on those who thought they had every reason to obtain salvation, but will not. At the conclusion of the parable he assures his audience that, they will see Jews and Gentiles safe in the Kingdom of God, “and you yourselves rejected” (v. 28). Now, one can understand Jesus’ remarks as those of the Lord, dominical or revelatory or prophetic sayings, but given the context of exhortation, it is more correct to see these sayings as an urging to repentance and acceptance of “this salvation”. In other words, the dramatic statement of Jesus, which is informational, surely serves as warning, and so as urging to “enter through the narrow door”. Again, the pattern we find in Acts 28,28, information leading to repentance, is evidenced, now in the Gospel of Luke.

5. The content of Acts 28,28 in the context of Jesus’ mission

Thus, should one look to the greater context of the Lucan work, he will find that Luke shows an ever-present interest in motivation towards repentance, even when the material is presented in dominical saying form, or, as we have said, in informational form. The public life of Jesus, according to Luke, has two purposes, one subordinate to the other. The central reason for his life before condemnation, death and resurrection is expressed, “(To other towns) I must announce the good news of the reign of God, because that is why I was sent” (4,43). Crucial, theologically laden terms here are εὐαγγελίσασθαι με δεῖ... ἐπὶ τοῦτο ἀπεστάλην; ‘necessity’ and passive form of ἀποστέλλω, which terms place the entire works of Jesus’ public life within the loving will and determination of God. This description of the role of Jesus repeats the essence of what he had said in Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to announce a year of favor from the Lord” (4,18-19). Indeed, another formula of the same idea occurs in 16,16: ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται.

jealousy (παραζηλώσαι) at the divine acceptance of Gentiles, but he also prefaces this with quotations which resemble the citation Luke offers in Acts 28,28. Indeed, Luke 24,47 is clear that the overall goal of Christian preaching in Acts is μετάνοια εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

The secondary or subordinate purpose of Jesus' public life is expressed in the second part of 16,16: καὶ πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται⁽³⁴⁾. The better expression of this role of Jesus occurs within a confrontation with certain Pharisees and Scribes (Luke 5,30-31). To them Jesus says, "I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners". This call to repentance, which is the "urging" in the word βιάζεται' is related to the divine pleasure "because he has fixed a day when the whole world will be judged⁽³⁵⁾ in uprightness by a man he has appointed. And God has publicly proved this by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17,31).

Given the theological understanding of the plan of God in Luke-Acts, it is difficult not to see in most all of what Jesus says and does calls, encouragements to repentance so as to pass the Final Judgment and enter into the Kingdom of God. Here is found the good news that Jesus offers to Israel. It is doubtful that Luke would have changed Jesus' emphasis on encouragement to repentance, once Luke moved into the story of Acts. On the contrary, one reads Acts with this Gospel reality in view. It seems more logical to read 28,28 against the tendency of Luke to offer encouragement to repentance⁽³⁶⁾. Paul himself had expressed a goal for his life identical to that of Jesus: "...to open eyes... to turn from darkness to light, from dominion of Satan to God, that... they may obtain forgiveness of sins and a portion among God's people" (Acts 26,18). This speech before Agrippa is written as a final reminder of the essence of Paul's work, and so the expression within it of Jesus' reason for sending Paul is of the greatest importance. If, then, Paul knew his role to be that of one to motivate to repentance, it seems best to understand 28,26-28 under this same rubric.

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The remarks of Paul to departing Jewish leaders (finally widened to πλείονες) in Rome lead up to, and conclude with a sentence introduced by οὖν; it is also an expressed (though third-person)

⁽³⁴⁾ The sense of the verb βιάζεται is best understood as "being strongly encouraged"; Jesus has this as his daily purpose. Cf. the comment of FITZMYER, *Acts*, 1117, who cites others in support of this interpretation.

⁽³⁵⁾ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ὀρισμένος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ κριτὴς ζώντων καὶ νεκρῶν.

⁽³⁶⁾ Cf. Acts 5,31; also, "To the very end Paul remains faithful to the Lord's calling to bear witness to both Jews and Gentiles...Neither Jewish rejection nor Roman imprisonment prevents him from preaching 'with all boldness' in response to this call", TANNERHILL, *Narrative Unity*, II, 352.

command. The full sentence is addressed to a limited audience, even if the Isaian citation leading up to it is addressed, centuries earlier, to the larger group, to “this people”⁽³⁷⁾. What this Pauline audience is to know is an event expressed as already begun⁽³⁸⁾, an event, therefore, which does not begin with these Jews’ refusal⁽³⁹⁾ of Jesus (“this salvation”), nor can they be said to know of this event before Paul’s words in 28,28. Literarily and theologically the moment of Jewish refusal is not, as in 13,46 and 18,6, what leads to a preaching to the Gentiles; preaching to the Gentiles has already begun long before Paul arrives in Rome. The question, then, is ‘of what value is this information to Paul’s audience’? The best answer, one which coincides with the overall context of Luke-Acts, is that knowledge of the preaching of salvation, already underway, from Israel’s God to the Gentiles should spur the present audience to repentance and belief⁽⁴⁰⁾. From this perspective, Acts 28,26-28, a speech ordered to repentance and faith, is not a condemnation or abandonment of Jews; it means to lay bare the evil of hearts and eyes and ears closed to the truth, in the hope that one might take stock of oneself and respond positively to the God who promises, “I will heal you”⁽⁴¹⁾.

Thus, Theophilus, to whom Gospel and Acts are written, understands not only how it came about that he received the offer of

⁽³⁷⁾ Differently: “...estas palabras de Pablo en v. 25-28 son válidas para todos los judíos y difícilmente se limitan exclusivamente a los de Roma”, M. BENÉITEZ, *Esta salvación de Dios (Hech 28,28)* (Madrid 1986) 387.

⁽³⁸⁾ Peter’s second Jerusalem speech (Acts 3,11-26) is not only ‘witness’ (in line with Acts 1,8), but is predominantly a speech of exhortation, filled with motives for repentance, not the least of which (in contrast to Peter’s Pentecostal speech) is a way of seeing Jesus’ death as an act brought about *κατὰ ἄγνοιαν* (3,17). All that Peter says is aimed here at the urging *μετανοήσατε* (3,19).

⁽³⁹⁾ While it is true, as Luke remarks, that *οἱ μὲν ἐπέειπον τοῖς λεγομένοις*, it also true that Luke cannot here announce the baptism of any of Paul’s hearers; thus, we do not confuse persuasion with belief. Another example of those who hear favorably, but still lack baptism and so fall short of faith, is found in Acts 19,1-7.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Cf. J. DUPONT, *La Sainte Bible. Les Actes des Apôtres* (Paris, 1964) 220: “Paul souhaite que cette docilité des Gentils soit un stimulant pour les Juifs: cf. Rm 10,19; 11,11.14”.

⁽⁴¹⁾ We have noted the speech meant to turn hearts to repentance in Acts 3,13-26. A speech which apparently does not mean to cause conversion is that of Stephen in Acts 7. Even the Pentecostal speech of Peter in Acts 2, though in itself does reveal evil but calls for no conversion, shows its fuller role to persuade in the verses immediately following it: *τί ποιήσωμεν, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί?* and the response *μετανοήσατε*.

faith in Jesus, but the continual offer of salvation to πάντας, Jew and Greek alike.

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SUMMARY

The Isaian citation, used by Paul to describe his encounter with certain Jews in Rome, does not stand alone: it leads to a conclusion, a conclusion which is an imperative and an assurance. What is commanded is a knowledge of the plan of God already in motion, a plan to offer salvation to Jews and Gentiles. As information for Jews of Rome, this final word of Paul is best understood as a motive for repentance; knowledge of the divine plan of God, which will succeed (28b), serves as an encouragement to Roman Jews to 'turn and be healed by Me'.