

HEARING ABOUT JESUS, BUT THINKING ABOUT JOEL:
EXPLORING THE BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN SPIRITUAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The salvation-restoration oracle in Joel 1 and 2 depicts the four phases of a spiritual cycle that has economic consequences: backsliding causes Yahweh to progressively remove His blessing, thus creating economic “recession”; disobedience (i.e. deliberate, blatant sin) leads to “depression”; true, heart-felt repentance causes Yahweh to reinstate His blessing, which kick-starts the process of “recovery”; and increasing levels of obedience lead ultimately to full blessing, which results in “prosperity”.

In particular, Joel 2:28 suggests that the outpouring of economic blessing, as depicted by the literary motif “grain, oil and new wine”, will either precede or occur in close proximity to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, since the apostle Peter made specific reference to this passage at the beginning of his Pentecost sermon, I would suggest that when those devout, God-fearing Jews in the audience were hearing about Jesus, they were also thinking about Joel; or, to be more precise, the promises of economic transformation outlined in that book. However, this should not come as any surprise, since ancient peoples often decided questions of obedience and loyalty to a particular deity, particularly nature-gods, based on the promises of “divine” provision and protection.

I further argue that the text of Acts contains sufficient evidence to suggest that the economic prosperity promised in the OT salvation-restoration oracles was actually experienced by the primitive church community in Jerusalem in the post-Pentecost period, if only for a brief period lasting approximately three to three and a half years. Also, we may infer from an alternative interpretation of *diakonein trapezais*, in Acts 6:2, that this

economic “bounty” would have been greatly enhanced by the activities of a thriving banking facility within the new sect – operating within the temple precincts and controlled initially by the Hebrew apostles, but subsequently by seven Hellenist *trapezitai*: i.e. bankers. Consequently, it is possible that the persecution experienced by the Hellenist members of the Jerusalem congregation was motivated primarily by economic factors, although doctrinal issues certainly provided a convenient excuse.

In addition, the results of a simple survey of church history and economic cycles from 1782 to 1973 indicate that the economic promises contained in the OT salvation-restoration oracles remain relevant within the modern era. If true, this has major ramifications for modern evangelism and mission work, particularly since the majority of current church growth is occurring in countries where most of the population lives below the poverty line.

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1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“People respond to incentives; all the rest is commentary” (Landsburg, 1995:3).¹

1.1 The aim and purpose of the dissertation

As the subtitle states, the aim of this dissertation is to explore the biblical and historical relationship between spiritual and economic “transformation”, more commonly referred to as “revival”.

This will be achieved primarily by examining first the promises and then the possible fulfilment of the OT salvation-restoration oracles,² with a focus on three periods: the various centuries covered by the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible), the period focussing on the primitive church community in Jerusalem,³ and also the modern era. In particular, I argue that the material/economic blessings described in these OT prophecies were ex-

¹ Also mentioned in abbreviated form in Levitt and Dubner (2009:XII-XIII)

² For the purpose of this enquiry, I have combined a variety of OT prose and poetic “salvation” and/or “restoration” oracles (e.g. in Joel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) under the single description, “salvation-restoration oracles”. This is in accord with Westermann’s explanation (1991:272) that “The salvation that results from deliverance means first of all the restoration of a whole relationship with God. This, moreover, includes of necessity the restoration of all other areas of life as well”. Block (1998:754) actually uses the phrase “Salvation/restoration oracles”, but only in his index, in order to pull together a number of separate salvation and restoration oracle references into a single category.

³ Luke uses *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), generally translated as ‘church’, as early as Acts 2:47 (also 5:12; 8:1, 3). Therefore, I have chosen to use the term “primitive church” to depict the nascent sect of Jewish “Jesus-Believers” that constituted the original Jerusalem congregation, as described in Acts 2 to 7. I appreciate that this descriptor has fallen out of favour in recent years; however, the current alternatives are unsatisfactory for the purposes of this enquiry. For example, “Christian community in Jerusalem” (e.g. Kollman, 2004:63), “early Christian community” (Kollman, 2004:11-12), “early Christian community in Jerusalem” (Esler, 1987:149), and even the “Christian Jewish community in Jerusalem” (Crossan, 1999:421) are more relevant after Acts 7, since the appellation “Christian” does not appear until Acts 11:12; similarly, “apostolic community” (e.g. Cassidy, 1987:29), “Jerusalem community” (e.g. Lüdemann, 1989:61) and “the community of followers of Jesus” (Moxnes, 1993:261) covers too broad a time period. I even considered coining “the pioneer church community in Jerusalem”, which, though accurate in every respect, proved rather unwieldy. Thus, because ‘primitive church’ was for such a long time the most useful way of referring to this specific congregation, as mentioned in Acts 2 to 7, and also because I felt that this enquiry was not the proper place to “reinvent the wheel” so to speak, I have chosen to retain this older descriptor.

perienced by the primitive church – alongside the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – if only for a very short period that commenced on the Day of Pentecost and lasted for approximately three to three and a half years. I also test the theory that these same benefits of economic transformation may have been available throughout later centuries for exploitation by devout adherents of the Jewish and Christian faiths: i.e. “the people of Yahweh”.⁴ However, whether or not Yahweh’s people have ever had the microeconomic genius necessary to take full advantage of His macroeconomic stratagems is another question altogether.

It is widely accepted that our English word ‘economics’ originates from the Greek *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία), meaning ‘management of a household, administration’: a compound of *oikos* (οἶκος), ‘household’, and *nomos* (νόμος), ‘principle, custom or law’;⁵ the verb being *nemein* (νέμειν), ‘to allot, manage or arrange’.⁶ On that basis, the purpose of this enquiry can be described broadly-speaking as an attempt to improve our understanding of the fundamental economic ‘principles, rules or laws’ that Yahweh is reputed to have prescribed for the material benefit and management of His particular ‘household’: i.e. His people down through the ages. Obviously, any enquiry involving Yahweh and/or scripture cannot be totally value-free. Nevertheless, my primary interest here is in economic questions, to the exclusion of many wider theological issues – except where

⁴ In an enquiry spanning five thousand years of history, we invariably encounter problems concerning terminology when attempting to describe a number of different groups in different historical periods. In searching for an adequate phrase that would encompass all groups, at all times in history, who have worshipped or currently worship Yahweh – specifically, those peoples who were /are beneficiaries of the various covenants between Yahweh and mankind (e.g. ancient Hebrews, Israelites, Jews, including proselytes, Jewish Christians, Messianic Jews, Gentile Christians both ancient and modern, etc.) – I came to the conclusion that the catch-all phrase “people of Yahweh” was probably the most suitable.

⁵ Strong’s (G3551) defines *nomos* (νόμος) as ‘that which is assigned, hence usage, law’.

⁶ As Finley (1973:1, 17) and Stegemann and Stegemann (2001:16) remind us, the earliest known treatise on economics is entitled “*Oikonomikos*”, written before the middle of the fourth century BC by Xenophon, an Athenian. It was a guide for elite landowners.

such issues impact economic conditions or results. And so, in a similar way that say computer operating software is based on programming “rules” that need to be adhered to – if an individual wishes merely to use their computer, let alone gain significant benefit from it – I would suggest that scripture also contains ‘rules, principles or laws’ (reputedly designed by Yahweh) that need to be adhered to in order for His people to gain some level of material, economic benefit.⁷

Consequently, this enquiry commences with a review of the OT salvation-restoration oracles, which contain Yahweh’s promise of (and also requirements for) an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, either in tandem with or in close proximity to the outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine”, an agro-economic literary motif found in a number of OT books.⁸ Thompson (1981:571) explains in his commentary on Jeremiah 31:12 that the reference to a bountiful supply of grain, oil and new wine (plus, in this particular verse, the young of the flock and herd) is evidence of divine favour, which is why this particular motif is such a crucial component of the OT salvation-restoration oracles in general and blessing formula in particular. Furthermore, the motif acts as something of a signpost, alerting us to passages that, when taken together, form an economic thread weaving its way throughout much of the OT; appearing in Numbers, Deuteronomy, 2 Chronicles, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah – and eventually resurfacing in the Book of Revelations.

⁷ The question of whether these rules/principles were “designed” or “revealed” by a divine being (e.g. Yahweh), or a result of the collective consciousness of humans over many centuries of interaction with their natural environment, is not an issue here, since ancient man obviously believed that adherence to these rules/principles brought him some kind of benefit – and on that basis, they are worthy of our attention.

⁸ I have used the word “grain” throughout this study, except when quoting directly from an MS, text or other literary source that uses “corn”. Also, where applicable, I have used “new wine” to replace the rather eccentric “grape juice” employed by the Amplified Bible, which is my primary source for scripture quotations.

However, my reason for singling out Joel in the title is because this particular book contains both a spiritual *and* economic bridge between the old covenant and the new,⁹ through the specific reference in Peter's Pentecost sermon. Using this as my foundation, I argue that the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises concerning the outpouring of His "bounty" – in the context of contemporaneous economic and spiritual transformation – is evident in both explicit and implicit form in the early chapters of Acts. In fact, it is possible that the conflict described in Acts 2 to 8, between the religious and political authorities in Jerusalem and the new sect of Jesus-Believers,¹⁰ was motivated primarily by economic factors, rather than solely by doctrinal differences, as traditional exegesis has led us to believe; although doctrinal issues obviously provided an excellent excuse for the authorities to deal with the economic threat in a decisive fashion.

⁹ Obviously, Jeremiah 31 (which contains the only actual OT reference to the new covenant) and Ezekiel 36 perform this function as well; however, they do not enjoy the distinction of being quoted by the apostle Peter at Pentecost.

¹⁰ As mentioned previously, the central thrust of this enquiry deals with the very beginnings of Christianity; namely, the first three or so years after Pentecost in a single location: Jerusalem. Therefore, 'sect', *hairesis* (αἵρεσις), is an accurate descriptor; especially since (a) it is used throughout this paper almost exclusively in the context of the relationship/tension between the temple authorities and the new group; and (b) for the period covered by Acts 2 to 8:3, all members of the primitive church congregation in Jerusalem are Jewish (or at least Jewish proselytes). Granted, the use of *hairesis* in Acts 24:5, 14 and 28:2 suggests that the word was sometimes used in a pejorative sense; however, in these particular verses, the word is either part of a speech, polemic or comment made by a non-Christian (24:5 and 28:22), or by Paul mentioning how others describe "the Way" (24:14). According to Fitzgerald (forthcoming), *hairesis* (which also means 'school' as in 'school of philosophy') [Author's note: in *Antiquities* 18.1.2-5, Josephus substitutes *philosophia* for *haireseis* and therefore appears to regard the two words as interchangeable and thus equivalents] is derived from the verb *haireomai* in the sense of 'to take for or to oneself', 'to take in preference to', and thus 'to prefer'. Use of the term therefore calls attention to the choice that people made voluntarily in regard to which of the competing doctrines (*dogmata*) they preferred. Thus, generally, the characterization of Christianity in terms of a 'sect' is fundamentally descriptive and neutral as a category, not pejorative. For his interpretation of *haireomai*, see Liddell, Scott and Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925) p. 42. Also, Acts 4:32 refers to the Jerusalem congregation as "the company (or congregation) of *believers*" (my italics); and the word "believer" is also used in Acts 16:1 (elsewhere in 2 Corinthians 6:15; Galatians 3:9, 1 Titus 5:16 in the NASB, and 1 Titus 4:12 in the KJV). It is the Greek *pistos* (πιστός), from the verb *peithō*, 'to persuade, to induce one by words to believe'; also 'to trust': e.g. Matthew 27:43, "He trusted in God".

1.2 The ‘cross-discipline’ approach

To describe the approach within this enquiry as “cross-discipline” is perhaps a euphemistic way of saying that it falls between two separate academic and ideologically distinct stools: theology and economics.¹¹ Over the centuries, the differences have created certain tensions; consequently, there are times when the distance between the stools can be considerable.

For example, Jackson and Fleischer (2007:1) write that, based on Stark and Bainbridge’s definition (1985:3-8), “religion consists of a set of coherent and shared beliefs, activities and institutions premised upon faith in supernatural forces”.¹² On the other hand, Tomes (1985:245) asserts that “economics is fundamentally atheistic”; as a result, “Religious beliefs, practices and behaviour play no role in the life of *Homo Economicus*”. However, history shows that this has not always been the case, as there was a time when biblical texts and commentaries represented a major source of evidence used in western economic theory and/or arguments. For instance, Jones (1989:1) explains that The Act

¹¹ For an instructive and helpful review of the literature dealing with the interaction between religion and economics, I recommend Jackson and Fleischer (2007). Their working paper is part of the Religions and Development Research Programme at the University of Birmingham, an international research partnership launched in 2005 to explore the relationships between several major world religions, development in low-income countries and poverty reduction.

¹² The word “religion” comes from the Anglo-French ‘*religiun*’ (11th century), meaning ‘conduct indicating a belief in a divine power’. From an anthropological viewpoint, Spiro (2004:94) states that religion ought to be defined by its core variable: “the belief in superhuman beings and their power to assist or to harm”, which he states “approaches universal distribution” among the academy. Similarly, Epstein (2010:109), a humanist chaplain at Harvard University, explains that “essentially, all the world’s religions were founded on the principle that divine beings or forces can promise a level of justice in a supernatural realm that cannot be perceived in the natural one”. Furthermore, to help understand the ways in which “religion” is constructed – from both a historical and social viewpoint – and to understand how such constructions are made and who benefits from them (or, in the author’s own words, “how the word religion carries a variable number of normative associations, and consequently how the classification of something as ‘religion’ can be used to advance a social agenda”), I recommend Craig Martin (2010); especially his first two chapters, “On Using Religion” (pp. 1-12) and “Delimiting Religion” (pp. 13-32). The latter chapter is based on an earlier essay, “Delimiting Religion”, in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 21, issue 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

Against Usury of 1571 was debated in the English parliament on the grounds of how the Word of God should be applied to the subject; viz. “how Parliament might best understand and enforce the will of God” (1989:198). Accordingly, most of the arguments presented were sourced from the writings of theological giants, such as Aquinas and Calvin;¹³ however, just 53 years later, when the Act was amended in 1624, the Members of Parliament treated usury as a secular issue.¹⁴ God was virtually ignored and, according to Jones (1989:199), “The theocentric, communal, and theologically defined approach to money-lending had been replaced by one that was secular, individualistic, and defined by economic thought”.¹⁵

As a consequence, like other social sciences, economics has been heavily influenced by “secularisation theory”,¹⁶ which Clarke (2007:77) defines as “the belief (in Wilson’s classic formulation) that ‘religious institutions, actions and consciousness lose their social significance’ over time as societies modernise”.¹⁷ According to Stark and Bainbridge (1985:429), the term “secularisation” is used to mean “the erosion of belief in the

¹³ In *Summa Theologica II* (Question 78), Aquinas argued that lending with interest was “an inequality contrary to justice” because the presence of interest indicated that the lender received more value out of the transaction than did the borrower; however, he condoned interest-bearing loans extended to and amongst merchants, for reasons described below in Section 6.7, “A question of interest”. On the other hand, Calvin (1991:139) claimed that “there is no scriptural passage that totally bans all usury”; and also explained (1991:140-141) that there was a difference between the Hebrew *tarbit*, ‘to take legitimate increase’, which merchants do on a regular basis, and the more oppressive-sounding *neshek*, ‘to bite’. Unfortunately, in the Latin Vulgate, both words were translated by Jerome in the pejorative sense as ‘usury’: i.e. *usura*, which is also the word for ‘leech’ in modern Italian. Calvin concluded his argument by asserting (1991:141) that “we ought not to judge usury according to a few passages in scripture, but in accordance with the principles of equity”.

¹⁴ According to an edict issued by the Third Lateran Council in 1179, Christians who practiced usury faced excommunication; however, the usury laws in England were finally scrapped in 1833 (mentioned in Ferguson, 2008:35, 54).

¹⁵ Jones contends that the traditional theological arguments against charging interest on loans were overwhelmed by the pressing need to finance the expansion of Britain’s global mercantile interests, which arose out of the successful exploits of the English seafaring “adventurers” during the reign of Elizabeth I.

¹⁶ Barro and McCleary (2002:3) assert that the secularisation hypothesis dates back to the 1930s and can be attributed to Max Weber.

¹⁷ See Wilson (1992: 49), in Clarke (2007:91, n.2)

supernatural – a loss of faith in the existence of otherworldly forces”. And Clarke further asserts that the influence of secularisation theory within economics has been evident in two key respects: (a) secular reductionism (“the neglect of religious variables in favour of other sociological attributes, such as class, ethnicity and gender”); and (b) materialistic determinism (“the neglect of non-material, especially religious motivations in explaining individual or institutional behaviour”). Hence, we may speculate that, even before any argument is presented, this enquiry faces potential prejudice and thus problems on both sides of this academic divide: firstly, from orthodox economists who, being “fundamentally atheistic”, would be disinclined to explore or even entertain anything of an “otherworldly” or “non-material” nature; and, secondly, from theologians who may have ideological problems with concepts that are blatantly designed to promote economic growth and prosperity – especially if there is any suggestion that the prosperity could be divinely orchestrated.

Jones (1989:174) implies that, historically-speaking, blame for the separation of economics and religion ought to be laid primarily at the feet of the Puritans, who argued that certain moral issues, which included usury, should be a matter of individual conscience. Thus, it was theologians who “cleared the way for the emergence of economics as a science separate from theology”;¹⁸ and, in the process, gave “the governing classes of England a new [secular] way to analyse laws which affected markets, money, and social behavior”. The genesis of modern, secular economics (and the separation from its religious roots) can also be seen in the 1690 treatise on “Political Arithmetik” by Sir William

¹⁸ However, it was probably Bagehot (2006:7), one of the early editors of *The Economist* magazine, who (in 1885) established forever the secular status of economics by defining it as “the science of business”.

Petty, who explains in his Preface that he chose to “express [himself] in Terms of Number, Weight, or Measure; to use only Arguments of Sense, and to consider only such causes, as have visible Foundations in Nature; leaving those that depend upon mutable Minds, Opinions, Appetites, and Passions of particular Men, to the Considerations of others”. According to Ball (2004:3), Petty believed that the science of political arithmetic “could free a nation’s leaders from man’s irrationality, and be used to fashion sound and verifiable principles of governance”.¹⁹

In keeping with Petty’s so-called scientific aims – and also perhaps his aversion to “mutable minds, opinions, appetites, and passions” – modern economists often rely on computer-driven models based on rational choice theory: the idea that the world is made up of rational people who make rational decisions, albeit for reasons of self-interest.²⁰ However, the global economic crisis that commenced in mid-2007 has shown that self-interest can sometimes drive human economic decisions beyond the boundaries of rationality,²¹ thus rendering these so-called scientific models “useless”, to quote one of the

¹⁹ In his 1698 work, “Discourse on the Public Revenues”, Sir Charles Davenport defined political arithmetic as “the art of reasoning with figures, upon things relating to government” (cited in Finley, 1973:25).

²⁰ Rational choice theory, also known as rational action theory, is the dominant theoretical paradigm in macroeconomics: e.g. the 1992 Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to Gary Becker for his work on the rationality of human behaviour. However, Rosenau (2006:61-79) suggests that our views of rational choice theory need to be revised because traditional economic models have been shown to be poor predictors of economic behaviour. Furthermore, Zaman (2008:11), an Islamic economist, argues that “the [Western] model of ‘rational self-interest’ is not ‘natural’, does not correspond to actual human behaviour, and does not offer any special advantages over other methods for constructing economic models”.

²¹ It is generally believed that the pivotal event marking the commencement of the crisis was Lehman Brothers’ filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in September 2008; however, this was preceded and in part caused by events in June 2007 when, as Ferguson (2008:271-278) informs us, a hedge fund owned by Bear Stearns (which was heavily exposed to sub-prime mortgages – one of the major building blocks of collateralized debt obligations or CDOs) was wound up, creating serious problems throughout the banking and insurance industry. On that basis, I have used the term “2007/8 global economic crisis” throughout this enquiry. For a helpful insight into the extraordinary and *irrational* level of individual and corporate self-interest behind this global financial meltdown, I recommend Michael Lewis (2010), an ex-banker turned popular author. His documentary-style book provides numerous insider accounts of what took place at the big banks and insurance firms leading up to the crisis; and while, from an academic point of view, his analysis may

profession's luminaries.²² But whether or not the current financial problems will lead orthodox economists to reconsider their views on "religious beliefs, practices and behaviour" is yet to be shown. On the other hand, the present crisis has no doubt deepened the existing prejudice of many theologians against any kind of free market economic activity, as the possible benefits of capitalism continue to be overshadowed by the harm done by capitalists, both individually and collectively.

Nevertheless, the present ideological distance between theology and economics ignores the fact that, from antiquity, religion has held out the promise of some sort of economic benefit or "blessing", as we find, for example, in the worship of ancient nature-gods, who supposedly controlled all the natural elements that ensure or impede a successful harvest. In fact, writing about the ancient Aryan pastoralists who lived on the steppes of southern Russia during the third and fourth millennium BC, Armstrong (2006:6) goes so far as to claim that "the benefits of [their] religion were *purely* material and this-worldly" (my italics). Therefore, I would argue that economics is and always has been an integral component of religion and religious life. Consequently, any religion whose doctrine does not include the possibility of economic "blessing" will progressively lose whatever following and attendant authority/influence it originally possessed,

need to be treated with caution, the specific examples he quotes are extremely revealing. For instance, he cites (2010:97) a particularly irrational credit transaction in Bakersfield, California, in which a migrant strawberry picker who earned USD \$14,000 per year and spoke no English was granted a 100% mortgage for \$724,000. Apparently, this and similar mortgages of dubious quality were marketed aggressively by banks and other financial institutions in an attempt to hoodwink the ratings agencies (e.g. Moody's and Standard & Poor's) into believing that the loan portfolios underpinning their CDOs deserved an AAA or other investment-grade rating.

²² In 2009, Paul Krugman, winner of the 2008 Nobel prize for economics, admitted that much of the past 30 years of macroeconomics was "spectacularly useless at best, and positively harmful at worst". Barry Eichengreen, a prominent American economic historian, has also claimed that the 2007/8 global economic crisis has "cast into doubt much of what we thought we knew about economics". See "What went wrong with economics?" in *The Economist* magazine, July 16th 2009.

which may explain why the Christian tradition in particular has fallen prey to the effects of secularisation, as humanity flocked en masse to a better offer.

At the same time, it is also worth noting that secular economic efforts have sometimes failed because of a lack of “faith”: i.e. faith in perhaps a government, an institution or more likely the people involved; or alternatively, because of people’s lack of faith in their own ability to improve their lot in life. As a result, national economies fail to grow, enterprises fail to attract investors and/or customers, and governments pour huge amounts of economic development funding into poverty-stricken areas with virtually nil effect. Finally, the current segregation of economics and religion also discounts the fact that banking originated in temples, for which we have attested evidence dating as far back as 3400 BC.²³ And since theologians appear to have ignored this and other aspects of history, or at least failed to take them into account in their study and interpretation of the biblical text, it should come as no surprise that many orthodox economists have chosen in return to ignore scripture and other religious factors in their attempts to solve the economic problems of the world.

In other words, both sides have decided that the other is simply not relevant to their work, which is a ludicrous notion, given their linked origins and shared past.

1.3 Applying a “what-if” scenario to the biblical text

Any difference in approach and/or style exhibited by this dissertation – when compared to normal theological discourse – stems primarily from my previous professional career: more than 20 years working as a banker.

²³ The Temple of Uruk at Eridu; see, for example, Chachi (2005:4, 21) and Davies (2002:50).

Because of that, it was inevitable that my interest would be drawn to sections of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant dealing with economic matters, especially those promising a “surplus of prosperity” (Deuteronomy 28:11, Amplified Version),²⁴ since leveraging and/or maximising economic surplus has been the primary function of banks and bankers for millennia. In fact, it is possible that the Deuteronomists may have had some form of ancient banking activity in mind in the passage describing Yahweh’s promise to command the blessing upon His people in their barns and storehouses (Deuteronomy 28:8). These storage facilities presumably housed the surplus grain from abundant (i.e. blessed) harvests; and, in the pre-coinage era, when payments were made in kind, substantial profits could be made from the possession of surplus grain – not only through grain trading, but also from a range of deposit and loan activities normally associated with banking.²⁵

Furthermore, my professional work included the regular use of financial modelling that required me to run what are called “what-if scenarios” based on the data I was reviewing: e.g. What if interest rates rose 1 percent? What effect would that have on corporate profits? The proven usefulness of these exercises inspired the idea of applying a what-if scenario to the text of Acts 6:1-7, which in turn created one of the central arguments of this dissertation: What if the Greek phrase *diakonein trapezais*, in Acts 6:2, which

²⁴ Other ET bibles have “abundant prosperity” (NIV), “abound in prosperity” (NASB), “lavish with good things” (The Message), and “plenteous in goods” (KJV).

²⁵ Taken literally, a blessing on the harvest creates an abundant harvest, presumably generated by Yahweh’s provision of the natural elements such as sun and rain at the optimal time. However, for a blessing to occur in the people’s barns and storehouses (Deuteronomy 28:8), where the surplus of the already blessed harvest has been stored, it suggests that Yahweh will bless some kind of activity conducted with that surplus, such as grain trading and/or grain banking. Also, the verb ‘command’ (28:8) is the Hebrew *tsavah*, meaning ‘to cause to exist’, which suggests that Yahweh is proactively involved in this secondary, trading or banking activity.

has traditionally been translated ‘to serve at tables’, was re-interpreted, using the alternative and explicitly commercial translation of *trapeza*, which is ‘bank’?²⁶ This would mean that the seven Hellenists listed in Acts 6:5 were not called to be “deacons”, but were chosen instead to ‘serve in the bank’ (literally, ‘to serve at the banking tables’),²⁷ and were thus operating as *trapezitai* (bankers or merchant-financiers) within the primitive church community. I hasten to add that this suggestion is not based on linguistic arguments alone, since religious sects had been operating temple-banking facilities for something like three millennia prior to Pentecost.²⁸ Therefore, it is highly likely that the new sect of Jesus-Believers would choose to continue the tradition, which makes a banking interpretation for *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 eminently plausible, as I argue below in some detail.

The application of this what-if scenario to the text of Acts 6:2 has given rise to further speculation. For example, if the primitive church did have its own banking operation, which was at one time controlled by Hellenist *trapezitai*, we are then obliged to re-evaluate the role and status of perhaps the most important Hellenist-capitalist within the community: Joseph-Barnabas. In fact, the exercise of viewing scripture through the lens of economics, which has been the primary (and also a very useful) methodology for much of the present enquiry, has provided potential solutions to a variety of long-

²⁶ According to Hamilton (1966: 365), “Because of the confusion of uncoordinated local coinage the earliest bankers were money-changers who sat at their tables (*trapezai*). From these tables the banker got his name (*trapezitēs*) in the same way the English ‘bank’ derives from *banque* or *banca* in the sense of bench, table, or counter”.

²⁷ If we adopt the alternative, banking-related interpretation of *trapeza* – according to Foakes Jackson and Lake, ‘a money-changer’s table, and so a bank’ (1920:64); and also Barrett, ‘a banker’s counter’ (1994:311) – the literal rendering of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 would be ‘to serve at the banking tables’, in keeping with the dative plural, *trapezais*. However, I find this somewhat clumsy, and so have chosen to use the simpler phrase: ‘to serve in the bank’.

²⁸ See Orsingher (1967:1), cited in Section 3.3, “Mesopotamian-Babylonian temple banking”

standing exegetical problems within the Lukan text. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, I am aware that theologians on the whole are rarely comfortable dealing with economic matters, as demonstrated by close to two millennia of theological tradition and writing on money and wealth creation that can generally be categorised in the negative.

When Jesus drove the money-changers from the temple precincts,²⁹ He was not protesting against the role of *trapezitai* per se since, as Hamilton (1966:372) reminds us, they were at that time providing a necessary service for festal pilgrims.³⁰ Instead, I would suggest that Christ's protest was directed more specifically towards the corruption of that role by the materialistic Sadducees who controlled the numerous commercial activities relating to the Temple and its cult, including the Temple treasury-bank. Sadly, tradition seems to have taken Christ's actions out of context and consequently devalued the potential leadership role of *trapezitai* within the national and global church community. This has produced negative consequences at both the individual and organisational level: firstly, denying those who might feel called to occupy this important, ancient role their legitimate position and function within what is now, according to the apostle Peter, a temple made of "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5); and, secondly, consigning the Christian church to an ignominious history of corporate begging and significantly underpaid workers.

Moreover, much of the global Christian community is currently living below the poverty line, and around 200 million of them are experiencing persecution for their faith,

²⁹ See Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46

³⁰ Armstrong (1997:143) agrees that, "When he drove out the money changers and pigeon-sellers, Jesus was not protesting against the commercial abuse of sacred space. Such vendors were essential to the running of any temple in late antiquity and would have occasioned no outrage".

which makes a mockery of the promises in Deuteronomy that “there will be no poor among you” (15:4), and also that “the Lord shall make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall be above only, and you shall not be beneath” (28:13). Hence, one of the purposes of this enquiry is to address these and other related issues.

1.4 Biblical Economics: a possible definition and rationale

Obviously, economics per se is not a new topic in theological circles. As mentioned previously, over the first 1,500 years or so of church history, the main economic issue addressed by theologians was the age-old controversy surrounding usury,³¹ which was tackled by Aquinas, for example, in the thirteenth century, and in later centuries by Luther, Melancthon and Calvin.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, economics has been the focus of books by biblical scholars such as Alfred Edersheim (1904), and more recently, Joachim Jeremias (1969), Martin Hengel (1974), Emil Schürer (1979),³² Douglas Oakman (1986; plus his joint venture with K. C. Hansen, 1998) and Richard Cassidy (1987), to name just a few.³³ How-

³¹ Perhaps the oldest example of a church law condemning usury was issued in 325 AD at the Council of Nicaea (Canon 17) prohibiting money-lending among the clergy

³² This 1979 work is customarily called “The New Schürer” or “The Revised Schürer”, being a revision of the original work by Emil Schürer (four editions between 1886 and 1909), and created under the editorship of Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Matthew Black; also Philip Alexander and Martin Goodman. Therefore, for the purposes of this enquiry, and also to recognise the contributions (i.e. substantial revisions and rewriting) of these latter scholars, I have cited and/or referred to these volumes as “Schürer et al”.

³³ In addition, we note the efforts of Thomas Carney (1975), Peter Oakes (2004) and Bruce Longenecker (2010), along with some secular economic historians whose work provides helpful information on the period under review, such as Raymond Bogaert (1966), Jean Andreau (1999), John Rich and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (1991), and also Dominic Rathbone (2007), among others. Collectively, economic historians tend to fall into two camps: on one side, the “primitivists”, represented by say K. Bücher (1901) and Moses Finley (1973), who believe that nothing approaching market or rational capitalism can be seen in antiquity; and on the other, the “modernists”, such as Michael Rostovtzeff (1926), T. Frank (1927) and Karl Polyani (1968), who find numerous similarities between economic life in the Roman Empire and today (as mentioned in Meggitt, 1998:42). Notably, Polyani (1979:39) argues that the ancient form of economy is comparable to the modern in

ever, these particular endeavours could be described as a compilation of historical economic facts and/or a description of the economic conditions behind the biblical text; and while eminently worthwhile, I would argue that this kind of treatment does not go far enough. Put simply, there is a need to move beyond the “what” to also examine the “how” and “why”, which means moving beyond the use of economic facts as historical background (e.g. to explain the social setting of the text), to the point where an economic perspective (i.e. viewing the biblical text through the lens of economics) becomes a legitimate exegetical tool in its own right. Consequently, until someone offers a better suggestion, I propose that the most appropriate label for this nascent, hybrid field of study is “Biblical Economics”,³⁴ which is in need of clarification, not to mention a proper definition; and perhaps the best way to start is by defining what it is not.

Firstly, Biblical Economics is *not* what is referred to generally as Religious Economics or, in some instances, Christian Economics, which Jackson and Fleischer (2007:3) describe as “encompassing views from the church on aspects of capitalism, including usury, and frequently containing wide ranging critiques of capitalism, the market, socialism, income distribution, banks, interest and taxation”.³⁵ In other words, Religious or Christian Economics is a platform for critiquing secular economic theory and/or practice, by judging it against the criteria of religion-based ethics: e.g. those drawn from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Therefore, its main purpose is to act as an intellectual frame-

terms of “a regulated process of cooperative effort between people and their surroundings that produces an ongoing provision of material means for the purpose of satisfying needs”.

³⁴ The term “Biblical Economics” has been both used and abused in magazines and on the internet for more than a decade now; however, the subject has only recently been recognised as a legitimate field of academic study. For instance, at its Annual Meeting in November 2008, the Society of Biblical Literature inaugurated a series of consultation sessions, entitled “Early Christianity and the Ancient Economy”, at which the author presented a paper dealing with some of the ideas examined in this enquiry.

³⁵ They cite Beed and Beed (1996), Gill (1994, 1998 and 2004); also Hay and Kreider (2001).

work and catalyst for the reform of existing, predominantly secular institutions of an economic or political nature.

Secondly, Biblical Economics is *not* the application of orthodox economic research techniques and modelling to the study of religious groups or activities: i.e. the view of religion as a marketplace, as per Finke et al (1996) or Iannaccone (1998). This activity is referred to as the Economics of Religion, which is exactly what it sounds like: the treatment of religion as one of society's many human pursuits whose participants engage in a range of activities that are peculiar to their particular affinity group, and which can be measured and analysed for the purposes of secular economic study. In this situation, religion is stripped of its other-worldliness to become merely another human marketplace, whose so-called faith groupings (e.g. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hindu, Buddhism, etc.) represent various niche markets, each with their own sub-niches (e.g. Protestant, Catholic, Pentecostal, etc.).

Now, while I readily accept the validity of both these approaches, neither is capable of providing a suitable intellectual home for the approach involved in this enquiry. Essentially, Religious/Christian Economics is more concerned with ethics than it is with economics; and the Economics of Religion is more concerned with secular economics than it is with religion. Therefore, theoretically speaking, you could function within either discipline without the need to make reference to scripture; whereas, in the case of Biblical Economics, that would be impossible. In fact, the qualifying adjective "Biblical" is a warning to all who enter this space that any discussion of economic matters must be

properly grounded in the terra firma of scripture.³⁶ This then brings us to the point where we must hazard a definition; and since Biblical Economics is not a mature discipline, any definition offered at this stage must therefore be considered a “work in progress”.³⁷

Since Biblical Economics is primarily the use of an economic perspective as an exegetical tool (i.e. a method of interpreting scripture), it is situated firmly within the discipline of Biblical Studies; which means that, unlike orthodox economics, Biblical Economics embraces the “supernatural” (i.e. non-material and other-worldly concepts and/or issues) with unabashed enthusiasm.³⁸ Moreover, if there are lessons to be learned from the exploration of biblical economic ‘principles’ and/or practices (and I believe there are), then the real-life economic problems that currently plague the global Judeo-Christian community have created a moral obligation to move beyond mere intellectual exercises (e.g. exegetical issues) to devise practical applications and stratagems that will

³⁶ Barry Gordon (1989), an orthodox economist who specialised in the History of Economic Thought, has also done some interesting work exploring ancient biblical economic principles.

³⁷ Since *oikonomos* can be interpreted in a general sense as ‘household management’, the study of Biblical Economics also encompasses areas other than those of a purely financial nature, such as leadership and numerous other human resources issues; however, these fall outside the scope of this particular enquiry.

³⁸ *The Oxford Dictionary* defines ‘supernatural’ as “a manifestation or event attributed to some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature”. The word is so ubiquitous as to make a definition superfluous at this level of enquiry; however, since academia as a whole – which obviously includes the study of theology – has fallen victim to the kind of secularisation mentioned above, the term “supernatural” is now compelled to be accompanied by apostrophes, which is how you will find it handled throughout this enquiry, except where I am quoting directly from scholars who have ignored/declined this practice. This would not have been a problem in antiquity, since ancient communities were generally theocentric, and so readily accepted ‘the supernatural’ – usually depicted as “acts of God” – as part and parcel of their life *and* their literature. The latter occurrences usually took the form of ‘divine intervention’ (in the human realm) or ‘divine causation’; for example, Herodotus’ report of the Greco-Persian wars (*Histories* 7.137.2) actually contains the phrase ‘divine act’. And, according to Rothschild (2004:9), ‘divine causation’ is used by ancient historians “to describe events for which natural explanations fall short in terms of either plausibility, or capturing an event’s ‘truth’ or significance, or both”. Of particular interest, Collins (1979:191) explains that “the confession of divine activity [...] is central to the biblical texts”; however, he recognises that there is a “gulf” between such confessions and what we might consider authentic, reliable historical accounts or information – a problem of credibility that has resulted in the current use of apostrophes. For a detailed discussion on the historicity of Acts, see Section 9.1, “Luke: historian or theologian?”

hopefully lead to solutions to these problems. Consequently, this nascent field of study also qualifies as an important, but thus far underexploited component of Practical Theology.³⁹

On the other hand, orthodox economists prefer to deal with factors that are measurable, which is one reason why medieval “political arithmetic” has evolved into the modern study of statistics. However, in his discussion of “the poor” in scripture, Oakes (2004:368) cautions that, while most economic studies are based on analysing (measurable) resources, “ancient sources (and certainly the New Testament) never tell us the resources of a particular poor person or group. They tell us *behaviour*. X wears no cloak. Y sells himself into slavery. Z works as a prostitute. We cannot map this *behaviour* directly onto resources” (my italics). Consequently, the field of secular economics that fits best with the kind of exegetical approach used in this enquiry is “Behavioural Economics”, which is described as “a method of economic analysis that applies psychological insights into human behaviour [i.e. the effects of social, cognitive and emotional factors] to explain economic decision-making”.⁴⁰

³⁹ The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines ‘practical theology’ as “the study of the institutional activities of religion” – an overly-narrow definition that permits theologians to abdicate any responsibility to “get their hands dirty” with real problems in the real world. Therefore, for the purposes of this enquiry, I would prefer to describe/treat Practical Theology as “the practical application of theology to everyday life”, which obviously includes the economic component of people’s lives. Consequently, I have found it helpful to use/adapt the four questions devised by Osmer (2008:4) for exploring practical theology issues: (1) Descriptive-Empirical: What is going on – *in scripture?*; (2) Interpretative: Why is this going on – *in scripture?*; (3) Normative: What ought to be going on – *in the world?*; and (4) Pragmatic: How might we respond – *using the lessons learned from scripture in a way that can be applied in the world?*

⁴⁰ Expanded definition of ‘behavioural economics’ from The Oxford Dictionary. The link with psychology gives the impression of it being a modern academic discipline. However, its first appearance occurred in the late 18th century, during the so-called “classical” period of economics; and its pioneers include Adam Smith (in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which offered psychological explanations for individual behaviour) and Jeremy Bentham, who wrote extensively on the psychological underpinnings of “utility”. Later contributions to this field were made by Frances Edgeworth, Vilfredo Pareto and Irving Fisher.

Therefore, even though Biblical Economics is first and foremost an exegetical tool that has the ability to expand our understanding of the biblical text, it also provides a useful way of augmenting the work of researchers in the secular field of Behavioural Economics. In addition, since there is currently a lot of interest being shown by International Finance Institutions (IFIs)⁴¹ concerning the use of Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) to help solve some of the problems of aid distribution in less developed countries, Biblical Economics also offers a way of enhancing the efforts of both scholars and field workers operating in the field of Development Economics. But how does all this work in practical terms? To explain, we have to return to my statement above about the need to move on from the “what” (the use of economic facts as historical background to explain the social setting of the biblical text), to also examine the “how” and “why”. And perhaps the best way to do this is with the following example that utilises two of the main foci of this enquiry.

In Acts 4:34, for instance, the “what” is the statement by Luke that there was “no needy person” among the primitive church community in Jerusalem. “Why” this happened, as I argue below, is because the community experienced the fulfilment of the OT promises – in Joel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel et al – of an ‘outpouring’ of economic prosperity (as depicted by the literary motif, ‘grain, oil and new wine’), alongside the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁴² “How” this prosperity occurred, as I further argue, is due in part to the establishment and operation of a thriving community banking operation (*trapeza*) that provided credit/investment for business purposes, to leverage and/or maximise the prom-

⁴¹ Such as the World Bank, the IMF and the UK Department for International Development

⁴² See Section 2, “The relationship between spiritual and economic transformation”.

ised economic blessing/growth,⁴³ which, among other things, provided numerous opportunities for employment of ‘needy’ people. And “how” we might replicate this state of affairs (to provide a solution to some of our current economic problems) is by application of the lessons to be learned from this particular ‘household management principle’ in the present age. Hence, Biblical Economics might be described as “a method of exegetical analysis that applies biblical and psychological insights into human behaviour [as well as the effects of social, cognitive and emotional factors] to explain/understand the part that economic factors play in human motivation and decision-making – with the aim of applying any lessons learned to help solve current ‘economic management’ problems among the people of Yahweh”.

But does biblical exegesis need *yet another* “interpretative” methodology? At the turn of the 20th century, Frederick William Farrar (1901:145) wrote that “The history of exegesis is, in a great measure, the history of errors”. However, it would perhaps be more accurate (and also kinder) to say that it has been – and continues to be – a history of “trial and error”. Because of that, no theologian (or theological approach) would claim to have all the answers to the problems of interpreting scripture. But then, the more questions we ask, the more answers we will discover – particularly if we ask *different* questions, which are usually generated by utilising a different approach, or at least a different perspective. Ergo, there is significant value in utilising a hitherto unexploited economic perspective as a forensic exegetical tool.

⁴³ See Section 4, “From Pentecost to persecution: the economic context of Acts 2 to 8”; specifically, Sections 4.13, “No needy person among them”, and 4.18, “The Seven Hellenist ‘trapezitai’”.

Now, the key, historical “error” that this nascent field of study attempts to redress is not one of commission but *omission*: for example, omitting to take into account the economic expectations of the Jewish people (in Jerusalem in 33/37 AD, in particular) regarding their religious beliefs and traditions. Because of this omission, NT scholars have failed, collectively-speaking, to explore the ramifications of alternate, specialised economic or commercial meanings of certain Greek words and phrases in the biblical text: e.g. *diakonein trapezais*, *chreia* and perhaps even *koinōnia*. Furthermore, a similar failure to appreciate the complexity of economic life in ancient society has led these same scholars to make assumptions that the economic activities of the primitive church were crude (i.e. a first-century “soup kitchen”)⁴⁴ and thus rather simple. Finally, these assumptions have led them to offer unsatisfactory solutions to perceived problems with the text – which in turn has led to various accusations that Luke’s accounts of events are “implausible”.⁴⁵

My interest in the connection between religion (in particular, the Judeo-Christian tradition) and economics stems in part from a meeting some time ago with the late Dr Johann Millendorfer, a highly regarded Austrian economist and also a devout Christian.

⁴⁴ The phrase “soup kitchen” is used by Johnson and Harrington (1992:106) to describe the ‘daily distribution’ mentioned in Acts 6:1

⁴⁵ For example, by ignoring the economic context of Peter’s Pentecost sermon (as suggested by the reference to Joel, and allusion to similar economic promises in Jeremiah, Ezekiel et al), we are asked to judge Luke’s account of events on the basis that spiritual or religious reasons and these alone motivated “3,000 souls” to repent and be baptised after hearing a short sermon; a result that has been criticised as “implausible” (e.g. Rothschild, 2004:277). However, by exploring the possible economic motivation/s involved (e.g. the fact that this sermon is likely to have occurred during an empire-wide economic crisis, in a city where the central bank was reputedly corrupt, as discussed below), Luke’s numbers in fact begin to look more and more plausible. This argument in no way denigrates the motivational potency of Jewish non-material expectations at that time concerning the advent of the Messiah and messianic age, which Peter’s sermon explicitly tapped into. Nevertheless, the combination of spiritual *and* economic expectations would have provided more than enough motivation to elicit the level of response reported by Luke in Acts 2:41. For more discussion on the power of “expectations”, see Section 2.8, “Prosperity in proper perspective: solving the endemic problem of scarcity”, in particular, the comments cited from William Easterly (2002) and van Duijn (1983).

I do not believe that he ever used the label “Biblical Economics”, which is understandable, since he worked as an economic consultant on behalf of a client list that included corporations and government agencies, but chose instead to coin a more secular phrase: “The Humane-Economic Principle”. In different papers in which he, along with colleagues from the STUDIA group, examined the socio-psychological causes behind different economic conditions,⁴⁶ Millendorfer wrote (e.g. 1985:144) that, “The disturbance of [economic] equilibrium [...] is characterized by an overemphasis of things, compared with the importance of man”. His findings also showed that problems arise when “high economic systems performance” (i.e. economic prosperity) leads eventually to “the dominance of the economic system over the human realm”, which echoes Christ’s comment, in Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13, about humans being ‘in the service’ (Greek: *doulos*; literally, ‘a slave’) of mammon.

Unfortunately, both scripture and economic history show that human nature is such that, collectively, humans do not possess the moral fortitude and discipline necessary to resist these powerful and potentially dominating forces. Therefore, in order to seek a solution to this and related problems, we are left with no alternative but to look beyond the human experience and explore what the prophet Isaiah described as “higher thoughts” and “higher ways” (Isaiah 55:9): e.g. the kind of macroeconomic principles-cum-rules that form Yahweh’s timeless strategy of provision for His *oikos*, which today consists of billions of people and conducts its affairs on a global scale. In this way, Bibli-

⁴⁶ Studiengruppe für Internationale Analysen (STUDIA) is an Austrian research group founded by Johann Millendorfer that has become known for economic research that combines analysis of both “soft” (socio-psychological) and “hard” (data-driven) factors.

cal Economics also qualifies as a form of normative economics: advocating what *ought* to be.

1.5 A discussion of some of the historical source material

Obviously, I could not “move beyond the use of economic facts as historical background” (as mentioned above) without actually depending on the work of the historians concerned. As a consequence, it would be helpful to discuss the merits and/or failings of these sources.

For example, I found Schürer et al (1979) and Jeremias (1969) particularly helpful; specifically, their comprehensive description/compilation of the economic conditions in Judea at the time under review, and especially the latter scholar’s discussion of the commercial activity focused on the Temple and temple cult. However, I am aware that, while Hengel (1981:xi), for example, lauds Jeremias as “the most significant New Testament scholar of the last generation in Germany”, and Leaney (1971:35) calls him “one of the greatest New Testament scholars of our time”, he is not without his critics; in particular, Sanders (1987). Consequently, Jeremias’ study of the economic conditions in Jerusalem should be treated with some caution, since he has been accused of not applying any kind of literary or form-critical examination to his historical-economic source materials. As Neusner (1971:202) comments: “The work everywhere assumes the equally historical usefulness of all references to Jerusalem (and many not to Jerusalem), wherever and whenever they appear [...] Everything, whether early or late, is taken equally seriously [...] the texts are read in a completely literal and uncritical spirit”.

It is therefore seen as problematic, for instance, when scholars like Schürer et al and Jeremias – and others, such as Foakes Jackson and Lake, Bruce, Hengel, Conzelmann, Marshall and Read-Heimerdinger – use the Mishnah to support their exegesis of passages in Acts. The central issue here is whether the rabbinical literature, codified by Judah the Patriarch between 180 and 200 AD, is an appropriate source to use in examining/interpreting events that occurred in Jerusalem in the earlier part of the first century AD.⁴⁷ However, we are informed by Smith (1990:731-732) that the Mishnah is based on the oral tradition handed down over the centuries from Ezra (fourth century BC) to the period dominated by the famous Pharisee scholars, Hillel and Shammai (just prior to 10 AD). Consequently, when a NT scholar like Jeremias (1969:126-127) claims, for example, that the rabbinical edict setting a limit on the percentage of their “means” that people could give away in pious or charitable donations was “recognized as a precept in the first century AD”, we can appreciate both the author’s caution and the reasons why his claim is valid.⁴⁸ Therefore, I would suggest that, where the appropriate care is exhibited, particular Mishnah references can be considered relevant to the present enquiry.

In addition, Jeremias, Schürer et al – and thus the present enquiry – have drawn heavily on Josephus, who Schürer et al (1979: 221-222) describe as “the best known historian of Jewish affairs in the Greek language”; however, doubts have been raised concerning the reliability of this ancient source – an issue that has never been truly resolved. Broshi (1982) notes that “duality of sharp criticism alongside fulsome appreciation has

⁴⁷ For further reading on this broad topic, including the dating of the rabbinic literature, see Instone-Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament* (2004); also Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees Before 70 A.D.* (3 vols., 1970). Of particular interest to this enquiry is Neusner’s shorter work, *Economics of the Mishnah* (1990).

⁴⁸ Especially since his claim is confirmed by other scholars, such as Hengel (1974:20)

consistently accompanied the scholarly treatment of Josephus' works". While, more specifically, Oesterley (1957:5) warns that "his prejudices and idiosyncrasies make it sometimes necessary to use his evidence with caution"; since, according to Broshi, his "inaccuracies range from vagueness to blatant exaggeration". For example, he has a tendency to gross overstatement concerning population figures. Hence, we read in *War* 6.420 that the inhabitants of Galilee are (supposedly) more than three million; also, in the census carried out under Cestius, celebrants at the Passover sacrifices totalled in excess of two million seven hundred thousand – a highly inflated figure when compared to the average Passover attendance given by Jeremias (1969:83): i.e. 180,000.⁴⁹ Shutt (1961:122-123) agrees that "The numerals in Josephus, which are frequently exaggerated and generally untrustworthy, are an unsatisfactory side of his work"; however, he contends that "it cannot be said that their unreliability detracts from Josephus' merits as a historian [...] Such unreliability is frequently due to manuscript tradition and not to the author".⁵⁰

Alternatively, Broshi (1982) argues that "In Josephus' *War*, much of the data can be proved accurate and much of the rest reliably assumed to be so".⁵¹ And he further asserts that, where scholars have been able to check the archaeological detail provided by Josephus, his "precision" is surprising, and that generally his data "stem from reliable

⁴⁹ Jeremias' estimate consists of 125,000 visitors and 55,000 residents

⁵⁰ The question of Josephus' reliability is also discussed extensively in Feldman and Hata (1987): e.g. by Stern (1987:71-80), Rajak (1987:81-94) and Ladouceur (1987:95-113).

⁵¹ Surburg (1975: 165) states that "A comparison between *The Jewish War* and the *Life* does not present a consistent portrayal of the Galilean campaign". However, he suggests that any inconsistencies may be due to the fact that the two books were written for different patrons: e.g. *War* was written under Roman patronage, which may explain its pro-Roman bias. He also cites the suspicion by Laquer (in *Der juedische Historiker Flavius Josephus*) that the misrepresentation of certain details in *Life* was done so that Josephus might find favour with King Agrippa II, his other patron.

sources to which he had access from the very beginning of his literary career".⁵² Finally, Sandmel (in Thackeray, 1969:xii) sums up the general dilemma/consensus when he states that "Even when we become suspicious of Josephus' reliability and even when we can convict him of contradiction, and of uncontrolled apologetic tendencies, we are faced with the circumstance that if we were to discard or eliminate Josephus, we would be virtually devoid of a clear knowledge of historical events from the beginning of the Maccabean War through the end of the first Christian century". Similarly, Feldman (1987:14) argues that "The period [Josephus] covers in such detail is the era just before and during the emergence of Christianity, and hence is crucial for an understanding of the infant years of the new religious group".⁵³

1.6 The dissertation structure

Before I describe the structure of this dissertation in specific terms, it would be helpful to make some general comments.

Firstly, this exploration of the relationship between spiritual and economic transformation is weighted much more heavily on the economic side, and deliberately so, simply because (a) that is where my expertise lies; and (b) the subject of spiritual transformation is dealt with copiously within the existing body of theological literature, whereas economic transformation is not. Secondly, the physical constraints of a doctoral dissertation mean that, in the examination of a complex and wide-ranging subject of this

⁵² Similarly, Thackeray (1969:19-20) admits that, "as a writer, [Josephus] lacks some of the essential qualifications of the great historian"; however, "we must not be led to exaggerate his failings or to underestimate his sterling merits and his immense contribution to learning and our knowledge of the past".

⁵³ Likewise, Sandmel (in Thackeray, 1969:viii) writes that, "The significance of Josephus in regard to the first Christian century in Jewish and Christian scholarship is that he represents the only major source which gives a direct and *sequential* historical account".

nature, which spans more than five thousand years of history, some topics and/or arguments will be explored in depth, while others will be touched on lightly and perhaps only in passing. Finally, within the exploration of economic matters, the reader will encounter a substantial amount of discussion of ancient banking activities because, apart from the reasons given above, banks are essentially repositories of surplus economic assets. Consequently, attestation of and/or literary references to ancient banks or banking activity provides evidence of economic surplus within a particular period and/or community – in a similar way that attestations and/or references concerning say ancient libraries (namely, repositories of books, manuscripts, etc.) would be considered evidence of literacy and learning.

In more specific terms, the structure of the dissertation is as follows: the following section (Section 2) contains an examination of the relationship between spiritual and economic transformation as described in Joel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel; and also explores various references to the agro-economic, literary motif “grain, oil and new wine” within the OT salvation-restoration oracles mentioned in those and other OT books. The central focus is a discussion of the economic context of Peter’s Pentecost sermon, as implied by his opening reference to the prophet Joel; a context that, whilst neglected by the vast majority of traditional NT exegetical studies, would have been blatantly obvious to the apostle’s Jewish audience; and also a key reason why he appears to have received their undivided attention. To demonstrate how economic considerations impact religious choices and loyalties, this section also includes an exploration of the economic and political dynamics behind ancient nature-religions – as epitomised by the Baal-Yahweh polemic, since this polemic provides the source of most of the “grain, oil and new wine”

references found in Hebrew scripture. Then, to test the validity of a correlation between spiritual/moral and economic conditions, as depicted in the OT text, I examine available evidence from modern, secular economic research. Finally, to conclude this section, I argue that there is a legitimate context for prosperity when applied to the endemic economic problem of scarcity: i.e. lack.

Because the Mosaic-Sinai covenant promises, among other things, a “surplus of prosperity”, Section 3 contains a discussion of what the ancients did with that surplus: namely, the deposit and loan activities normally associated with banking. In particular, I explore the temple-based origins of banking, and also the connection between banking and the people of Yahweh in different eras, which, after 587 BC, became an important factor behind the progressive shift in Jewish economic practices: i.e. from agrarian to mercantile. In Section 4, I focus in some depth on the economic context of Acts 2 to 8, and examine various verses in Luke’s text to make a case for the likelihood that, post-Pentecost, the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers experienced the fulfilment of the economic promises described in the OT salvation-restoration oracles. This section also contains a brief discussion of the temple-centric economy of first century Jerusalem and the vested interests of the ruling Jewish elite, in order to highlight the economic dynamics underpinning the tension between the Sadducees and the nascent sect, which eventually led to the persecution of the sect’s Hellenist leadership.

In addition, there is a brief examination of instances where people have “converted” for non-religious reasons (e.g. food and shelter in difficult times), which – since both Italy and Palestine were experiencing an economic crisis at the time – is a plausible motivation for some of Peter’s Pentecost audience, as it was for others who “repented” in

both prior and subsequent centuries. In effect, the use of an economically-slanted exegetical approach to these chapters has enabled me to present a more complex interpretation of Luke's account of the birth and formative years of the Christian church, based mainly on the ramifications of adopting the alternative, banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2: i.e. 'to serve in the bank' rather than 'to serve at tables'. In support, I also offer a variety of evidence drawn from economic-historical literary sources that cover the period from the fourth century BC to the first century AD. This is followed, in Section 5, by a re-evaluation of the role and status of Joseph-Barnabas, arguably the most important Hellenist-capitalist within the nascent sect, and includes a different view of the circumstances behind break with his fellow-apostle, Paul.

Then, in Section 6, I attempt to create a theoretical model for the scope of banking activities that might have been conducted through the primitive church *trapeza* – based on detail from the historical literature on Greek and Roman banking, as well as relevant biblical texts. For this model, I have taken into account the fact that, as Hellenists, the *trapezitai* were part of an international mercantile network that offered numerous lucrative business opportunities. However, as devout Jews and Jesus-Believers, they would have operated under the altruistic guidelines articulated in the Torah and reinforced by Christ. In Section 7, I test the possibility that the OT salvation-restoration oracles have relevance within the modern era, using a simple survey that compares historical dates of spiritual "outpourings" against long wave economic cycles for the period 1782 to 1973. Finally, Section 8 provides a summation of my arguments and conclusions.

In addition, any exegetical effort that deals with the early chapters of Acts – especially using the approach adopted for this enquiry – will find itself in the middle of two

controversial issues. Firstly, as Rothschild puts it (2004:25), the 150-year old debate concerning the “overall value [of Acts] as a historical source”, which she states is one of a number of issues concerning the Book of Acts and its Author that “present scholarship still seeks to resolve”. And secondly, any argument in support of a link between spiritual and economic transformation is in danger of being dismissed arbitrarily as a legitimisation of the so-called prosperity gospel. Both these controversial issues have been addressed in some depth, in separate excursions, that are located within the Appendix section at the end of the dissertation.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPIRITUAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Normally, any exegetical foray into the books of the Hebrew prophets is fraught with a certain amount of problems and controversy; in particular, questions of authorship and authenticity.

For example, because the OT blessing formula appears in numerous OT books, either on its own or as an integral component of a salvation-restoration oracle, some scholars have cited the regular and frequent occurrence of this formula (along with certain similarities in language) to argue that it should be attributed to groups, such as the Deuteronomist editors, rather than to the individual prophets from whom the various books derive their names. Hence, Zimmerli (1983:28), for instance, asserts that it was “a later hand” who added the blessing formula to the original text of Ezekiel 36:11; however, I would suggest that these arcane problems concerning the text have little bearing on the present investigation. After all, in the first century AD, the salvation-restoration oracles in general and the blessing formula in particular would have been deeply embedded within the prophetic traditions of Judaism, and also within the collective psyche of the Jewish people: i.e. an example of what we would today call “received knowledge”, which is usually handled with minimal critical reflection by the people involved.

Consequently, on that occasion, Peter’s audience would have intellectually processed and emotionally responded to his arguments on the basis of what they *believed* to be true. Therefore, what they *believed* is perhaps of greater importance to our examination of the possible relationship between spiritual and economic transformation than what may or may not have been textually or historically authentic – which I argue re-

mains relevant in the modern era, especially now that “faith-based” organisations are becoming key actors on the global economic stage.

2.1 The OT spiritual/economic cycle: an overview

The phrase “grain, oil and new wine” and its constituent elements form a literary motif used throughout Hebrew scripture to depict episodes of ancient agrarian economic activity,⁵⁴ both actual and promised, in either a positive or negative sense: i.e. good harvests and bad.⁵⁵ On that basis, Joel 1 and 2 (for example) may be interpreted as depicting the four phases of a spiritual cycle that has economic consequences: (1) backsliding causes Yahweh to progressively remove His blessing, thus creating economic “recession”; (2) outright disobedience and sin results in economic “depression”; (3) true, heart-felt repentance causes Yahweh to reinstate His blessing, which kick-starts the process of economic “recovery”; and (4) increasing levels of obedience lead ultimately to the restoration of full blessing, which equates to economic “prosperity”, if not “a surplus of prosperity”.⁵⁶

The opening chapter of Joel depicts the lowest point of the spiritual/economic cycle and, as such, paints a dismal picture of agro-economic desolation. There is no blessing or prosperity, and what little there might have been in the form of harvests has been eaten away by different kinds of destructive “locusts”, a word used both literally and metaphorically: e.g. to depict surrounding war-like, predatory nations. For instance, Barton (2001:44) explains that, “In favor of a military interpretation, it may be noted that the

⁵⁴ See, for example, Deuteronomy 7:13; 28:51; 33:28; 2 Chronicles 32:28; Nehemiah 5:11; Isaiah 36:17; 62:8; Jeremiah 31:12; Hosea 2:8-9, 22; 7:14; Joel 1:10; 2:19; 2:24; Haggai 1:11; Zechariah 9:17.

⁵⁵ The motif is also used to depict the elements associated with the ritual/offering of the tithe or first fruits of the harvest. See Numbers 18:12; Deuteronomy 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 2 Chronicles 31:5; Nehemiah 10:37, 39; 13:5.

⁵⁶ Deuteronomy 28:11, Amplified version

locusts are described as a 'nation' (*gôy*) in [Joel] 1:6". He also reminds us (2001:43) that this imagery occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in this context: e.g. in Judges 6:5, the Midianites and Amalekites used to come up against Israel "as thick as locusts" (*cf.* also 7:12); and Jeremiah 51:14 contains the threat that Yahweh will fill Babylon "with troops like a swarm of locusts". This agro-economic calamity, as we are told by the prophet, left the people of Yahweh downcast.

The field is laid waste; the ground mourns, for the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails [i.e. there is no harvest and ensuing prosperity] [...] so that joy has withered and fled away from the sons of men (Joel 1:10, 12).

From the text, we understand that "the sons of men" lost Yahweh's blessing because of their rebellion and disobedience. So the prophet calls them to repent – a true repentance and not some superficial ritual: "Rend your hearts and not your garments and return to the Lord, your God" (Joel 2:13). Then, if and when His people did repent, Yahweh promised to remove their oppression and restore their prosperity. This pledge is found in a detailed passage (2:19-27) that contains the promise to restore the years that the cankerworm and locusts have eaten away, so that "you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and shall praise the name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you" (2:26).

Finally, after all this, comes the promise (in Joel 2:28 or LXX Joel 3:1) of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Peter referred to on the Day of Pentecost: "And afterwards, I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall

prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, etc.” In other words, *after* all this grain, oil and new wine has been poured out, *then* the Holy Spirit will be poured out. Thus, economic restoration/transformation is supposed to precede or at least coincide with spiritual transformation. Apparently, as far as Joel is concerned, the existing economic crisis needed to be resolved *before* the people could derive proper benefit from the spiritual component of the OT salvation-restoration oracle. And a possible reason for this can be seen in Christ’s explanation of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:22 and Mark 4:19); namely, that unless we resolve “the cares of this world”, they will “choke and suffocate the Word [so that it] yields no fruit”. Interestingly, this echoes an explanation I was given, in 2005, by senior executives of Opportunity International Australia: that a key objective of their microfinance programme is to help pave the way for evangelism – by overcoming the psychological barriers that occur when “an empty stomach creates a closed mind” (to the gospel).⁵⁷

An earlier example of the spiritual/economic transformation cycle can be found in the Book of Jeremiah, as part of the promised new covenant: “Behold the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31). The cycle is part of the concluding section of the oracle known as the “Book of Consolation”, which commences in Chapter 30. The oracle promises that the people would be released from their oppression (which again occurred because of their turning away from Yahweh) and that they would be rebuilt as a nation under this new covenant – both spiritually *and* economically:

⁵⁷ Likewise, an old African saying, cited by Agbetse (2007:65), states that “a famished stomach has no ears”.

They shall come together and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and shall flow together and be radiant with joy over the goodness of the Lord, for the corn, for the new wine, for the oil, and for the young of the flock and the herd. And their life shall be like a garden and they shall not sorrow or languish any more at all (Jeremiah 31:12).

Therefore, since the advent of the new covenant occurred with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, which subsequently led to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, by implication, we should expect to see both components of the salvation-restoration oracle fulfilled in the period immediately following Pentecost.

In addition, a similar cycle of events can be found in the Book of Ezekiel. In chapter 36, verses 8 through 11 contain a promise concerning not just the restoration of a level of prosperity experienced previously, but something even greater: “And I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and be fruitful. And I will cause you to be inhabited according to your former estate, *and I will do better for you than at your beginnings*” (Ezekiel 36:11, my italics). Then a few verses later, Yahweh makes another promise; this time concerning spiritual transformation: “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (36:26-27). Consequently, I would argue that the above passages provide sufficient evidence to suggest that, according to OT scripture, Yahweh has promised that the outpouring of economic prosperity will precede or at least coincide with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (i.e. economic transformation will accom-

pany spiritual transformation),⁵⁸ a theory that obviously requires further examination and testing.

2.2 The Baal-Yahweh polemic: a battle for men's hearts through their stomachs

Any comprehensive examination of the OT salvation-restoration formula and its constituent "grain, oil and new wine" motif requires that we first understand the significance and potency of the provision and protection components within the worship of nature-gods in Israel and Judah. This in turn necessitates an exploration of the Baal-Yahweh polemic, which is both the source of and reason behind most of the references to this particular formula-motif combination.

Woods (1994:14 and 2002:3) explains that the name Baal appears 76 times in the Old Testament: 18 times in the singular and 58 times in the plural – more often than any other pagan deity. From his heavenly home, *Ba'al Hadad* was supposed to rule over all aspects of water and storm, including lightning, rain, thunder, dew and clouds. The worship of Baal was essentially a fertility cult, which functioned to bring fertility to an area affected by an arid climate, and also to the many herds of animals that were a source of food, clothing and wealth. Obviously, the general idea of fertility encompasses human fertility and, consequently, human sexuality became an integral part of Baal-worship. However, there is enough evidence to indicate that devotees of this nature-god were motivated primarily by agro-economic factors: the people needed rain for their crops and

⁵⁸ Barton (2001:94) also draws our attention to the association between the Spirit of God and "renewed fruitfulness" in Isaiah 32:15: "Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is valued as a forest".

herds, and Baal was thought to control the weather and therefore control the supply of rain. As Woods writes (1994:1):

Man's physiological needs are his most fundamental concerns. Among these needs, water is of paramount importance. The agrarian peoples of the ancient Middle East were acutely aware of the most basic equation: 'water = life'. The relatively arid climate with its seasonal rainfalls magnified the need for this sustaining element into a daily concern. In his attempt to explain the uncertainty, he developed gods to serve as intercessory, intermediary figures between him and nature. The importance of 'nature' gods in religious beliefs was shaped significantly by man's dependence upon water and his attempt to influence its supply.

The promise of economic prosperity is a powerful, psychological force; surpassed only in emotive strength by the feelings of desperation experienced when confronted by its antithesis: i.e. economic disaster, whether present or potential.⁵⁹ The interplay of these opposing psychological forces often provided the motivation behind the question of loyalty and obedience to a particular deity for many ancient peoples, including the people of Israel and Judah. And the frequent occurrence of the Baal-Yahweh polemic in scripture not only testifies to the significance of the polemic itself, it also highlights the depth and strength of the economically-driven, psychological forces present in the hearts and minds of the people during the period under review. However, it is not my intention to

⁵⁹ In a similar vein, Ferguson (2008:13) argues that the financial system "reflects and magnifies what we human beings are like. As we are learning from a growing volume of research in the field of behavioural finance, money amplifies our tendency to overreact, to swing from exuberance when things are going well to deep depression when they go wrong".

deal with this subject in any great depth, but merely to discuss aspects of the polemic that show how important the twin promises of divine provision and protection were to the people of Israel and Judah.

The book of Hosea, among the oldest of the prophetic books to use the “grain, oil and new wine” motif, provides a helpful insight into the problem underpinning the polemic, and so affords us a good place to start.

For [Israel] has not noticed, understood, or realized that it was I [the Lord God] Who gave her the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and Who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Baal and made into his image (Hosea 2:8).

Apparently, a century later, the problem as to which god the people believed they should be indebted to for their economic welfare still existed, as shown by the fact that Jeremiah protested likewise that the people of Judah “did not say to themselves, Let us reverence Yahweh our God, Who gives us rain, The autumn rain and the spring rain in season” (Jeremiah 5:24). The prophet goes on to remind the people that it is Yahweh who secures “the weeks appointed for harvest”, and Thompson (1981:249) comments that the ritual in which the priest presented the first sheaf of the harvest at Passover (Leviticus 23:10), and which was repeated seven weeks later at the Feast of Harvests as an offering of grain from the new crop (Leviticus 23:17), was intended to “acknowledge the activity of Yahweh in making the maturing of the crop possible [...] for it was He who gave Israel her grain”.

Skinner (1963:59) explains that, because “the desert faith of Israel made no express provision for the devotional exercises suitable to the needs of an agricultural community”, by the time of Jeremiah, the popular religion in Judah had become somewhat schizophrenic: “Yahweh was recognised as the God of the nation, whose presence was realised in times of great national enthusiasm; but He was not at first apprehended as the God of the land, and the dispenser of the good gifts of corn and wine and oil”. Oldenburg (1969:176) confirms this with a similar comment: “To the Israelites, moreover, the specific fertility god Ba’al Hadad rather than Yahweh, whom they had met in the desert, may have seemed a better fit to give them success in farming like the Canaanites”. Therefore, despite a well-established tradition of Yahweh’s awesome exhibitions of military-style power – including the defeat of various nations who worshipped Baal – in the matter of provision, it was the Baals and not Yahweh to whom the Israelites usually turned in worship and with votive offerings when they wanted to ensure the occurrence or plead for the restoration of whatever natural elements were necessary to secure good harvests.

Later in the Book of Jeremiah, we find a passage that illustrates the extent to which the people had become convinced that the Baals (and not Yahweh) controlled the natural elements involved in their agro-economic provision and prosperity. In the 43rd and 44th chapters we read that, even after Jeremiah’s prediction of doom concerning the consequences of their disloyalty and disobedience to Yahweh and the Mosaic-Sinai covenant had proven true, a group of Judeans fleeing to Egypt verbally attacked the prophet and accused him of lying (43:2) when he declared that they should abandon both their flight and their Baal-worship, return to Judah and also ‘turn back’ to Yahweh

in order to receive the benefits of the material blessing promised in the covenant – which they refused to do.⁶⁰

We will certainly perform every word of the vows we have made: to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and to pour out drink offerings to her as we have done – we and our fathers, our kings and our princes – in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food and were well off and prosperous and saw no evil.

But since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine (Jeremiah 44:17-18).

From the above verses, we can sense the strength of feelings and the psychological forces that underpinned the people's loyalty to their chosen deity, based primarily on the promises of divine protection and provision. Verse 18 implies that Yahweh had failed to perform in both these areas; in particular, provision, which is arguably one of the most important promises within the Mosaic-Sinai covenant. As Skinner (1963:10) explains: "The fundamental facts on which the religious relation rests are the mighty deeds of Yahweh in redeeming the people from Egypt, in securing it in the possession of the land in Canaan, in defending it against its foes, *and crowning it with the temporal blessings in which national well-being consists*" (my italics).

Perhaps the best known episode within this polemic is the confrontation between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal, which took place on Mount Carmel. According to

⁶⁰ The Hebrew root for 'turn back' is *šûb*; and, according to Thompson (1981:111), "No prophet explored the meaning of the root *šûb* ('turned') more than Jeremiah".

Woods (1994:97), the account in 1 Kings is considered to be the climax of the centuries-long battle between Yahweh and Baalism; not just in the Book of Kings, but in the entire Hebrew Bible. Ahab, King of Judah (873-852 BC), had taken Jezebel to be his wife and Queen. Jezebel was the daughter of the Phoenician King, Ethba'al, and Ahab erected an altar for Baal in Samaria and worshipped him and also made a sacred post for the goddess Asherah. In fact, Ahab is said to have angered Yahweh more than any of the kings of Israel who ruled before him (1 Kings 16:29-33), and the worship of Baal reached its peak during his reign. So, having given His people ample warning regarding the consequences of following after other gods, the time had come for Yahweh – through the prophet Elijah – to invoke the punishment/curse clauses of the covenant; in particular, the threat of drought:

As Yahweh lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain these years, but according to my word (1 Kings 17:1).

However, the ensuing drought was just Yahweh's way of getting His people's attention. The pivotal demonstration of power came later, and commenced with a challenge from Elijah: "If Yahweh is God, then follow Him; and if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). Since the people did not answer the prophet, their guilty silence suggests that the worship of Baal had permeated their lives to such an extent, it needed to be confronted in a decisive manner; and the venue chosen for the confrontation is of special interest. According to Woods (2002:10-11), Mount Carmel was located directly on the border of Israel and Phoenicia, the kingdom ruled by Ethba'al; and the Hebrew word *karmel* means 'garden land', thus implying (agrarian) fertility. Furthermore, Aharoni (1979:341) asserts that, according to an Assyrian inscription dated 841 BC, at the time of this event, Mount

Carmel was referred to by the Canaanites as Mount *Ba'li-ra'si*: i.e. Baal's 'mountain' or 'domain'. Oldenburg (1969:80) agrees, and suggests that the source of this epithet comes from the annals of the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III. So here again the polemic is implicit in that Elijah appears to have chosen to stage this demonstration of Yahweh's superiority over Baal in a location over which the Baals supposedly held sway.

The Mount Carmel episode is extremely well known and does not need recounting here in great detail. Suffice to say that the 450 priests of Baal failed to entice their god to send down fire on their altar and consume their sacrificial offering. However, 1 Kings 18:38 states that "fire" fell from heaven and not only consumed Elijah's sacrifice, the wood and stones of the altar, and even the dust, it also "licked up" the water in the surrounding trench. The response from the people witnessing this startling demonstration was "Yahweh is God! Yahweh is God!" (1 Kings 18:39). Then, almost immediately after this successful exhibition of His superior power, Yahweh confirmed His supremacy over the elements (and, by implication, the Baals): after sealing up the heavens and causing a drought in Israel for three and a half years, He then sent a single, small cloud (reputedly the size of a man's fist) that eventually produced torrential rain (1 Kings 18:42-45).

But why is this episode considered to be the climax of the centuries-long battle between Yahweh and Baalism? According to Oldenburg (1969:1), no other god is depicted in the OT as being "more wicked, immoral and abominable than the storm god, Ba'al Hadad". However, he implies that an immense amount of energy and literary effort was put behind the Baal-Yahweh polemic not so much because of the actual character of the Baal cult, but because the worship of Ba'al Hadad posed a greater threat to

Yahwism than that of any other god, which prompts us to examine possible reasons as to why this was so. Oldenburg (1969:176) further explains that:

When the Israelites came into Canaan, they found everywhere, from north to south, the different and independent local cults of Ba'al Hadad established on the high places of the land [...] In their new surroundings, the Israelites had to adjust themselves to an entirely new way of living; from being desert nomads they became sedentary agriculturists. From the native population of Canaan the Israelites learned the best methods of agriculture suited for that mountainous terrain. But, together with these new methods, they learned the rituals of the Ba'al cult as well, which were considered an integral part of making the soil fertile.

However, a marked change occurred during the reign of the House of Omri. At that point, this cult of the hills and fields metamorphosed into a much more powerful form. Apart from the fact that it became highly organised – with a central temple and 450-strong priesthood – Baal-worship also gained an added dimension of influence from the association with political and economic power, as Oldenburg remarks (1969:177):

In the ninth century BC Tyre became exceedingly strong, being the center of the vast Phoenician colonial empire. Consequently the cult of its national god, Melqarth, i.e. Hadad, *spread wherever the commercial influence of Tyre reached, and the acceptance of this cult became a sign of political alliance with Tyre* (my italics).

The northern kingdom of Israel, being so close geographically and economically to Tyre, could hardly remain unaffected. Thus an alliance between Israel and Tyre was sealed by a political marriage of the Phoenician princess Jezebel to Ahab, king of Israel, and thereby the strong united cult of the Phoenician Ba'al and Asherah with its numerous cult personnel was established in the capital Samaria as the state cult supported by the court.⁶¹

Whitley (1952:139) informs us that Omri, Ahab's father, formed an expedient alliance with the powerful Phoenicians, via his son's marriage to Jezebel,⁶² to help protect Israel against the military ambitions of the newly-formed alliance of Aramaen states that had come together to face the threat of Assyrian domination. This alliance with the wealthiest and most powerful mercantile nation of the day obviously benefited the economy of Israel, and the reign of Omri established a time of great prosperity. According to Whitley, Israel continued to flourish under Ahab: "Jericho which had lain desolate for some four centuries was now rebuilt (1 Kings 16:34); other cities were founded, and the palace in Samaria was further enlarged and ornamented (1 Kings 22:28)".⁶³

⁶¹ Oldenburg (1969:177) also explains that Phoenician Baalism was introduced into the southern kingdom of Judah through the political marriage of the Judean vassal king, Jehoram, son of Jesophat, to Athaliah, the daughter of Omri, who had grown up in the court of Ahab and Jezebel. According to Armstrong (1997:63), Athaliah built a temple for Baal in Jerusalem that "was served by the Sidonian priest, Mattan".

⁶² 1 Kings records a precedent for a successful alliance between Israel and Phoenicia in its description of the commercial agreement between Solomon and Hiram of Tyre (1 Kings 9:26 and 10:22) and his nuptial alliance via "the women of [...] the Sidonians" (1 Kings 11:1).

⁶³ For the splendour of the palace and buildings in Samaria in Ahab's time, see Crowfoot and Crowfoot (1938:1-6). Ahab's wealth and might is further attested in the "Monolith", an Assyrian inscription whose text was reputedly authored by Shalmaneser III, and which describes a battle at Karkar on the River Orontes in 853 BC between the Assyrians and the combined forces of Irkhuleni of Hamath, Adad-idri of Damascus and a number of neighbouring rulers that included Ahab. Whitley (1952:141) writes that, "The 'Monolith' records that there were present at the battle 'two thousand chariots, ten thousand men of Ahab the Israelite' (lines 91-92). Thus, of all the allies, Ahab contributed by far the greatest number of chariots and was only sur-

Whitley (1952:150) also suggests that the strength of the literary tirade against Ahab, as penned by the Deuteronomist editors, was inspired “not only because he set up Baal worship in Samaria, but because of his constant association with foreign powers”. By moving from the countryside to the palace, the cult moved into a higher gear in terms of its impact and influence on the general populace. Understandably, the public display of wealth, military power and other benefits of a powerful economic-political alliance – all of which were associated with the cult of Baal that, through Jezebel, had gained the status of state religion – would have looked decidedly more attractive to the people of Israel than the distant promises of their ancient desert covenant with Yahweh, who was remembered fondly perhaps for engineering long-past victories over the nation’s enemies, but not especially for the fulfilment of His promise of provision. Interestingly, the OT text suggests that the choice of Canaan as the Promised Land was partially responsible for creating the problem that gave rise to the polemic.

For over 400 years, the Israelites had dwelt in Egypt, a land that derived its fertility from the River Nile, which could be counted on to flood its banks at around the same time each season, to provide water and silt over the adjacent flood plain. Ancient but highly effective forms of irrigation also added to the efficiency and ease with which the farmers in Egypt could raise their crops and feed their animals. However, in Canaan, a land reputedly “flowing with milk and honey”, the provision of life-giving water could not be taken for granted, as we learn from a prophetic statement in Deuteronomy 11:10-27:

passed in the number of infantry by Adad-idri himself. In fact, altogether, Ahab's entire contribution might be regarded as the most powerful of any of the allies”.

For the land which you go in to possess is not like the land of Egypt, from which you came out, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your foot laboriously as in a garden of vegetables.

But the land which you enter to possess is a land of hills and valleys which drinks water of the rain of the heavens,

A land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

And if you will diligently heed My commandments which I command you this day – to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your [mind and] heart and with your entire being –

I will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil.

Consequently, in this new land, where the water supply was much less if not unpredictable, and where storms, droughts and floods created a fragile environment for agriculture, the people's dependence on "divine" provision meant that the widespread worship of nature-gods was inevitable. The only question was: which one? Thus, according to scripture, began a constant battle for the hearts and minds of the people of Israel and Judah based on the twin promises of divine protection and provision. The issue of which deity was in the ascendant appeared to depend on whatever human need was greater at the time. As mentioned above, if there was a pressing need for protection against some foreign military power, then Yahweh was called upon; although, even that might depend on how vulnerable the people felt, since there were times when hubris led them not to cry out to Him. On the other hand, the seemingly unshakable existence of

Baal-worship throughout the centuries suggests the obvious: namely, that the need for good harvests was far more prevalent and pressing than the need for success in battle. From this, we can see clearly how basic human needs can often determine religious choices and/or loyalty.

2.3 Hearing about Jesus, but thinking about Joel

When the prophets castigated the people because of their disloyalty and neglect of the obligations which lay upon them because of their privileged position, they were not preaching in a vacuum. Rather, the people were reminded of what they knew, or should have known (Thompson, 1981:6).

On the Day of Pentecost, when the multitude of devout, Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem were “astonished and bewildered” by the outbreak of glossolalia (Acts 2:6), the apostle Peter stepped forward to explain the significance of this phenomenon with a brief, introductory reference to the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16-17), and then went on to preach his famous sermon.

Since the average reader is usually impatient to pour over the ostensibly more important sections of Luke’s account of the birth of the Christian church, the reference to Joel is often in danger of being glossed over, like some brief curtain-raiser to the main event: i.e. the more compelling content of Peter’s sermon, such as his accusation that the Jews, including some of his hearers, “crucified and put away [Jesus] by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23), which is followed by the argument establishing Jesus as “both Christ and Lord” (2:36); and, finally, the climax of this seminal event: 3,000 souls added to the primitive church community (2:41). As such, there is a tendency to view the refer-

ence to Joel as something akin to a “preacher’s gimmick”; a device to gain the audience’s attention and help set the scene, rather than providing any kind of far-reaching and meaningful context to the entire sermon. However, I suggest that this would definitely *not* have been the case for the multitude gathered in Jerusalem on that momentous occasion. And, as mentioned previously, it is specifically the human, emotional responses of Peter’s audience of Diaspora Jews that attracts my interest in this portion of the current investigation.

Put simply, Luke’s rendition of Peter’s sermon – as it has been handed down over the centuries – does not appear to do proper homage and thus full justice to the debt it owes to Joel. In particular, the enigmatic amendment/misquote in the introduction, as recorded in Acts 2:17 in the more widely-accepted MSS, has become something of a theological “red herring” – not only distracting and/or confusing generations of scholars, but also depriving Christianity of the material benefits of understanding the wider context of Peter’s message. As Bauckham (1996:163) explains, “In Acts 2:17, the words μετὰ ταῦτα (‘after these things’) in LXX Joel 3:1 are replaced by ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις (‘in the last days’)”;⁶⁴ however, it is interesting to note that not all the MSS agree on the text in Peter’s opening phrase. Conzelmann (1987:19) writes that “The quotation has been transmitted in two recensions B and D. At the beginning of the quotation, B and sa have (with the LXX) μετὰ ταῦτα, ‘after these things’, instead of ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, ‘in the last

⁶⁴ As Conzelmann mentions, *meta tauta* is also used in the LXX Joel 3:1 translation of OT Joel 2:28, which states that “it shall come to pass afterward (Hebrew, *’achar*) that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh”. Watson (1996:5-6) writes that “Luke’s opening [to Peter’s sermon] ‘And it shall be in the last days (Καὶ ἔσται ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις) has in the less ambiguous Septuagint ‘And it shall be afterwards’ (ἔσται μετὰ ταῦτα). Joel was talking not about the end of the world but about the beginning of the new time. Peter in Acts should mean the same because his whole point is that the prophecy of Joel is being fulfilled”; meaning, by implication, that both spiritual *and* economic components of Joel’s prophecy are being fulfilled at Pentecost.

days'''⁶⁵ In fact, μετὰ ταῦτα is used in Acts 2:17 not only in B (*Codex Vaticanus*, fourth century AD) and cop^{sa} (Sahidic Coptic MSS), but also in C (*Ephraemi rescriptus*, fifth century), pc (a Greek miniscule) and 076 (a Greek uncial from the fifth or sixth century); as well as by Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in 386 AD.⁶⁶

To my mind, the various rationales for this amendment lack credibility, particularly since Luke is normally so faithful to the LXX.⁶⁷ Some scholars have tried to justify the change by taking an overly-simplistic route based somewhat perilously on nothing more than modern, western logic; as Bauckham continues (1996:163): “μετὰ ταῦτα presupposes preceding events which are not explained”. But then, not explained is not the same as not understood. Likewise, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:21) comment that the phrase ‘after these things’ is unintelligible without the context to show what ‘these things’ are. But here again, just because the context has not been articulated in full does not mean that it was not understood in its fullest sense by Peter’s audience. The unsatisfactory results arising from this flawed logic have led these and other scholars to seek alternative justifications for the substitution. Hence, Johnson and Harrington (1992:49) write that, “Although the citation from Joel 3:1-5 agrees substantially with the LXX, there are several changes that in all likelihood represent changes made by Luke to fit the text to the context”. Similarly, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:21) assert that “The Western

⁶⁵ Also mentioned in Klijn (1976:104), who explains that, “At the moment there is a tendency to consider D secondary to B, because D shows some marked theological trends which can only be explained as elements introduced into a text like B”. On the other hand, Haenchen (1971:179) is more emphatic. He claims that “The text of B, *meta tauta*, is the original: in Lucan theology, the last days do not begin as soon as the Spirit has been outpoured!”

⁶⁶ See www.laparola.net/greco/index.php and search on Acts 2:17 with request to view variant readings; accessed on July 24th 2011.

⁶⁷ According to Marshall (1980:18), “one of the most striking literary features of the writings of Luke is that they are written in the style of the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX)”. More specifically, Johnson (1992:61) asserts that Luke was “unquestionably” using the LXX “for the composition of his work”.

text represents a series of changes from the LXX all making the quotation more suitable for the occasion".

However, in making these assertions, both pairs of exegetes fail to provide an adequate explanation of either context or occasion; and I suggest that this would only be possible with, firstly, a proper understanding of the economic context provided by Joel 1 and 2; and, secondly, knowledge of the economic background to the occasion: i.e. the Day of Pentecost in 33 AD.⁶⁸ In fact, our failure to use an economic perspective as an exegetical tool has left us with something of an hermeneutic quandary, because the traditional over-spiritualisation of the text (i.e. an exclusive focus on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and total neglect of any possible attendant outpouring of "grain, oil and new wine") has demoted the powerful OT salvation-restoration model to one of salvation-only. And worse, it also implies that, when the promised Messiah finally arrived, Yahweh uncharacteristically chose to renege on something like half of the benefits He originally offered.

Thus I find it astonishing that, when faced with centuries of OT prophecy concerning how economic restoration is supposed to occur in tandem with spiritual "revival", NT scholars have chosen to interpret Pentecost as being solely about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, they appear to have ignored completely the far-reaching implications of the promised outpouring of "grain, oil and new wine" in say Deuteronomy 7:13; 11:14; likewise, Joel 2:18-19, 24-27; Jeremiah 31:12; Hosea 2:22 and Zechariah 9:17; as well as the promised reversal of the fortunes of Yahweh's people in

⁶⁸ For the arguments concerning the choice of this date for the original Day of Pentecost, see Section 4.21: "The time spent on this business"

Jeremiah 31:3 – not to mention the promise in Ezekiel 36:10-11 of economic restoration/prosperity of an even greater magnitude than experienced previously. These latter passages in particular are replete with promises of economic restoration alongside of spiritual transformation; consequently, they provide an unambiguous economic context for Acts 2:17-41 that is both plausible and also extremely potent. On that basis, I suggest that Peter's audience of first century Jews would have fully understood what 'these things' were, which then makes the phrase 'after these things' totally intelligible – and thus more appropriate for the introduction to his Pentecost sermon.

Finally, in order to attempt to explain this substitution, some scholars have grasped at the straw of eschatology, which again puts them potentially on unsafe ground, since Jervell (1996:106) argues that, "Unlike other New Testament authors, history means more to Luke than eschatology".⁶⁹ For example, Barrett (1994:135) explains that "the quotation from Joel, in the form in which Luke gives it (his Christian interpretation involves some changes in the text), is important for Luke's understanding of eschatology: God has begun, but not completed, the work of fulfilment; Christians are living in the last days, but the last days are not yet come".⁷⁰ However, when viewed against the backdrop of so many OT promises of material blessing and abundant prosperity offered

⁶⁹ Johnson and Harrington (1992:54) write that "Luke alters the citation from LXX Joel 3:1-5 in several important ways, making the Spirit's outpouring an eschatological, and above all a prophetic event". Against this, Jervell argues that "Luke's task [in Acts] is to offer the history of the people of God in the last phase of salvation history, beginning with the coming of the Messiah". Furthermore, Sterling (1992:359) contends that Luke is writing "history from the perspective of the fulfilment of the [OT] promises and prophecies".

⁷⁰ I can only speculate that ignorance among NT scholars of the ramifications of the economic references/evidence presented throughout the early chapters of Acts, both implicit and explicit, has lead to the seemingly logical but erroneous conclusion that the promised outpouring of 'grain, oil and new wine' (in Joel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.) did not occur post-Pentecost and was thus supposedly meant to occur at some unknown stage in the future. A good example of this is the opinion expressed by Ste Croix (2001:426) concerning the promises made by Jesus to "the poor" and "the hungry" in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3, 6). He writes that "the fulfillment of the blessings is intended eschatologically: they will be realised not in this world but in the Age to come".

in return for repentance and obedience, this statement from Barrett again implies fickleness on the part of Yahweh.

After all, if that first group of “Christians” (i.e. the Jews who responded positively to Peter’s message) believed that they were “living in the last days”, they would have expected to enjoy the economic benefits of those last days. But if those last days had “not yet come”, does this mean that they had to wait for those particular benefits; and, if so, how long? For people who need to put food on the table, these are more than just theological questions; especially in the midst of an economic crisis, as explained in some detail below.⁷¹ Also, any suggestion that Luke had to adapt the Joel 2:28 (LXX 3:1) reference because Peter was ushering in a new, “Christian” era (as implied in Barrett’s statement above) runs counter to Kippenburg’s contention (1994:96) that the political environment would have compelled Luke to present Christianity as a continuation of the Jewish tradition (i.e. as an “ancestral religion”),⁷² because “the Roman authorities only officially recognized cults that were ‘ancestral’”. This is corroborated by Botticini and Eckstein (2003:13) who explain that, “Up to the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt in 135, the Romans themselves did not distinguish between Jews and early Christians”.

Fortunately, I believe that some of this exegetical fog will dissipate when the text of the early part of Acts is viewed through the lens of human economic effort and expect-

⁷¹ See Section 4.8, “The Roman financial crisis of 33 AD”; also, Section 4.9, “Economic conditions in first century Jerusalem”.

⁷² Likewise, Sterling (1992:381) writes that “Christianity is not a new movement, but the *continuation* of Israel”; and Armstrong (1997:159) insists that “Continuity is very important to Luke, as it was for most people in late antiquity. Innovation and novelty were suspect, and it was crucial for religious people to know that their faith was deeply rooted in the sanctities of the past”. In a similar vein, van Unnik (1976:25) suggests that Luke “underscores the relation between Christianity and Judaism to prevent Roman authorities from looking upon Christianity as a new and dangerous religion”; perhaps because, as Sterling (1992:385) informs us, “The emergence of Christianity as a separate movement made it vulnerable to persecution”; thus, “The claim that Christianity was a continuation of Judaism was a way of claiming the standing of Judaism”.

tations. As mentioned earlier, a lack of appreciation of the economic context of Peter's Pentecost sermon has been the cause of a significant amount of over-spiritualisation, as well as neglect of the more basic, human elements of the salvation-restoration oracle to which Peter was alluding. This has impacted our understanding of not just the wider implications of Peter's message (e.g. the more complex manner in which a Jewish audience would have emotionally and/or intellectually processed the apostle's reference to Joel), but also the human dynamics underlying the Pentecost event itself; consequently, I intend to address this exegetical neglect/omission below in some depth. Meanwhile, I suggest that the use/acceptance of 'in the last days' by the majority of MSS (rather than 'after these things', which is the better match for Joel 2:28/LXX 3:1) plus the supposed "Christian interpretation" of Joel (either by Luke but, more likely, later groups) has been detrimental rather than helpful.

Therefore, to help clarify the issue, it is necessary that we revisit the early part of the Book of Joel and re-examine the prophet's dramatic depiction of a real-life agrarian economic calamity, which Wolff (1977:12) confirms was "an acute emergency in his own day";⁷³ and which Allen (1976:53) describes somewhat melodramatically as "grim cam-eos of the contemporary scene depicted with heavy brushstrokes".

⁷³ The dating of the Book of Joel has been a matter of some debate. Its position within the canon of scripture between Hosea and Amos (both dated around the eighth century BC) has suggested a similar dating for Joel. However, this placement does not appear to be based on the date of writing but on a similarity of theme when compared with Amos. For example, Bratcher (1997:258) informs us that "the language of Joel 2:31 and 3:16, 18-19 concerning the Day of Yahweh closely resembles the beginning of Amos". On the other hand, Bratcher argues that other factors suggest a later date: e.g. "Hebrew terms and expressions are used in Joel that appear elsewhere only in later in OT books (see Thompson, 1956:731-732, and Wolff, 1977:10-11 for a detailed list). The book shows a dependence on the thoughts of other prophets, including notably the late prophets Obadiah (v. 17 cf. Joel 2:32) and Malachi (3:2; 4:5 cf. Joel 2:11, 31). These examples suggest that Joel must be dated sometime after the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah and before the Hellenistic conquest of Judah, most likely the first half of the fourth century BCE or the end of the fifth century BCE".

The field is laid waste, the ground mourns; for the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails (Joel 1:10).

Allen (1976:53-54) informs us that grain, oil and new wine were “the principal crops of the Palestinian farmers and are celebrated in the OT as generous gifts of God (*cf.* Deuteronomy 7:13, etc.; Hosea 2:8, 10; *cf.* Psalm 104:15f.). Joel employs a traditional formula in referring to these products, but he puts it to sinister use. The fertility hailed in OT times as a pledge of the harmony between Israel and its God had disappeared”. This occurrence, according to Wolff (1977:31), “fulfils ancient prophetic threats of judgment”; and Allen (1976:79) adds that “Joel’s whole interpretation of the locust plague does pre-suppose serious sin in the life of the community”.

Be ashamed, O you tillers of the soil; wail, O you vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished.

The vine is dried up and the fig tree fails; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple or quince tree, even all the trees of the field are withered, so that joy has withered and fled away from the sons of men.
(Joel 1:11-12)

Wolff (1977:32) comments here that “Lack of a harvest is a disgrace for the peasant, just as childlessness is for parents, for it is evidence that the blessing is withdrawn (2:14) [...] Joy withers together with the harvest (*cf.* Isaiah 9:2[3]); it gives way to shame”. Allen (1976:54) also reminds us that wheat and barley were the most important of the Palestinian cereals, but now, according to the prophet, “there were no cereals to sell, or seed to sow next season, and the economic consequences for the farmer were disas-

trous". The balance of verses 11 and 12 state that the vineyards and fruit trees also did not yield any harvest, and Allen writes that "One might regard the calamity as solely the effect of the plague of locusts, but vv. 18-20 mention a drought, with which a locust attack not infrequently coincides". In this situation, the land and plants are unable to regenerate themselves naturally. The implication therefore is that the solution has to come from some greater, more powerful source; thus setting the scene for the necessary intervention of Yahweh.

At this point, Joel reminds the priests that the cult ritual as well as their personal welfare is also dependent on the harvests being plentiful, and exploits this issue to urge them to summon the people to a traditional service of lamentation, in order to petition Yahweh to reverse His judgment on the nation. Then, in Joel 2:1-12, when the prophet seems to sense that he has his audience's full attention,⁷⁴ he seizes the opportunity to drive home his message by amplifying the potential gravity of their plight and also implying that, if they do not remedy the situation as soon as possible, the current economic calamity, bad enough as it is, may escalate into the ultimate "worst case scenario", as proclaimed by prophets of old: i.e. the "Day of Yahweh" (e.g. Isaiah 13:6, 9-11; 24:21-23 *cf.* Acts 2:24). But then, to stop his audience from falling into utter despair, Joel offers some hope of compassion on Yahweh's part, and holds out the possibility of this horrific threat being averted.

⁷⁴ Allen (1976:78) writes that "Now is the psychological moment. It signifies both a consequence and a caution; since the people are in their present circumstances of distress, they must respond before it is too late".

Therefore also now, says the Lord, turn and keep on coming to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning [until every hindrance is removed and the broken fellowship is restored].

Rend your hearts and not your garments and return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness; and He revokes His sentence of evil [when His conditions are met] (Joel 2:12-13).

Apparently, as Newsome (1984:108) explains, around the time of Jehoiakim's coronation (c. 609 BC), there emerged what he calls "a twisted parody" of the teaching dealing with Isaiah's statement of Yahweh's concern for the protection of Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:33-35), combined with Josiah's edict that all worship should be centralised there.⁷⁵ This gave rise to the erroneous belief that, because Jerusalem was deemed Yahweh's special city, no harm could ever befall it; and also, that Yahweh's protection was unconditional. As a consequence, the people of Yahweh had on numerous occasions thought that they could take for granted or even manipulate His blessing through mere ritual, or by resorting to some claim of special status, rather than a demonstration of true repentance. However, in this instance, according to Allen (1976:79), Yahweh "will not be satisfied with a perfunctory show of repentance, prompted by a shrewd and selfish desire to save their skins. On one occasion the complaint was made that Judah had not re-

⁷⁵ Skinner (1963:167) confirms that "the vindication of Isaiah's faith had no other effect than to foster a belief in the inviolability of the Temple, which ultimately hardened into a dogma of the popular religion".

turned to Him *wholeheartedly*, but in pretence (Jeremiah 3:10). Now it is to be sincere and heartfelt".⁷⁶

At this point, if or when the required level of repentance occurs, and the people wholeheartedly 'turn back' to Yahweh,⁷⁷ Joel states that the Lord is willing, if not eager, to reinstate His blessing, which, according to Allen (1976:82), is viewed in terms of material symbols of divine favour.

Then was the Lord jealous for His land and had pity on His people.

Yes, the Lord answered and said to His people, Behold, I am sending you grain and new wine and oil, and you shall be satisfied with them; and I will no more make you a reproach among the [heathen] nations.

And the [threshing] floors shall be full of grain and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

And I will restore or replace for you the years that the locust has eaten – the hopping locust, the stripping locust, and the crawling locust, My great army which I sent among you.

And you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord, your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you. And My people shall never be put to shame.

⁷⁶ When Thompson (1981:62) describes the situation during the time of Jeremiah, he writes that "Deep repentance, inward and sincere acceptance of the obligations of the covenant would alone fulfil the requirements of Yahweh. One could recite 'The temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh' (Jeremiah 7:4) and still tolerate all kinds of personal evils and breaches of the covenant (Jeremiah 7:5-10)".

⁷⁷ Bratcher (1997:265) writes that, in Joel 2:13, "The people are called to return, or repent (Heb. *shūv*), in the traditional, prophetic understanding of repentance"; and explains that, "to return with one's heart, which is in Hebrew the center of the will, is a call to turn toward Yahweh exercising the very center of the self's power to choose its way, establish its priorities, and fix its loyalties".

And you shall know, understand, and realize that I am in the midst of Israel and that I the Lord am your God and there is none else. My people shall never be put to shame (Joel 2:18-19, 24-27).

At this crucial stage when, or more critically, *after* the promise of full economic restoration and blessing is laid out before the people of Judah in all its enticing abundance, then comes the verse that – if Joel 2:28 (or LXX 3:1) was quoted faithfully – should have been used as the opening gambit to Peter’s sermon: “And *afterward* [Hebrew, ‘*achar*; and Greek, *meta tauta*] I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh”.

Consequently, I would argue that, by quoting from Joel, Peter was not only providing an explanation for certain spiritual phenomena, he was also alluding to the full range of attendant economic conditions/benefits – and his audience of God-fearing Jews from the Diaspora would have understood that unequivocally. In support, we have the assertion by Johnson (1992:60) that “Peter interprets this outpouring of the Spirit and its extension to [his hearers] in terms of the promises of God to Abraham” – which by implication includes the promise of economic blessing. He further claims that “the reason why the prophecy of Joel is so perfect is because it contains both an outpouring of the Spirit *and* the proclamation of the good news to a restored remnant of the people of Israel, all this happening in Jerusalem!” Thus, through the message of both prophet and apostle, as Wolff (1977:104) reminds us, “God was working in a way consonant with the hopes of devout Jews”, which matches both the description and situation of Peter’s audience in Acts 2:5. Finally, the above scenario becomes even more credible if we appreciate that Pentecost took place during a period of economic crisis in both Italy and Palestine, as explained in detail below.

This then provides an excellent point at which to take a leap in time: from Jerusalem in the time of Joel to the same location in 33 AD, in order to examine how extensively the words of the apostle Peter – and their implications – were aligned with those of the earlier prophet. Firstly, Allen (1976:77) describes the opening chapter of Joel as forming “a basic pattern of appeal in the form of the messenger-formula and [...] a motivation made up of the elements of *promise, accusation and threat*” (my italics); and these three elements can be seen repeated in the content and structure of Peter’s Pentecost sermon. Secondly, he argues (1976:54) that the prophet Joel was speaking about events of which his audience were only too painfully aware,⁷⁸ which could be applied equally to Peter’s audience in first century Jerusalem. Thirdly, from the above, it is obvious that the aim of both prophet and apostle, as Allen (1976:55) further suggests, is “to present a series of arguments to bring [the audience] to their knees”.

Also providing a link between the two messages, we have, for example, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28 *cf.* Acts 2:1-6), which Allen (1976:102) explains “was hailed as the realization in principle of the charismatic gifts enumerated in [Joel’s] ancient oracle”. Furthermore, there are the signs and wonders performed by Jesus throughout His three and a half year ministry (Joel 2:30 *cf.* Acts 2:22), which attested to His position as the promised Messiah and thus the chosen vehicle through which Yahweh would fulfil his glorious plan. In addition, Peter’s audience would have been well aware of the fact that, only seven weeks earlier, on the afternoon of Christ’s crucifixion, the sun had indeed turned to darkness and the moon appeared ‘blood red’ (Joel 2:31 *cf.* Acts 2:20; also Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:45), a point that Bruce (1970:90)

⁷⁸ This is corroborated by Thompson (1981:6), as shown in the citation at the beginning of this section

mentions in his commentary on Acts 2:19-20. He writes that, “Peter’s hearers may have associated the phenomena described in vv. 19f. with those which attended the preternatural darkness on Good Friday”; and elsewhere (1981:68) suggests that “the paschal full moon may well have appeared blood-red in the sky in consequence of that preternatural gloom”.

Like Bruce, others insist that this phenomenon in the heavens was a lunar rather than a solar eclipse; and, according to Humphreys and Waddington (1992:347), “The majority of lunar eclipses pass unnoticed, occurring when people are asleep or indoors. This eclipse, however, would probably have been seen by most of the population of Israel, since the Jews on Passover Day would be looking for both sunset and moonrise in order to commence their Passover meal. Instead of seeing the expected full Paschal moon rising, they would have initially seen a moon with a red ‘bite’ removed. The effect would be dramatic. The moon would appear to grow to full in the next hour. The crowd on the day of Pentecost would undoubtedly understand Peter’s words about the moon turning to blood as referring to this eclipse that they had seen”.⁷⁹ Finally, even Joel’s reference to Jerusalem’s oppression by “the northern army”,⁸⁰ a term (along with “northerner”) that Barton (2001:88) asserts is always used in other parts of the OT to describe a human enemy – who Yahweh promises to remove and deal with severely (Joel 2:20) – would have

⁷⁹ Humphreys and Waddington (1983:746) explain that “The coloration of [lunar] eclipses varies greatly with atmospheric conditions [...] For example, Davis has recently depicted an eclipse sequence as seen by the human eye with the Moon low in the sky, when the blood red of the umbra in the partial eclipse is almost as vivid as when the eclipse is total”. See Davis, D., *Sky Telescope* 64, 391 (1981); also Section 4.21, “The time spent on ‘this business’”.

⁸⁰ We should not interpret this reference as more locusts per se (i.e. more natural calamity), since Wolff (1977:60) reminds us that “the locusts in Palestine came, as a rule, from the east (Exodus 10:19) or south”.

been pregnant with meaning to Peter's hearers, given the nation's occupation by Roman troops at that time.

From Wolff (1977:5-6) we learn that, in Judah, during the time of Joel, "The cultic community is well organized. As part of the smoothly functioning Persian Empire, the community is no longer troubled by external unrest. With its theocratic leadership and the canonized Torah to guide it, performing the daily sacrifices, and having purified itself from within of all that was foreign, the community's mood is one of confidence in the inviolability of its own salvation and in Jerusalem's election as the throne of Yahweh's kingdom". Similarly, centuries later, the reforms of Augustus had brought political stability to the entire Roman Empire. So, even though the fourth century harvests and first century economic conditions were similarly grave, the political situation during both periods seemed to be ticking along just fine. However, that's not the way that either prophet or apostle perceived matters.

As far as Joel was concerned, "from the perspective of earlier prophecy it had to be recognized that the relationship between Israel and the world of nations – as represented by the contemporary Jerusalemite cultic community incorporated into the political framework of a Persian satrapy – *was not in keeping with the ultimate will of the God of Israel*" (Wolff, 1977:12; my italics). Likewise, it must be remembered that Peter was among the apostles present prior to Christ's ascension when they asked Him, "Lord, is this the time when You will re-establish the kingdom and restore it to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) because, according to Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:6) , "the disciples connect[ed] the promise of the Spirit with the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel". This, plus Peter's reference in his sermon to "the Day of Yahweh" (Acts 2:20), a motif (also from Joel) that

contains a promise to remove the “northern armies” far off, would suggest that he too (and perhaps the rest of the apostles) did not believe that the Roman occupancy was in keeping with the ultimate will of the God of Israel – a fact that may have been evident to the local political leadership in his audience.

And so, in 33 AD, Peter’s sermon, patterned heavily on Joel’s model of the three elements of promise, accusation and threat, did indeed achieve what both apostle and prophet before him had intended. In a manner that was highly credible and ultimately persuasive, Peter presented his Jerusalem audience of devout, God-fearing Jews with a powerful and compelling argument concerning the reasons for (and solution to) their economic and political plight – as implied by his allusion to the salvation-restoration oracle in the Book of Joel. Faced with such a persuasive argument, many of Peter’s audience would not have exhibited Barrett’s suggested ambivalence concerning the timing of what was occurring, since Acts 2:41 implies that around 3,000 of them were convinced by Peter’s message that, just as Joel had threatened, the real-life, albeit non-agrarian economic crisis they were all too painfully aware of had the potential to escalate into their worst nightmare: namely, the Day of Yahweh. It is little wonder they wasted no time in asking the apostles what to do about it.

Now when they heard this they were stung (cut) to the heart, and they
said to Peter and the rest of the apostles (special messengers), Brethren,
what shall we do?

And Peter answered them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of and release from your sins (Acts 2:37-38).

According to Allen (1976:104), “the appeal for repentance in Acts 2:38 has an obvious affinity with Joel’s call in Joel 2:12f.; the sacrament of baptism replacing the mourning [i.e. lamentation] rites”. Likewise, Marshall (1980:81) states that, “For John the Baptist, baptism was an expression of repentance. The early Christians took over the same rite, but its meaning was enlarged”.

Finally, Luke’s account of Peter’s sermon concludes with the instruction: “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40); and Lüdemann (1989:47) explains that “The *sothete* in the concluding appeal in 2:40b [...] picks up the last word of the Joel quotation (*sothesetai*, LXX Joel 2:32 cf. Acts 2:21)”; a point also mentioned by Johnson (1992:58). Thus, it could be said that Joel’s prophetic message not only opens but also closes Peter’s sermon. It also provides the model for its structure, arguments and objective, and is the source of some crucial content and evidence. In addition, we know from Joel that repentance (of the true, heart-felt kind) was the key to initiating the restoration of Yahweh’s material blessing. Therefore, it would be helpful to examine the expectations among Peter’s first century audience of Diaspora Jews concerning the *non*-spiritual (e.g. economic) benefits they believed they would receive in return for their repentance.

Allen (1976:95) informs us that, in Joel 1:24-27, Yahweh promised not simply to restore His material blessing, but to go significantly beyond that covenant obligation and

make up for the produce lost in the years when locusts had ravaged the crops.⁸¹ He writes that Yahweh offered full compensation: “The bad years would be compensated by an especially good year”,⁸² which would supposedly result in an extraordinary surplus of abundance that would be recognised and, more importantly, acknowledged by the people – through acts of praise – as the kind of wondrous works that only Yahweh was capable of performing. Therefore, given the critical economic environment, and with an abundant “outpouring” of the first century economic equivalent of “grain, oil and new wine” on offer, it is not unreasonable to expect that some of the 3,000 souls who responded to Peter’s call (Acts 2:41) would have been swayed by such extraordinary economic enticements, and repented for what Baumgarten (1997:63) has called “more mundane reasons”.

Consequently, from the evidence given above, I believe we may conclude that, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter’s audience would have had very strong reasons to be thinking about Joel (along with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, no doubt) – or more importantly, the spiritual associations with economic disaster and restoration described in those books – while they were hearing about Jesus.⁸³ To disagree would be to deny or at least underestimate the emotive power and influence of the OT salvation-restoration oracles on the

⁸¹ Apparently, according to Allen, the locust attacks were not confined to a single year, but had occurred over several years in succession

⁸² Wolff (1977:64) informs us that “To restore (*pi’el*) is an old legal term for the adjustment of damages; it designates the rendering of a substitute payment or of restitution”. Likewise, Allen (1976:95) mentions the use of a legal term for indemnifying.

⁸³ As mentioned previously, Acts 2:17 provides the main link between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the economic promises found in the OT salvation-restoration oracles. However, in Peter’s second sermon (Acts 3:19-21), we are provided with a link between Jesus/Messiah and these oracles when Peter states that (a) “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” in return for the people’s repentance – but that (b) Jesus will not return from heaven “until the time for the complete restoration of all that God spoke by the mouths of His holy prophets for ages past – from the most ancient time in the memory of man”. The impact/result of this second sermon was almost as dramatic as the first, since “many believed and their number grew and came to about 5,000” (Acts 4:4).

multitude of Jews assembled that day. It would also deny their desperate need to obtain relief from the effects of the serious economic crisis they were experiencing at the time. And since it was “the third hour” (Acts 2:15), it is highly likely that many of Peter’s hearers had just come from the Temple, where they had been celebrating the Feast of Weeks by presenting the first fruits of their particular economic harvests – which, in 33 AD, might not have provided much cause for celebration. Finally, if we argue that they were *not* thinking about Joel while hearing about Jesus, we would also be seriously underestimating the desires of many in the audience to see radical change for the better in the administration of the religious, political and economic affairs of the holy capital and Jewish religion worldwide.

Obviously, I am not suggesting that Peter’s hearers were attracted to his message solely on the basis of any implicit or explicit economic promises that it appeared to be offering. Such a blatantly mercenary mindset would not be in keeping with the calibre of men described as ‘devout’ or ‘pious’ (Acts 2:5). However, to ignore the possibility that many of them were convinced and also convicted that their economic problems (and the solution to those problems) were somehow linked to the spiritual condition of their nation would be naïve indeed. And to disregard this important dynamic in the modern era, especially as it pertains to evangelism and mission efforts, would not only be naïve, but also counterproductive.

2.4 The spiritual/economic cycle in Jeremiah

Even though there is a century between them, Jeremiah shares with Joel the classic scenario in which the prophet seizes opportunistically on a contemporary, natural calamity

to explain that the nation's economic woes are evidence of corporate sin and rebellion against Yahweh; and that they, as a nation, have broken the conditions of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant.⁸⁴ For Joel, a plague of locusts and drought provided the prophet with a reason to be heard. Likewise, for Jeremiah, the talking point, as Thompson (1981:249) calls it, came from a period of drought, a natural calamity that Jeremiah exploited to remind the people that their problems were of their own making. By breaking their covenant with Yahweh, there was no longer any obligation on His part to supply the material blessings promised within that covenant. As the prophet explained to the people, "Your iniquities have turned these blessings away and your sins have kept good [harvests] from you" (Jeremiah 5:25).

Jeremiah's collection of poetic oracles and prose sermons follow the traditional, OT salvation-restoration oracle format: (a) identification of the nation's "sin" (i.e. rebellion and moral decline)⁸⁵ with current economic/political woes, as just discussed;⁸⁶ (b) a call for repentance; and (c) the promise of a future hope and restoration (both from a political and economic standpoint) in return for repentance. According to Thompson, like Hosea before him, Jeremiah struck a strong note of repentance. He writes (1981:84) that "Three passages in Jeremiah, 3:22-25; 14:7-10; and 14:19-22, represent 'confessions of sin'

⁸⁴ Thompson (1981:59) informs us that "The word 'covenant' (*berît*) occurs some twenty-three times [in the Book of Jeremiah], most of these in reference to Yahweh's covenant with His people, whether the Mosaic Sinai Covenant or the New Covenant". See Jeremiah 11:2, 3, 9-10; 14:21; 22:9; 31:31-33; 32:40; 33:20-21; and 50:5. In his commentary on Jeremiah 2:20, he explains (1981:177) that "Israel had cast off all restraints that bound her to Yahweh her sovereign Lord, declaring, 'I will not serve'. The verb '*āḥad*, 'serve', *be a slave*, is also used to describe the action of one who is a vassal. The context thus points to the covenant".

⁸⁵ Jeremiah 5:26-29 and 7:1-15 reveals the deterioration of public morality

⁸⁶ Like Joel, Jeremiah even mentions a "foe from the north", and Thompson (1981:53) argues that the description of this foe in Jeremiah 4:13, 16; 5:15; 6:6, 23, suits the Babylonians rather than a nomadic tribe like the Scythians.

of the type Jeremiah believed the people should make”.⁸⁷ However, Skinner (1963:76) points out that the prophets experienced a great deal of frustration preaching repentance to people who seemed incapable of it; all the while knowing that the fate of their nation was sealed, even though Yahweh stood ready to forgive His people. In particular, Carroll (1981:8) explains that “The conflict between oracles of doom and promises of salvation is not peculiar to Jeremiah, but the problem constituted by it is exacerbated by the strongly critical nature of Jeremiah’s oracles. A prophet who said so many harsh things about the community can hardly have said such positive things without serious problems of interpretation arising”.

Against this gloomy backdrop of inevitability, the salvation component of the oracle in Jeremiah chapter 31 is pregnant with hope of change for the better on the part of the people. However, the prophets obviously had no inclination of when or how the Messiah would come, or how the messianic age of restoration would manifest. All they knew is that both were integral to Yahweh’s ultimate solution to the seemingly unsolvable problems of a rebellious people. This knowledge gap may also help explain some of the emotional problems experienced by the prophets, as well as certain problems that exegetes have encountered within the OT books attributed to them. Furthermore, the assignment taken up by the prophets was made even more difficult by the fact that they were chosen/called by Yahweh to proclaim the need for significant *reform* within both palace and temple (often against the vested interests of the incumbent leadership of

⁸⁷ In Jeremiah 26:12-13, the prophet also appeals to the people to reform (*hētîl*, literally ‘make good’) their ways, since repentance “would make Yahweh *think better* (*niham*) of the disaster He intended to send upon them” (Thompson, 1981:526).

those institutions), and also on a collective basis among the people of Israel and/or Judah.

On the other hand, I would argue that the apostle Peter, the prototype of spiritual leadership within the new covenant, had an easier task, comparatively speaking, since he preached a overtly *sectarian* message in Acts 2,⁸⁸ which urged the people to extract themselves from the larger, national group deserving of Yahweh's judgment, and become part of something new, formed out of a godly remnant.⁸⁹ Joel prophesied that "whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered and saved, for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the remnant shall be those whom the Lord calls" (Joel 2:32 *cf.* Acts 2:21).⁹⁰ So, by the first century AD, there was a long and well-established tradition of a devout remnant (Hebrew: *š'e'ērîṭ*) being blessed by Yahweh (i.e. reaping the benefits of material blessings promised in the Mosaic-Sinai covenant) – as opposed to the entire tribal or national group, if and when they and their institutions were reformed. Therefore, on the Day of Pentecost, this tradition too would have provided both context and meaning for those devout/pious Jews from all over the Diaspora who were listening attentively to Peter's sermon.

Of particular interest here is the fact that, unlike the reform model, which requires a critical mass of collective repentance, the sectarian model offers/grants the repentant individual entry into a community of fellow-penitents who, as a community,

⁸⁸ This is supported by Bovon (1992:188-189), who suggests that Luke-Acts may be described as "an exercise in legitimating a sectarian movement".

⁸⁹ According to Johnson (1992:58), "To be saved from a larger population obviously means to be part of a remnant people".

⁹⁰ In his commentary on Acts 2:40, Bruce (1990:31) writes that "In σωθήτε there is an echo of σωθήσεται, quoted from Joel 2:32 [...] In both the Joel oracle and the present context the word applies to a 'remnant' which will be delivered from the catastrophe destined to overtake the mass of the people".

qualify for the collective economic benefits of ‘turning back’ to Yahweh,⁹¹ as well as numerous spiritual benefits from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As such, the sectarian model allows the prophet, apostle and/or preacher – not to mention Yahweh – to “think outside the box” concerning a particular tribe or nation, such as Israel or Judah, since it opens the door for the inclusion of other, often unrelated individuals and/or groups, as we find in Acts 10 and beyond. Consequently, the sectarian model not only offers a solution to the age-old problem of a lack of collective repentance within the ancient national religion, often exacerbated by a resistance to change among the nation’s power elite, it also provides a strategic platform for major, if not unlimited expansion.⁹²

In the Book of Jeremiah, we find early appearances of the different elements of the phases of the OT salvation-restoration oracle: e.g. identification of sin with economic woes (2:19-20; 3:2-3; 5:19) → threat of punishment (2:9) → call for repentance (3:22; 4:1) → promise of economic and/or political restoration (3:16; 4:1).⁹³ However, since the present study is concerned primarily with the link between the old and new covenants, it is the promise of the new covenant in this book that concerns us most in this section. The chapters in Jeremiah known collectively as “The Book of Consolation” commence in chapter 30, and Thompson (1981:553-554) explains that the Hebrew phrase, *šūb šebūt* (literally

⁹¹ Interestingly, in Ephesians 1:6, the apostle Paul informs a gentile-filled congregation that, in return for their repentance and conversion, they are “accepted in the Beloved” (KJV). Here, the Greek for ‘accepted’ is *charitoō* (χαριτόω), meaning ‘to peruse with grace, compass with favour’; also, ‘to honour with blessings’

⁹² The type of expansion, for example, that would enable the disciples to become Christ’s witnesses “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NASB).

⁹³ In his commentary on Jeremiah 3:16, Thompson (1981:202) writes: “The picture of the days of restoration is now enlarged. There will be material prosperity (when you have multiplied and become fruitful in the land) and true religion (they will no longer say ‘The Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh’).”

‘turn the turning’) occurs frequently in the OT,⁹⁴ and is to be viewed in Jeremiah 30:3 either as a reversal of the fortunes of the people of Yahweh or a restoration of their fortunes.⁹⁵ Similarly, when Bracke (1985:244; cited in Westermann, 1991:258) examined the contexts in which the expression *šūb šebūt* occurs, he concluded that, among other things, it was “a technical term indicating a restoration to an earlier time of well being – *restitutio ad integrum*”.

Specific reference to the central elements of the new covenant commences in the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah, which contains the only reference to the new covenant in the entire OT.

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion and shall flow together and be radiant with joy over the goodness of the Lord – for the corn, for the new wine, for the oil, and for the young of the flock and the herd. And their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall not sorrow or languish any more at all (Jeremiah 31:12).

I have surely heard Ephraim [Israel] moaning thus: You have chastised me, and I was chastised, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; bring me back, that I may be restored, for You are the Lord my God.

⁹⁴ For example, see Deuteronomy 30:3; Job 42:10; Psalms 14:7, 53:6, 85:1, 126:4; Jeremiah 29:14, 30:3, 18, 31:23, 32:44, 33:7, 11, 26, 48:47, 49:6, 39, Lamentations 2:14; Ezekiel 16:53, 29:14, 39:25; Hosea 6:11; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:14; Zephaniah 2:7 and 3:20

⁹⁵ The NASB, NIV and Amplified versions generally translate *šebūt* as ‘fortunes’; whereas, the KJV uses the less helpful ‘captivity’; also, according to Genesius’ Lexicon, in Job 42:10, the phrase *Yēhovah šūb šebūt šebūt* ‘*lyowb* has the specific meaning of “Jehovah restored Job to his *prosperity*” (my italics).

Surely after I [Ephraim] was turned [from You], I repented; and after I was instructed, I penitently smote my thigh.⁹⁶ I was ashamed, yes, even confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth [as a nation].

Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a darling child and beloved? For as often as I speak against him, I do [earnestly] remember him still. Therefore My affection is stirred and My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy, pity, and loving-kindness for him, says the Lord (Jeremiah 31:18-20)

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was their Husband, says the Lord.

But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put My law within them, and on their hearts will I write it; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

And they will no more teach each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they will all know Me [recognize, understand, and be acquainted with Me], from the least of them to the great-

⁹⁶ Thompson (1981:574) explains that beating on the thigh (*yārēk*) was a physical sign of remorse and a gesture of pain and lament – not only in Israel but all over the near east (Ezekiel 21:17) – to show that the person was ashamed and humiliated.

est, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will [seriously] remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34).⁹⁷

Since some features of the old and new covenants remain essentially the same, it is the differences that attract our attention here.⁹⁸ In particular, there is an implicit recognition that the old covenant contained a major flaw, inasmuch as one side, the people, seemed morally and spiritually incapable of meeting their obligations on a consistent and meaningful basis. Therefore, Yahweh, the significantly more powerful party and thus the only one in a position to negotiate or implement any substantive changes, appears to have felt compelled to provide a way in which things could improve in this regard – by changing the way in which the covenant and covenant relationship is processed by the people: i.e. a shift from external ritual and religious practices to a more internalised form of religion. This process of internalisation was intended to result in the people ‘knowing’ Yahweh, as opposed to simply *knowing about* Him. In fact, Carroll (1981:581) informs us that “The verb *know* here [*yāda*] probably carries its most profound connotation, the intimate personal knowledge which arises between two persons who are committed wholly to one another in a relationship that touches mind, emotion and will”.

Nevertheless, all this internalisation and emphasis on “the heart” in the new covenant did not change anything concerning the externalities of economic blessing/prosperity within the existing contract between Yahweh and His people. Therefore, the promise of an outpouring of grain, oil and new wine remains an integral element of

⁹⁷ Thompson (1981:115) regards this passage in Jeremiah as authentic, “if not in precise wording then in substance”

⁹⁸ I find Skinner (1963:328-329) helpful with his detailed articulation of the differences

both covenants. As mentioned previously, Thompson (1981:571) explains that, in Jeremiah 31:12, the reference to a bountiful supply of grain, oil and new wine (plus the young of the flock and herd) is evidence of divine favour. In 31:14, the mention of ‘fat things’ (Hebrew: *dešen*) is usually applied strictly to the fat of the offering burnt on the altar to Yahweh; however, Thompson (1981:572) suggests that, in this verse, ‘fat’ is probably a symbol for life and prosperity (*cf.* Psalm 36:8; 63:5; Isaiah 55:2). Thus, “in lyrical terms, Jeremiah declared that [in the new covenant] the people would be satisfied fully (*śāḥa*’, literally ‘sated’) with Yahweh’s bounty (*tûb*)”.

2.5 The spiritual/economic cycle in Ezekiel

The Book of Ezekiel, which is better known for its focus on cultic matters, also contains the blessing formula, and even intensifies its appeal with a promise that Israel and Judah will together enjoy future economic and political conditions that would be even better than those experienced in the early days of the nation, when they entered and possessed the promised land of Canaan.

And I will multiply upon you man and beast, and they shall increase and be fruitful. And I will cause you to be inhabited according to your former estate and I will do better for you than at your beginnings; and you shall know, understand, and realize that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 36:11).

As mentioned earlier, Zimmerli (1983:230) asserts that “a later hand has added the blessing formula [to promise] an increase of good beyond what it once was”. Nonetheless, he subsequently confirms (1983:249) the promised concurrence of economic and spiritual regeneration with his statement that, in Ezekiel 36:29-30, “a new beginning is

made describing the changes in the external life of the country, changes which go hand in hand with the inner renewal". In terms of the present study, our interest in the Book of Ezekiel is confined to a small section that covers the sin-punishment/repentance-blessing cycle, and in doing so looks forward to the new covenant without naming it as such.

The Ezekiel tradition deals with the time of the Babylonian exile, and the prophet is proclaiming the "word of Yahweh" from his base by the River Cheba (Ezekiel 1:1). In the classic prophetic model, first comes the explanation of why the people of Yahweh lost His promised protection and provision (36:17-19):

Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by [doing] their [own] way and by their [idolatrous] doings. Their conduct before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman during her [physical] impurity.

So I poured out My wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land and for their idols with which they had defiled it.

And I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries; according to their conduct and their [idolatrous] deeds I judged and punished them.

Interestingly, this short section of the Ezekiel tradition does not contain a standard version of the prophetic call to repentance in the hope of enticing Yahweh to respond with some sort of positive, remedial action. Instead, Yahweh is seen as changing tack proactively for the sake of His name:

But I had regard, concern, and compassion for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they went.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: I do not do this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations to which you went.

And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name and separate it for its holy purpose from all that defiles it – My name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned among them (Ezekiel 36:21-23).

Nonetheless, verse 25 contains a reference to purification that is regarded as pointing toward the requirement for baptism stipulated by Peter in Acts 2:38 as the outward expression of inner repentance: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness”. Zimmerli (1983:248) explains that the verb ‘to sprinkle’ (*zaraq*) is used elsewhere in the OT in connection with the sprinkling of blood.⁹⁹ Therefore, he argues that this is a reference to the cultic purification ritual using water, and cites the inference by Betz (1958/59:213-234) from 1 QS III, 4-9 that Ezekiel 36 inspired a proselyte baptism at Qumran that became the prototype of Christian baptism. Also, we should bear in mind Allen’s assertion (1976:104), mentioned previously, that “the appeal for repentance in Acts 2:38 has an obvious affinity with Joel’s call in Joel 2:12f.; the sacrament of baptism replacing the mourning [i.e. lamentation] rites”. Consequently, in Ezekiel’s reference to cleansing with water, we have an allusion to bap-

⁹⁹ See, for example, Exodus 24:6 and Leviticus 1:5, 11. Numbers 19:9-22 refers to a similar act of cleansing with water but changes the phrase to “running water” (19:17), even though it uses the verb ‘to sprinkle’.

tism/purification and thus repentance, which is stipulated in Joel and implied in Acts as the trigger for both spiritual/inward *and* economic/outward regeneration. Thus, one verse later (36:26-30), in accord with the OT salvation-restoration model, we find the actual promise of a simultaneous occurrence of spiritual *and* economic regeneration/restoration:

A new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall heed My ordinances and do them.

And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

I will also save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will call forth the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine on you.

And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, that you may no more suffer the reproach and disgrace of famine among the nations.

Zimmerli (1982:248) advises that, in the OT, the word “spirit” always suggests “a power which gives a man strength to do new things (1 Samuel 10:6f.)¹⁰⁰ [...] Jeremiah 31:31ff. had referred to the putting the law in the human heart. Ezekiel 36:27 speaks of

¹⁰⁰ This idea is also expressed by the apostle Paul in Romans 8:26, when he describes how the Holy Spirit “comes to our aid and bears us up in our weakness”. The verb is “helpeth” in the KJV, and is the Greek compound *synantilambanetai* (συναντιλαμβάνεται), meaning ‘to help alongside, together with’.

putting the spirit there and in this way goes beyond Jeremiah 31 and allows Yahweh to participate directly in man's new obedience". As mentioned previously, the advent of the new covenant occurred with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, which subsequently led to the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh, commencing at Pentecost. Thus, in Ezekiel, we find further evidence to support the argument that, in scripture, the promise of an outpouring of material prosperity by Yahweh (generally depicted by the literary motif, "grain, oil and new wine") either precedes or at least coincides with the promise of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit – which, when added to the abovementioned evidence from Joel and Jeremiah, implies that both types of "outpourings" occurred on or around the Day of Pentecost.

2.6 The purpose behind the OT salvation-restoration model

Generally speaking, in the minds of most Christians, prosperity and spirituality have a negative correlation; their opinions perhaps coloured by memories of Sunday school lessons about Christ's conversation with the rich young ruler,¹⁰¹ whose trust in riches was so great, he missed out on God's best for him. Also, there are OT passages in which Yahweh either complained or prophesied that, in times of prosperity, His people would not listen to Him. For example:

Jeshurun [Israel] grew fat and kicked. You became fat, you grew thick,
you were gorged and sleek! Then he forsook God Who made him and for-
sook and despised the Rock of his salvation (Deuteronomy 32:15).

¹⁰¹ See Matthew 19:16-21; Mark 10:17-11; and Luke 18:18-23

I spoke to you in your prosperity; You said I will not listen (Jeremiah 22:21).

As a result, the received wisdom within modern Christianity is opposed to the weight of scripture: namely, there is a widespread assumption that a direct relationship exists between spirituality and *lack*.

However, this view demonstrates a superficial understanding concerning both the timing and purpose of the different phases of the spiritual-economic cycle, since both lack and prosperity should be construed as merely the means to an end, and not an end in itself. Put simply, according to the OT salvation-restoration oracles, the economic and psychological pressure of lack/scarcity is intended to force the people of Yahweh to their knees – in repentance. As a reward for this repentance, Yahweh promises to reinstate His covenantal blessing, which kick-starts the outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine”: i.e. economic recovery, leading on to prosperity. Then (or *afterwards*, to quote Joel 2:28), Yahweh apparently (a) puts a new heart and a new spirit within His people, and also (b) pours out His Spirit – in order to provide them with what Zimmerli (1982:248) refers to above as “a power which gives a man strength to do new things”, and which will also enable Yahweh “to participate directly in man’s new obedience”. Consequently, this greater level of spiritual empowering is designed to help the people of Yahweh overcome the human limitations and inadequacies that have previously caused them to fail to keep the obedience requirements of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant.

Thus, in a sense, the aim of providing an outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine” in tandem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to help ensure that the penitents (col-

lectively and/or individually) have a powerful economic incentive *as well as* the spiritual fortitude/moral fibre to remain obedient and continue to ‘serve’ Yahweh (Hebrew *‘abad*, as in Jeremiah 2:20) – rather than some alternative source of “provision”, divine or otherwise – once they have “turned back” to Him (Hebrew, *shūv*). Therefore, any relationship between the two “outpourings” is best understood in terms of their linked purpose. As mentioned above, the *purpose* of lack is to bring Yahweh’s people to their knees – in repentance. The *purpose* of the outpouring of divine prosperity is to reward the people for “turning back” to Yahweh, and also to prove to them that He (and not some other deity-source) is *Yēhovah yireh*, their divine “provider”.¹⁰² And the *purpose* of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to empower those same people to (hopefully) stay “turned back” – and not fall back into their old, rebellious and disobedient ways.

That is the purpose behind the link or relationship between spiritual and economic “revival”. However, the question remains as to whether or not the provision of economic blessing – as part of the fulfilment of the OT salvation-restoration oracles – was intended as a one-off event, to perhaps help finance the launch of the Christian church, or something that was meant to be timeless. Based on a simple survey discussed below, in Section 7, I argue for the latter.

¹⁰² See Genesis 22:14. According to Strong’s Concordance (H3070), *Yēhovah yireh*, meaning ‘God sees’, is the “symbolic name given by Abraham to Mount Moriah in commemoration of the interposition of the angel of Jehovah who prevented the sacrifice of Isaac and *provided* a substitute” (my italics).

2.7 Is there a plausible relationship between moral and economic conditions?

Your iniquities have turned these blessings away, and your sins have kept good [harvests] from you (Jeremiah 5:25).

This statement from the Book of Jeremiah, which is attributed to Yahweh, implies that there was a correlation between “sin” (in particular, spiritual rebellion and disobedience) and the economic woes being experienced by Judah at the time. However, in order to establish this idea as more than just religious propaganda or pious rhetoric, we need to find secular economic research findings that support at least some of the underlying principles or assumptions.

Unfortunately, empirical evidence in this area is not easy to come across, since orthodox economists tend to ignore so-called “soft” (i.e. socio-psychological) factors – which include many facets of human behaviour, apart from those involving questions of sin or morality – when analysing economic activity or conditions. Instead, they prefer to concentrate on hard data: the measurable sources of economic growth or slowdown in a given country or region, such as changes in resources and/or other factors that create changes in economic output (e.g. changes in investment, capital accumulation, labour supply, etc.). Thankfully, there is at least one published group of economists whose work has addressed various “soft” underlying causes that, according to their findings, drive different factors that impede growth in GDP and which are therefore relevant to the present enquiry. In various papers on the subject, Baaske, Hussain and Millendorfer, from the STUDIA group, describe these causes (e.g. 1987:239) as “the mechanisms that create

an atmosphere that determines the adverse development of these sources and thus slow down the [economic] growth rate". Consequently, they have labelled these underlying causes as "growth retarding factors", and have used both hard economic data and the analysis of socio-psychological phenomena to identify four key sets: (1) State, (2) Megalomania,¹⁰³ (3) Isolation, and (4) Levelling.

The group examined two 10-year and one 20-year data sets (1960-1970, 1970-1980 and 1960-1980) that originated from 19 OECD countries: namely, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (West), Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. There is extensive literature available that discusses the growth retardant factor entitled "State", which examines the negative consequences of massive state expenditure and inefficient government intervention in the economies of different countries. Interestingly, according to Baaske et al (1987:240), during the 1960s, government expenditure was "one of the most important growth retarding factors";¹⁰⁴ and, for the period 1960-1981, it alone was responsible for not less than 45 percent of the explanation of growth slowdown. However, in terms of the present enquiry, the most significant of the growth retardant factors identified by this group is the one labelled

¹⁰³ STUDIA have sometimes used "Centralization" as a substitute title for the growth retardant factor known as "Megalomania". Both words are used to describe the creation and proliferation of mega-corporations or institutions that devour and/or supplant numerous smaller economic units that are by nature decentralized and thus better for stimulating growth. Furthermore, Ball (2004:274) argues that where Megalomania-Centralization occurs, namely, "in an economy dominated by a small number of large firms, we should expect deeper, more severe recessions".

¹⁰⁴ For example, Polanyi (1968) has shown that the average rate of return of nationalised (i.e. state-owned) industries is less than one-third that of private industry.

“Isolation”, which I contend is an excellent gauge of moral decline or degradation.¹⁰⁵ Understandably, moral degradation per se is not something we would normally expect to find as the subject of empirical research; perhaps because it is difficult to either examine or articulate in statistical terms. Consequently, Baaske et al (1987:243) chose to focus on particular circumstances in which the *impact* of Isolation (and the underlying moral decline) in society can be observed and also measured, commenting that “The most important [impact], and at the same time the source of several other social ills, is the deteriorating quality of family life, leading to isolation”, hence their choice of label for this particular growth retardant factor.

To measure what *prima facie* might appear to be an amorphous social phenomenon, they selected a range of statistical proxies in the form of (a) the illegitimate birth rate,¹⁰⁶ (b) the divorce rate, and (c) the suicide rate.¹⁰⁷ In addition, the group utilised statistical results from research by Klein (1975, in *STUDIA*, 1985: 12) of female death rates due to cervical carcinoma, in order to quantify another factor of moral decline: promiscuity. Using these statistical proxies, the group’s calculation of the regression coefficient for Isolation for the period 1960-1970 was -0.7, which was of a greater magnitude than the results for the other three growth retardant factors during that same period: i.e. State (-

¹⁰⁵ Skinner’s comment (1963:6) that Yahweh, the ultimate personification and source of spirituality, “was revealed to Israel (by the prophets) as a *moral* personality” (my italics), allows us to accept a connection between spirituality and morality in this context.

¹⁰⁶ The group’s findings show that “the illegitimate birth rate and growth of GPD are significantly correlated” (*STUDIA*, 1985:11)

¹⁰⁷ The group assert (*STUDIA*, 1985:10) that suicide is both an important meter of mental health and also the most useful measure of cultural stress. They also refer to the high suicide rate among divorcees and claim that the correlation between suicide and divorce is one of the most widely tested in social science. Finally, they also mention that heavy drinking habits can be found amongst divorced people, a further factor of social/moral decline.

0.51), Megalomania (-0.44), and Levelling (-0.24).¹⁰⁸ However, for the second half of the period examined (1970-1981), the regression coefficient for Isolation was just -0.3, compared to State (-1.04), Levelling (-0.35) and Megalomania (-0.26).¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, moral decline (which covers a plethora of underlying social problems) remained a significant factor in retarding economic growth during the overall twenty year period under review.

The authors acknowledge the novel nature of their research and have issued the following word of caution (STUDIA, 1985:52): “In quite a new field where there is no mature theory, we have to be careful in deriving a hypothesis from empirical data. The best way to cope with this difficulty is a redundancy in an abundance of empirical observations”. Therefore, on the one hand, I recognise that, without further exploration of this combination of socio-psychological and economic phenomena by other researchers, the findings of a single group may not be considered conclusive in establishing a plausible relationship between “sin” and economic downturn. On the other hand, Baaske et al have analysed more than enough empirical data and observations (e.g. from 19 OECD countries over a 20 year period) to ensure that their findings merit both our interest and a significant degree of credibility. On that basis, we have reasonable grounds to accept that their secular research supports the premise behind Yahweh’s condemnatory remark given above: i.e. there was a spiritual-moral rationale for Judah’s economic woes at the time.

This then begs the question whether or not the opposite might also be true: Is there a correlation between moral resurgence and economic upturns? Interestingly, the

¹⁰⁸ See STUDIA (1985:12)

¹⁰⁹ See Table 17.1 in Baaske et al (1987:245)

original STUDIA research was conducted partly in response to a question posed by Vaizey (1981, in STUDIA, 1985:57): “Is Sigmund Freud’s thesis that sublimation is a pre-condition for cultural creativity also true for all kinds of creative activities, including creativity for technical and economical innovation?” Freud’s explanation of sublimation implies conditions of moral discipline in which sexual drives are controlled. Thus, the opposite condition, whereby sexual drives are *not* controlled, is de-sublimation (i.e. promiscuity), which Baaske et al had previously shown to have a negative correlation with economic growth.

Furthermore, Millendorfer argues in an earlier solo paper (1983:140) that *intensive* (economic) growth rates, which “are caused by a more efficient use of the factor input due to technological progress”, and therefore dependent on “innovations based on creativity”, show a negative correlation with de-sublimation (and thus a positive correlation with sublimation). The group cite the link, first identified by Joseph Schumpeter in 1934, between technical innovation and the upturn of economic long waves that depict periods of economic recovery and which Schumpeter referred to as “innovational pushes”.¹¹⁰ These, according to Van Duijn (1983:98), involve the development and commercial exploitation of new production processes and organizational changes, as well as new products.¹¹¹ Consequently, Baaske et al (STUDIA, 1985:58-59) argue that there is a definite link between these innovational pushes, which rely on technical innovation (i.e. a

¹¹⁰ This notion is confirmed by Mensch in the subtitle of his book, “Stalemate in Technology” (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1979); namely, “innovations overcome the depression”.

¹¹¹ Van Duijn (1983:106) mentions the findings by Hartmann and Wheeler (1979) that, in Britain at least, the growth rate of patents sealed (a proxy for the number of inventions) is highest during economic downturn periods. However, he also explains (1983:66) that, according to Kondratieff (1926), there is a difference between “invention”, which often occurs during the lower end of economic downturns, and “innovation”, in which inventions are applied on a large scale (i.e. commercially exploited); normally at the beginning of the next upturn.

form of creativity), and sublimation, which equates to high moral standards and conduct; and so claim that their findings provide empirical support for a positive answer to Vaizey's question. Therefore, I would also argue that there is a plausible relationship between moral resurgence and economic upturns.

Baaske et al (STUDIA, 1985:54-55) also explain that David McClelland's achievement-motivation index depicts a sequence in which high quality of family life (the opposite of Isolation) leads to high achievement-motivation, and this in turn leads to high economic systems performance: viz. prosperity. However, a socio-psychological feedback system developed by the STUDIA group (1987:251, Figure 17.4) shows that, when McClelland's index is extended, dominance of the economic system over the human realm leads to a decrease in the quality of family life and a corresponding increase in Isolation.¹¹² It would appear that high achievement-motivation, which leads to high economic systems performance, leads eventually to a deterioration in the quality of family life (amongst other things) because the highly motivated human engineers of economic growth and prosperity have less and less time for their families. As a result, the children of these high-achievers frequently do not experience normal family life; consequently, they in turn create families that are even more dysfunctional, and so the quality of family life further decreases – thus increasing "Isolation", which helps to retard economic growth.¹¹³

¹¹² As mentioned previously, I suggest that STUDIA's economic jargon, "dominance of the economic system over the human realm", corresponds to the description in Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13 of humans being 'in the service' (Greek: *doulos*, literally 'a slave') of mammon.

¹¹³ This may be illustrated anecdotally by what occurred soon after each World War: e.g. the hard-working, pre-WWI (Victorian/Edwardian) generation produced children with the loose morals of the "Flapper" era, who partied and danced their way into and through the 1920-1929 recession. Likewise, the offspring of the

The group assert that there is a 25 to 30 year time lag between the pinnacle and nadir of an economic systems performance phase, which produces oscillations of cycles of between 50 and 60 years: i.e. so-called economic long waves. And, starting with an earlier solo paper, Millendorfer (1983:143) has regularly argued that, if the socio-psychological, economic mechanisms outlined by his STUDIA group correspond to reality, then the length of the cycle is determined by something like anthropological constants governing the dynamics of the interrelationships between the generations. If correct, humanity's array of interventionist instrumental variables and political tools are powerless to do anything to change the actual length of the cycle.¹¹⁴ Therefore, economically speaking, the human race appears to be locked in some kind of tragic and predictable, multi-generational "dance" in which the partners and even the music may change, but the underlying rhythm does not.

Consequently, I suggest that the arguments put forward above provide plausible reasons to accept a correlation between spiritual/moral and economic conditions – both good and bad. It would seem that the perverse combination of positive attributes and predictable flaws present in human nature ensure that the human dynamics underpinning economic activity contain the seeds of both its success and its downfall; hence its cyclical nature, as implied in the text of Joel 1-2 and elsewhere.

high achieving "corporate slaves" of 1948-1966 embraced the Hippy culture that "free-loved" its way through the recession of 1967-1973.

¹¹⁴ Millendorfer suggests that, in the absence of truly effective economic and political remedial tools, the best we can do is to try and minimise the negative effects and degree of each downturn.

2.8 Prosperity in proper context: solving the endemic problem of scarcity

Taken out of its biblical context, the idea of material/economic blessing is in danger of being misunderstood; perhaps because “a surplus of prosperity” is usually equated with “excess” in the pejorative sense. However, in its proper context, prosperity represents a much needed solution to the most critical and endemic of all economic problems: scarcity.

According to Gordon (1989:xi), “For most economists, the [most critical] economic problem is the problem of scarcity”,¹¹⁵ which has been a “continuing element of the human condition” for most of history. He also asserts (1989:1) that the Yahwist, one of the first contributors to the Hebrew scriptures, believed that “the problem of scarcity is an ever-present burden for the bulk of mankind”, and suggests that this condition is a direct consequence of the fall of man when, because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the ground became cursed, with the result that “the acquisition of the means of life is a task involving continual struggle and personal cost”, as prophesied in Genesis:

And to Adam [Yahweh] said, Because you have listened and given heed to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it, the ground is under a curse because of you; in sorrow and toil shall you eat [of the fruits] of it all the days of your life (Genesis 3:17).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Gordon (1989:xi) claims that most economists appear to be in broad, general agreement with this argument, which was first suggested by Robbins (1935) as being part of the foundations of economics.

¹¹⁶ Interestingly, Agrell (1976:43) writes that, “According to the LXX rendering of Gen. 3:17ff. and *Vitae Adae et Evae* to the same text, it was work and not the soil which was cursed after the fall”.

However, Gordon goes on to explain that Yahweh (as depicted by different OT authors) has provided various strategic solutions to this problem. For instance, the problem of scarcity can be overcome by the application of faith, as we find described in the biographical detail of Noah, Abraham and Moses. And in his explanation of this particular divine stratagem, Gordon (1989:6) also provides us with a basic but useful definition of faith: the willingness to do something that does not make sense.

In its beginning, mankind [in the form of Adam and Eve] disobeyed a command which did not appear to make sense. By contrast, Abraham obeys a command which does not appear to make sense.¹¹⁷ Noah, it is true, anticipates Abraham in that he is willing to involve himself in the seeming absurdity of constructing a queer kind of ship in the midst of dry land.

We are informed that this willingness to do something that does not make sense resulted in material blessing: i.e. economic prosperity. For example, Noah and his sons were blessed – becoming fruitful and multiplying to fill the earth (Genesis 9:1); Abraham became “extremely rich in livestock and in silver and in gold” (Genesis 13:2); and Moses successfully led two million Israelites out of Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land.

The second stratagem by which the problem of scarcity can be overcome, we are told by the Yahwist, is the application of wisdom, as exemplified by the lives of Jacob and Joseph. According to Gordon’s interpretation (1989:7), Jacob used great skill and

¹¹⁷ At Yahweh’s command (Genesis 12:1-4), Abraham left Haran, one of the main, regional centres of civilisation and economic activity for an unspecified destination, which is an act of great faith since, according to von Rad (1972:161), “to leave home and to break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient man almost the impossible”.

wisdom in animal husbandry to grow “exceedingly rich, and [he] had many sheep and goats, and maidservants, menservants, camels, and donkeys” (Genesis 30:43). However, his son Joseph surpassed his achievements to become the governor-chancellor of Egypt, and established a royal grain bank for Pharaoh that was designed to maximise the benefits derived from the surplus harvests of seven years of “plenty” in order to overcome the scarcity of the seven years of “lack” that followed. Finally, Yahweh’s third stratagem for overcoming scarcity is via rigorous observance of the Mosaic-Sinai law, which Gordon (1989:11) describes as “By far the most durable of the general solutions of the Old Testament for success in dealing with the economic problem [of scarcity]”, with the object of rewarding obedient followers with “a surplus of prosperity, through the fruit of your body, of your livestock, and of your ground, in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you” (Deuteronomy 28:11).¹¹⁸

The common denominator in all three stratagems is that the people of Yahweh are required to do something: i.e. divine prosperity requires human cooperation. They either have to do something that does not make sense. Or they have to apply wisdom that is divinely inspired and which, to humans, may appear unwise and also risky. Or they have to obey particular spiritual-moral “commandments” – which is not as easy as it sounds, since scripture abounds with accounts of blatant and widespread disobedience

¹¹⁸ According to Armstrong (1997:88), rigorous observance of the 613 *mitzvot* that constitute the Mosaic law, and which address not just ritual purity but also the proper treatment of other human beings, was designed to “restore [to the people of Judah and Israel] the intimacy that Adam and Eve had enjoyed with Yahweh when He had walked with them in the garden”. However, as Westermann (1991:272) explains, “the restoration of a whole relationship with God [...] includes of necessity the restoration of all other areas of life as well”, thus implying that restoration of intimacy with Yahweh, as a result of His third stratagem, leads also to economic restoration.

of such edicts, with the attendant economic consequences.¹¹⁹ In fact, in order to overcome the continuing economic problem of scarcity, it is possible that all three divine stratagems need to be applied at any given time – and on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, if scarcity/lack is indeed so endemic (a “continuing element of the human condition” for most of history), it should perhaps therefore be considered the norm: i.e. the “default” economic condition, as suggested in a comment by the German economist and sociologist, Werner Sombart, who stated that “The so-called natural state of modern economic life is the depression”.¹²⁰

Consequently, upturns in economic cycles should be regarded as movements in a positive direction *away* from the norm (of scarcity/lack). Conversely, the economic downturns that follow represent instances in which socio-psychological and other factors drive economic forces that pull regional and/or national economies back down to the norm. Nevertheless, in both cases, some sort of significant, *proactive* effort is required – either to generate the positive or counteract the negative factors of the seemingly unalterable, cyclical nature of human economic activity: e.g. Schumpeter’s “innovational pushes” that help kick-start periods of recovery leading on to prosperity;¹²¹ or actions/programmes that are designed to minimize the impact of human socio-psychological forces that create economic downturns. Either way, a particular type of

¹¹⁹ Hence the need for the involvement of a greater power, the Holy Spirit, to help Yahweh’s people overcome their shortcomings in this area

¹²⁰ Cited in van Gelderen (1913:458)

¹²¹ Interestingly, the beginnings of economic upswings within Kondratieff long wave economic cycles correspond with major discoveries and innovations that include the following: cotton textiles and pig iron (K-Wave #1); railroads (K-Wave #2); also chemicals, electricity and the motor vehicle (K-Wave #3). Some innovational pushes also occurred during major periods of military conflict, such as WWI and WWII.

effort is required: one that involves a combination of spiritual, moral and economic factors, as discussed previously.

Interestingly, the recurring economic pattern of regression (to the mean and beyond to the norm of scarcity) can also be seen in modern corporate performance. For example, Foster and Kaplan (2001) have used the McKinsey Corporate Performance Database to track the “Total Return to Shareholders” (or TRS) of 1,008 US companies in 15 different industries between 1962 and 1998. From this study, they determined (2001:47) that innovative companies generally enter an industry or marketplace with a competitive edge over established companies, outperforming the industry average by a considerable margin. However, “Eventually, [their] performance deteriorates to the industry average, and then below”. They give three reasons for this pattern of deterioration (2001:48), one of which is that the high performing entrant to the market “falls prey to cultural lock-in and can no longer create innovation on the scale that brought [the] original success”. In their definition of “cultural lock-in”, they cite a growing fear of risk, which causes management to play it safe and also impose control systems that are intended to ensure *predictable* and thus seemingly manageable growth, but which stifles creativity and innovation.¹²²

At this point, the company’s market position/share becomes exposed to possible predation from one or more new entrants willing to take greater risks and be more innovative. Eventually, the former innovator’s sales and/or financial results fall to the point where the company itself is vulnerable to a takeover by an outside group who believe

¹²² Mensch (1975:180) has suggested that it is only when the situation gets really dire that enterprises are “forced to overcome their aversion to risk-taking”.

they can do a better job than the incumbent, risk-averse management. Therefore, without a sustained willingness to take risks and, at times, do things that to others may not make sense (a key attribute of religious faith), even superior economic performance and/or results (e.g. material blessing) will invariably regress to the mean or average – a well-proven statistical phenomenon – and eventually to the norm of scarcity. In the corporate environment, that norm is a scarcity of profits; a primary *raison d'être* for the existence of corporations and the yardstick by which they are judged in the marketplace. Finally, according to Foster and Kaplan's research (2001:47), the average period between the peak and nadir of this corporate performance phase is around 25 years, which is uncannily similar to the findings of Millendorfer et al in their survey of the economies of 19 OECD countries: i.e. 25 to 30 years, or approximately one human generation.

In early 2009, I had a private conversation with Brigadier Trevor Minter who, after a successful career in the British Army, was then Director of the Kent Partnership, the multi-agency local strategic partnership for that county in the United Kingdom. Brigadier Minter told me that he grew up in Kent, in the economically-deprived seaside town of Folkestone; and, at the time of our conversation, 46 percent of the working age population of his childhood town were on benefits: i.e. "a burden on the public purse", which is how welfare recipients are described in UK government parlance. Ultimately, our discussion focused on the question of why so many people who have access to government-sponsored programmes that can lead to economic and social improvement fail to utilise those programmes for their own benefit and also the benefit of their community. It is a question that has exercised the minds of numerous economists and politicians over the years.

As suggested in the general introduction, one of the problems hindering secular economic efforts can be a lack of “faith”: i.e. faith in perhaps a government, an institution, or more likely the people involved; or alternatively, a person’s lack of faith in their own ability to improve their lot in life. Understandably, orthodox economists prefer to use a word without “supernatural” connotations; consequently, Easterly (2002:167-168) talks about the power and impact of “expectations”. He writes (concerning lower income countries):

High expectations are enough to get the economy out of the poverty trap.

Conversely, bad expectations could take a country that was above the poverty trap and send it down into the poverty trap. You won’t invest if you think that no one else is going to be investing.¹²³ Whether an economy gets rich or poor can depend on whether everyone expects it to get rich or poor.

Van Duijn (1983:139) agrees that “Investment behavior is very much determined by expectations”. He also cautions that “Once expectations change, whether for real reasons or for imagined reasons, it is difficult to turn them around”. Furthermore, Easterly (2002:167-168) suggests that “Expectations could be a source of the instability of growth rates that we observe in practice. A single shock to the system could change expectations overnight. You suddenly expect everyone else to stop investing, so you stop investing.

¹²³ Likewise, international hedge fund manager-owner, George Soros, contends that, in the market, future events are shaped by current expectations [See Robert Slater, *Soros, The Unauthorized Biography: The Life, Times and Trading Secrets of the World’s Greatest Investor* (New York: Irwin Professional Publishers, 1996), pp. 48f.]. Also, Ball (2004:294, 416-7) asserts that “future market behaviour depends on what traders and investors *believe* that behaviour will be [...] Market traders buy and sell on the basis of *beliefs* about the market: whether the prevailing feeling is optimistic (so that others will buy) or pessimistic (when everyone wants to sell)” (my italics). Furthermore, Keynes (1973:161) claims that “a large proportion of our positive [economic] activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than on a mathematical expectation”.

The expectations story could explain the Latin American growth crash after the debt crisis in 1982, the Mexican crash in 1995, and the East Asian crash in 1997-1998. Growth changes more violently than is justified by a change in fundamentals because expectations change abruptly".

Thus, high expectations (which lead to growth and prosperity) may be interpreted as faith in a positive outcome for one's efforts. Conversely, low expectations (which can either keep people trapped in poverty, or else lead to a traumatic reversal of fortunes for a previously prosperous group) may be interpreted as a lack of faith in a positive outcome for one's efforts. The latter, it would appear, induces a state of psychological inertia, resulting in a lack of any kind of proactive effort, and thus ensures regression to the mean and eventually to the norm: i.e. scarcity or lack.¹²⁴ Therefore, it is possible that the application of "faith" could help to overcome what might be described as a person's or nation's economic "fate", which is the norm of lack/scarcity. Consequently, it would be counterproductive if religion, which is premised upon faith (specifically, "faith in supernatural forces"),¹²⁵ was ignored in either the planning or execution of applicable economic projects or programmes, since its potential impact in terms of what Easterly calls "expectations" could mean the difference between success and failure. Unfortunately, governments and academia as a whole do not fully appreciate this often untapped and under-exploited potential within Yahweh's human creation; perhaps because they fail to grasp how natural the "supernatural" can be.

¹²⁴ Lack of faith and/or negative expectations are often driven by fear of some kind, and Hebrews 10:38 records Yahweh's displeasure when such negative expectations lead people to give up and thus fail to carry through any proactive action: "the just shall live by faith; and if he draws back and shrinks in fear, My soul has no delight or pleasure in him".

¹²⁵ According to Stark and Bainbridge's definition of religion (1985:3-8), given earlier.

So, how does faith work in practical terms? And how does one explain faith to social scientists, whose work is inherently “atheistic”? Even though the present enquiry deals predominantly with the people of Yahweh, the following example of faith leading to a positive, practical outcome comes from the Buddhist tradition. The “Da Fo”, or Giant Buddha of Leshan,¹²⁶ which is located in the Chinese province of Sichuan, is one of China’s most important Buddhist sites and the largest stone Buddha in the world: i.e. 233 feet (71 metres) high. Below the cliff where the statue is located is a confluence of three rivers, the Minjiang, Dadu and Qingyi, whose treacherous currents, in ancient times, would regularly sweep local fishermen to their deaths. The construction of the giant statue was initiated in 713 AD (during the Tang Dynasty) by a monk called Haitong, who hoped that the Buddha’s presence would protect the local boatmen.

The project was finally completed in 803 AD, forty years after Haitong’s death; and his efforts to make this particular stretch of river safer were eventually successful, as the huge amount of rubble extracted as a result of the statue’s construction filled in much of the river bed and thus slowed down the currents. In other words, a large-scale, long-term project that was started on the basis of faith in some sort of divine intervention achieved its goals as a result of physical phenomena whose mechanics lay beyond the existing knowledge and understanding of those who participated in the task. However, without the participants’ primitive and naïve level of faith, the so-called spiritual project would never have been undertaken, let alone finished; and the subsequent physical benefits would therefore not have been realised. This is an excellent example of how

¹²⁶ The statue is not Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, but his disciple Maitreya, also a Buddha. In 1996, UNESCO listed the statue and surrounding Mount Emei Scenic Area as a World Heritage site.

natural the “supernatural” can be – and also how important faith can be in the planning and execution of major projects. In this instance, there is a rational explanation for what caused the currents to slow down and consequently make the area safe for river traffic. However, as we shall now see, sometimes the application of faith can result in circumstances when natural forces do not appear to act in a natural way.

The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, Say to the Israelites, When you come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath to the Lord. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits. But in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord; you shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of itself in your harvest you shall not reap and the grapes on your uncultivated vine you shall not gather, for it is a year of rest to the land (Leviticus 25:1-5).

The above passage describes the OT law of *shmita* (Hebrew, meaning ‘to let fall’ or ‘to let drop’),¹²⁷ in which Yahweh demanded that His people allow their land to “rest” (i.e. lie fallow) every seventh year.¹²⁸ As Stanley (2004:8) explains, observance of *shmita* – commencing at *Rosh Hashanah*, sometime in September – requires farmers to refrain for a full year from (a) sowing vegetable crops or planting trees, (b) pruning vines or fruit

¹²⁷ See *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (1997), p. 631

¹²⁸ See also Exodus 23 and Deuteronomy 15; the latter reference to *shmita* also involves the cancellation of debts

trees, (c) normal levels of harvesting, and (d) picking of fruit.¹²⁹ Not only is this course of action counterintuitive for experienced farmers (i.e. it does not make sense), it is also potentially problematic if not disastrous. Nevertheless, in his brief field study amongst farmers on *kibbutz* and *moshav* in modern Israel, Stanley (2004:11ff.) managed to locate and interview some nineteen individuals and groups who had been observing *shmita*, and were thus willing to risk potential economic ruin in the belief or hope that Yahweh would keep His promise to bless them if they were obedient to this particular aspect of the Torah.

For instance, one of the potential problems in observing *shmita* is that, if you do not prune fruit trees properly each year, under normal circumstances, you will not get full growth in the following year; in fact, in some extreme cases, the tree can even die. This, to quote Jon Nathan,¹³⁰ one of the farmers interviewed by Stanley, results in “lots of expense and no income”. However, Yitzhak Novik,¹³¹ another interviewee, stated that, during a critical point of one *shmita* year, the weather turned unexpectedly cold, with the result that any orchard owners who pruned their trees that year had no fruit; whereas, he was “one of the only farmers in Israel that had nectarines and therefore there was a lot of demand for them”. He also claimed that the same weather anomaly occurred the following *shmita* year, seven years later, but did not occur in any of the six years in be-

¹²⁹ Stanley’s field study was undertaken between the *shmita* years of 5761 and 5768 in the Jewish calendar, which ran from September to September in 2000-2001 and 2007-2008.

¹³⁰ Jon Nathan (cited in Stanley, 2004:13) is an orchardist producing peaches and nectarines at the farming settlement of Moshav Avne Eitan, on the Golan Heights directly east of the Sea of Galilee and close to the Syrian border.

¹³¹ Yitzhak Novik (cited in Stanley, 2004:14) farms in the Jewish settlement of Ofra, on the West Bank, in the Judean hills

tween. A third interviewee, David Israel,¹³² explained, in simple terms, the way in which Yahweh promises to look after those who observe *shmita*, and also what happened in his *kibbutz* when they did.

In the Torah we are promised that – if you keep *shmita* – in the sixth year,¹³³ in the year before *shmita*, you will have a much greater yield and it is interesting to see the number of occasions on which *kibbutzim* have found that that has actually happened [...] We had an example ourselves; in one field we were growing *bachia* – that’s a cattle fodder, and the [average] yield of that year was about 500kg per dunam and that was for the people who did not keep *shmita*, who sowed their fields at the usual time [...] (Yet) this field of ours had a yield of over 600kg per dunam and people came all around to see this field and they were absolutely astounded.

Finally, Baruch Adiri,¹³⁴ a farmer who raises sheep for meat and milk, and normally has 1200 dunams of his land under barley and wheat, reported a similar but somewhat more creative form of “blessing” for being obedient to the Torah:

In the *shmita* year when I don’t plant my barley and wheat, I lose a lot of income. Yet – let’s say that each 100 ewes normally give me 125 to 130 lambs – in the *shmita* year they actually give birth to about 180 lambs. This compensates for the income I lose when I don’t plant my barley and

¹³² David Israel (cited in Stanley, 2004:16) farms on the Kibbutz Sha’alvim, which is located centrally between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in the foothills of the Judean mountains, in the region known as Shephelah. The main agricultural activities of the kibbutz are vineyards, wheat and cotton.

¹³³ Leviticus 25:21 in fact promises that the harvest in the pre-*shmita* (i.e. sixth) year will be plentiful enough to eat from for three years

¹³⁴ Baruch Adiri (cited in Stanley, 2004:18) owns a private farm near Ofakim in the south-western Negev

wheat. In the year before the last *shmita*, all my sheep were eating out in the fields. In late summer the first rain damaged the grass so I had to move all the sheep inside to feed them via a feed lot for about 100 days. In the *shmita* year, all the rain was in Be'er Sheva, a long way from us. The water from Be'er Sheva ran down here in the river and, because it was hot, the grass within the river bed grew very, very quickly and that year the sheep were able to feed all year outside. Thus I didn't have to give them anything extra; I didn't have to buy any additional food for them.

The above offer excellent examples of Gordon's first and third stratagems for overcoming the problem of scarcity: (a) the willingness to do something that does not make sense, which in this case occurred as a result of (b) strict observance of Mosaic-Sinai law. And the results are more than interesting: anomalies of weather that only occurred during a *shmita* year, and which appear to have only benefitted *shmita*-observant farmers; greater crop yields (e.g. 20 percent higher) in pre-*shmita* years – again enjoyed only by those obedient to this ancient OT law; and, finally, greater fertility (e.g. approximately 40 percent higher) in flocks during a *shmita* year – which compensated for loss of income from leaving wheat and barley fields lying fallow, as part of *shmita* observance.

Having said that, I appreciate that this anecdotal "proof" is open to question on a number of fronts; however, again, it is not so much the so-called miracle of provision itself that is important here. Instead, what is of particular interest within the present enquiry is the willingness of people to do things that do not make sense, and engage in risk-filled projects on the basis of faith and/or obedience – which required them to ignore

traditional agricultural practices, and also disregard significant peer pressure as well, no doubt. Now, seemingly irrational action of this kind might be easy to comprehend amongst naïve eighth century Buddhists in some remote area of China, but among hard-headed Israeli farmers in the early twenty-first century, such examples of faith cannot be so easily dismissed. Easier, were he interested in this kind of phenomena, might suggest that they occurred as a result of the people's expectations. In the eighth century, the Buddhist monk and workers on the gigantic statue *expected* their pious efforts to be rewarded (by Buddha) with protection – and that is exactly what happened. At the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, those Israeli farmers *expected* their pious acts of obedience to the OT law of *shmita* to be rewarded (by Yahweh) with protection and material blessings – and, again, that is exactly what happened.¹³⁵

Unfortunately, much of the present interest in Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) by International Finance Institutes (IFIs) and western aid/donor organisations does not recognise the spiritual-psychological power of faith as such, but instead focuses almost entirely on the practical issue of improving efficiency and effectiveness within the aid distribution model.¹³⁶ FBOs are on the ground, have invaluable local knowledge, are plugged into key, local networks, and so offer a viable option for improving aid distribu-

¹³⁵ According to the Letter to the Hebrews, "Faith is the substance (Greek: *hyposastis*, 'the steadfastness of mind, confidence, trust') of things hoped for" (11:1), and hope is "an anchor (Greek: *agryka*, metaphorically, any 'stay or safeguard') for the soul" (6:19). Thus, individual or collective faith may be defined as the psychological, motivational force that causes people to engage and persevere, if necessary, with a project they "believe in", providing them with some sort of internalised assurance of eventual success – even when faced with opposition or adversity.

¹³⁶ The blatantly secular nature of the current interest in Faith Based Organisations is illustrated by Benthall (2010), an anthropologist, who argues that FBOs are particularly relevant in development work because: (1) There is a correlation between religious adherence and practical commitment for the disadvantaged; (2) Philanthropy is rooted in religion; (3) Religions give access to vast civil society networks; (4) FBOs provide opportunities to bypass political structures that often lead to squandering and abuse of aid flows; and (5) FBOs can benefit from 'cultural proximity' – a privileged relationship between aid donors and aid beneficiaries.

tion in most of the less developed countries – especially since the major Christian denominations, for example, have been running mission schools and hospitals in those countries for over a century. To illustrate the extent and scope of FBO operations, Marshall (2005, in Rakodi, 2007:14) reports that, by some estimates, more than half of all health care and a large proportion of education services in sub-Saharan Africa today are provided by FBOs.

Thus, if there is any interest in religion exhibited by economists inside the International Financial Institutions, it is based purely on their expectations of a positive outcome from using FBOs as a local distribution vehicle to improve the deployment of aid. Faith and the “supernatural” do not come into it at all. Nevertheless, both development agencies and faith-based groups claim to have the same core agenda: the alleviation of poverty. On that basis, economics and religion are not at odds with each other – even if many of the participants on either side of the debate are. However, if lack of faith (i.e. negative expectations) is both a cause of economic deterioration and a hindrance to economic improvement, then by ignoring the positive motivational power of individual and collective faith, both IFIs and FBOs are ignoring a powerful component within the divine stratagems aimed at solving the very problem they are attempting to resolve: i.e. the endemic problem of scarcity. As a result, stripped of its economic component, religion (in particular, the Judeo-Christian tradition) continues to appear deficient and at times impotent in the face of economic adversity. Conversely, without the positive contribution

of faith (i.e. positive expectations), the IFIs' economic development programmes continue to deliver their less than stellar results.¹³⁷

Now, if scarcity is the norm, economically speaking, then logic dictates that the "Holy Grail" for economists must be the quest for growth – which Easterly has described in the title of his 2002 book as "elusive". Alas, Jackson and Fleischer (2007:1) report that, in the literature they reviewed,¹³⁸ religion is regarded almost unanimously as an *obstacle* to economic growth.¹³⁹ And I would suggest that this unfortunate state of affairs has arisen in part from the widespread perception that religion and, in particular, the Judeo-Christian tradition and thus the people of Yahweh appear to have nothing to offer the many millions of poor around the globe except charity (sometimes packaged as aid), which is essentially a voluntary form of redistribution of existing income from the rich to the poor. Interestingly, Easterly (2002:14) asserts that redistribution is just one way in which the economic condition of the poor could be improved. The other way is to create conditions of economic growth in which the income of both rich and poor rise together. In fact, I would argue that this scenario is implicit in the Mosaic-Sinai promise that "there will be no poor among you" (Deuteronomy 15:4); especially since the rest of the verse states that these optimal circumstances will occur because "the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you".

¹³⁷ Clarke (2007:91) concurs to some extent in his call for much needed change amongst western donors such as the UK Department for International Development. He asserts that the DFID "faces a number of distinct challenges, both conceptual and operational" and must "explore practical overlaps between the previously separate worlds of faith and development".

¹³⁸ As mentioned previously, Jackson and Fleischer's paper is part of the Religions and Development Research Programme at the University of Birmingham: a five year, £3.5 million project funded by the UK Department for International Development that confirms the importance that IFIs, western donor groups and development agencies have attached to faith-based organisations in development work and the alleviation of poverty.

¹³⁹ Interestingly, Barro and McCleary (2002:42) find a positive correlation between religious belief and economic growth, but a negative correlation between church attendance and growth.

Research by Dollar and Kraay (2000; in Easterly, 2002:14, n. 28) found that “a 1 percent increase in average income of the society translates one for one into a 1 percent increase in the incomes of the poorest 20 percent of the population”. Consequently, these findings (plus earlier research by Ravallion and Chen, 1997) suggest that, in Easterly’s words (2002:14), “on average, growth has been more of a lifesaver to the poor than redistribution”,¹⁴⁰ a claim that religious groups around the world would do well to consider. On the other hand, some might argue that redistribution is implicit in Christ’s remark that “those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last” (Matthew 19:30, 20:16; also Mark 10:31 and Luke 13:30), which is usually interpreted as depicting some form of divinely-ordained reversal of status and/or fortunes.¹⁴¹ However, this view ignores the context and thus misses the point. Without delving into too much exegetical detail here, in Matthew’s gospel, this statement brackets the parable of the Vineyard owner who chooses to pay all his workers the same wage, despite their varied efforts: i.e. whether they laboured for a full, 12-hour day or just one hour. On that basis, “those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last” could be interpreted as the economic version of a “dead heat”: i.e. everyone’s a winner – which is obviously what Easterly is suggesting.

Thus, from the above, we can see that within its proper, biblical context, prosperity (i.e. material blessing/surplus) can have a divine purpose for good – rather than being

¹⁴⁰ Easterly (2002:82) also argues that economic activity that focuses on the redistribution of income, particularly government intervention in the local economy (which has been proven to be a major growth retardant factor), causes the educated and highly skilled classes of that country to focus on those kinds of activity, rather than activities that would create growth. Thus, redistribution has the potential to be detrimental to growth. For a wider-ranging discussion of the political and economic problems associated with government-to-government aid, specifically from the viewpoint of Catholic Social Teaching, see Booth (2007).

¹⁴¹ For example, Stegemann and Stegemann (2001:202).

used in a perverted way for the kind of self-indulgence and self-aggrandisement with which it is normally associated. However, we cannot leave the issue there. As Osmer has suggested (2008:4), we need to adopt a pragmatic approach and determine some of the “practical applications” of that purpose in everyday life.

3. A BLESSING ON YOUR BARNS: ECONOMIC SURPLUS AND BANKING

And the Lord shall make you have a surplus of prosperity, through the fruit of your body, of your livestock, and of your ground, in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you.

The Lord shall open to you His good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow (Deuteronomy 28:11-12).

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned above, Thompson (1981:571) explains in his commentary on Jeremiah 31:12 that the reference to a bountiful supply of grain, oil and new wine (plus, in this particular verse, the young of the flock and herd) is evidence of divine favour that, according to the Mosaic-Sinai covenant, results in not just a basic level of provision, but in a *surplus* of prosperity.

The Amplified Bible correctly adds the word “surplus” in Deuteronomy 28:11 because the Hebrew is *yathar*, meaning ‘have more than enough, have an excess’, which obviously describes a situation whereby people have far more than they require for their own needs. However, as stated previously, the issue we are concerned with here is what happens to that surplus. Once harvested, it needs to be stored, and Sterba (1976:18-19) asserts that, “in an [ancient] economy employing commodity money, stored goods represent both cash reserves and *loanable funds*” (my italics). Thus, it would be something of

a natural progression for the people of Yahweh to graduate from being successful grain producers to become grain traders – and eventually grain bankers. This is why, just one verse later, in Deuteronomy 28:12, we read that Yahweh’s abundant blessing would cause His people to lend to many nations (Hebrew: *goyim*; usually a reference to non-Hebrew people), which would cause them to become powerful and thus gain economic and perhaps even political supremacy over the surrounding nations: viz. make them “the head and not the tail [...] above and not beneath” (Deuteronomy 28:13).

However, the link between banking activity and Yahweh’s promises of divine protection and prosperity appears to be based on more than simply finding something useful to do with surplus grain. For example, in different biblical episodes, when Yahweh desired to (a) protect His people from the devastation of famine, and (b) liberate them from the oppression of a corrupt oligarchy, His solution to the problem appears to have involved banking in some form. Firstly, in Genesis, we read that, to safeguard the extended family of Jacob-Israel from the effects of a severe famine that impacted the entire region, Yahweh inspired Joseph to establish a royal grain bank in Egypt. Secondly, in the sixth century BC, when Yahweh grew tired of the seemingly endless procession of corrupt and disobedient monarchs in Israel and Judah, He orchestrated the start of a paradigm shift in traditional Jewish economic practices – from predominantly agrarian to extensively mercantile – by introducing His people to the economic benefits of exile in Babylon,¹⁴² where many of them acquired mercantile experience and skills that would have involved banking.

¹⁴² According to Jeremiah 24:5, Yahweh sent the Jewish exiles “into the land of the Chaldeans *for their good*” (my italics).

Finally, if we accept the commercial interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, in the first century AD, when Palestine was again ruled by a corrupt oligarchy, consisting of the Herodians and aristocratic Sadducees, the benefits of the outpouring of grain, oil and new wine (in tandem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) would have been leveraged and also increased significantly by the operation of a banking facility within the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers. These and other factors make it important to explore the connection between banking and ancient religions; with a particular focus on the people of Yahweh – from Egypt to Babylon and beyond.

3.2 The temple-based origins of banking

The association of money and temples has its roots in both Greek and Roman mythological sources. For example, the Greek etymological origin of the word “money” reputedly involves an argument between Zeus and Hera, as portrayed in Homer’s *Iliad* (15:15-25), in which Zeus punished his wife by chaining her in limbo between earth and sky.

In this predicament, the goddess was described as ‘lonely Hera’, *Heras monetas*, and the word ‘money’ apparently comes from *moneres* or *mone*, because the lonely Hera was allegedly bound with a golden chain. However, with the help of her son, Hephaestus, Hera broke the golden chain and released herself; and the ancient Greeks believed that all gold found on earth originated from the fragments of this golden chain when it fell from the sky. This myth, plus the link between temples and gold, is supposedly the reason why gold coins were not minted in Greece until 356 BC. In a similar vein, we learn from Davies (2002:88) that the Latin origin of “money” involved a Roman legend that grew out of the sack of Rome in 390 BC, which alleges that, when the Gauls attempted to

mount a surprise attack against defenders who had retreated to the Capitoline Hill, the besieged Romans were alerted by the cackling of sacred geese around the temple of Jupiter,¹⁴³ where valuable assets were deposited for safekeeping. The warning allowed the defenders to rally in time to repel their attackers, which they managed to do successfully for some seven months. In thanks, according to Davies, “the Romans built a shrine to Moneta, the goddess of warning, or of advice. It is from [the name of] Moneta that we derive both ‘money’ and ‘mint’”.

Davies (2002:50) also explains that, even though “banking operations of the temple and palace-based banks predate the use of coinage by a thousand years”;¹⁴⁴ the earliest records dealing with money and banking are associated with temples because “Security for deposits was more easily assured in the temples and royal palaces than in private houses”. Hamilton (1964:366) agrees, and further argues that “Temples quickly accumulated large amounts of coined money offered to the gods. Being the property of the gods, these temple funds enjoyed the unique security of divine protection, with the result that temples were considered the safest places for money in antiquity.¹⁴⁵ This security factor attracted the surplus funds of states, corporations, and private individuals until custody of deposits became a regular feature of temples. Temples became the first banks”. He goes on to assert that “Ways were soon found of investing these funds to advantage through loans”. Likewise, Cohen (1997:42, n. 2) writes that “The financial operations of

¹⁴³ Some versions of this legend claim that it was the Temple of Juno

¹⁴⁴ As mentioned previously, the earliest banks were depositaries for surplus grain

¹⁴⁵ Interestingly, Steinsaltz (2006:217) writes that people who deposited their funds in the temple in Jerusalem sometimes marked their money chests as “Temple property” in order to dissuade thieves.

religious complexes [in particular, Greek temple banks] utilised funds belonging to a particular deity to offer loans to finance cult expenses”.

Finally, according to Temin (2002:24), temple-banking operations continued in the Roman era and, in order to finance cult expenses, the temples had to adopt an aggressive lending programme that earned at least a 12 percent annual return on their capital.¹⁴⁶ However, caution is urged at this point, since any study of ancient banking encounters problems if we insist on applying an overly-strict definition of a “bank” to any ancient so-called banking operation. It can also be counterproductive if we allow ourselves to get bogged down in any debate over such technicalities because, in doing so, we might miss a salient point: in order to survive, let alone thrive, temples of various religions needed to engage in outside commercial activities – some more aggressively than others. And some of that outside commercial activity involved the acceptance of deposits,¹⁴⁷ and also lending money.

In other words, whether temple treasury operations were or were not banks in the strict sense is not the point for, as Chachi (2005:4, 21) states both succinctly and correctly, temples certainly *acted as* banks.

¹⁴⁶ Temin (2002:24) writes that “endowment accounts often anticipated an expenditure at or near 12 percent annually, implying that the funds had to earn at least 12 percent to preserve the endowment (Sosin, 2001). The temples holding the endowments had to have an aggressive loaning policy to earn this much”. We also know from other sources, namely Cohen (1997:52) and Bogaert (2000), that 12 percent per annum (i.e. 1 percent per month) was the standard rate of interest in the Greco-Roman period.

¹⁴⁷ According to Stegemann (1998:72), the Temple in Jerusalem levied a tax on deposits left with their treasury

3.3 Mesopotamian-Babylonian temple banking

Sterba (1976:25-26) speculates that the origins of what he calls the Mesopotamian temple corporation (i.e. estate)¹⁴⁸ “go back to the tribal customs of the unknown people who first erected temples at Eridu, Ubaid and Uruk in the fifth and fourth millennia BC”, and asserts that its success can be demonstrated by its longevity. He explains (1976:19) that these temple estates “combined many functions of a modern day public treasury, commercial bank, accounting firm and welfare agency”, which meant that they “received revenues from various enterprises, collected taxes and rents, disbursed payrolls, redistributed income by means of grants to the needy, under-wrote foreign trade and sometimes made loans to private individuals”. Moreover, as part of the management of local economic affairs, temple authorities also administered price controls and set interest rates.

From Orsingher (1967:1), we learn that that “Historical excavations have uncovered the temple of Uruk and Chaldea, a relic of the Babylonian empire, and have shown that the foundation of the oldest banking building in the world took place more than 3,300 years before our era”. Since the medium of exchange at the time was predominantly barley, the evidence of extensive storage facilities associated with temples implies that the temple estates operated grain banks;¹⁴⁹ because, as mentioned previously, Sterba (1976:18-19) argues that “in an economy employing commodity money, stored goods represent both cash reserves and loanable funds”. Furthermore, Davies (2005) asserts

¹⁴⁸ For a comprehensive overview of Mesopotamian Temple estates, I recommend Sterba (1976:16-36) who, writing in a business management journal, refers to them as “Temple corporations”.

¹⁴⁹ Sterba (1976:18) writes that “Pantries, granaries, bins and warehouses were built along the inner side of the wall surrounding the temple ground”.

that, even though they had to carry out various monetary functions without the benefit and facility of coinage, which at that time had not been invented, the early Babylonians developed their banking activity to quite a sophisticated degree. And Chachi (2005:4, 21) agrees that the available historical evidence, which dates from as early as 3400 BC, “shows that a very advanced banking system was carried out by the religious temples which used to take care of the savings of their depositors and give loans to those who need finance, thus acting as banks”.

This is confirmed by Davies (2002:50), who also reports that, somewhere around 3400 BC, the activities of Mesopotamian temple banks expanded from being merely a safe deposit for funds to include the provision of loans, when receipts for deposits came to be used for transfers not only to the original depositors but also to third parties. In addition, Homoud (1985:17-18) cites evidence for this development in one of the excavated scripts found at the temple of Uruk, which describes what would be considered a reasonably sophisticated credit transaction: the loan of a quantity of silver, from the priestess of the temple to a farmer, in order to finance his purchase of sesame. From this document we glean the following: since the borrower was a producer, the loan was for production purposes, and not for personal or household consumption. Also, the farmer undertook to repay the loan of silver with an agreed value of sesame (at whatever price was current at harvest time) to the holder of this ancient form of a “promissory note”, which was made payable to the bearer; thus, the loan was transferable.

Finally, Orsingher (1964:viii) claims that the Code of Hammurabi, created c. 1790 BC, provides categorical evidence that, by this period, “Bank operations by temples and great landowners had become so numerous and so important” it became “necessary to

lay down standard rules of procedure". However, Sterba (1976:26) explains that temple estates began to decline during the Hammurabi dynasty, since "Hammurabi and his successors consciously pursued policies encouraging private ownership of land, thus chipping away at the economic base of the temple corporation".

3.4 Greco-Roman temple banking

Bogaert (1968, in Macro, 1970:350) writes that, from early antiquity, Greek sanctuaries provided facilities for the safe-keeping of precious objects; and, with the introduction of money, they also accepted deposits of coin.

He also states that, of the twenty-five sanctuaries for which banking operations are attested, twenty extended loans. However, he argues that the capital for these loans came from the temple treasury or, to be more precise, its surplus funds – and not from outside client deposits. From Hamilton (1964:366), we learn that, "due to the expansion of commerce and a money economy, the Hellenistic period saw a considerable increase in banking activity". Interestingly, after the fourth century BC, private banks tended to overshadow temple banks in large commercial cities; however, Rostovtzeff (1941:231ff., 425, 648-649, 673, 1290) claims that there is evidence for Greek temple banks during this period in Sardis, Claris, Pessinus, Mylasa, Aymus, and Caria – although, the most famous of these banks were apparently at Ephesus, Delos, Olympus and Delphi. In fact, Homer (1963:38) writes that the Shrine of Delphi has sometimes been described as "the great banker of the Greek world"; although, Temin (2001:22) differs, claiming that "The most famous banks were on Delos, where there were both temple and private banks".

According to Davies (2005), because Delos was a barren offshore island, the inhabitants had to live off their wits and make the most of their two great assets: the island's magnificent natural harbour and the famous temple of Apollo – both of which figured greatly in the development of trading and financial activities.¹⁵⁰ From Temin (2002:22) we learn that “the Temple of Apollo appeared to give loans with houses as security, what we now would regard as a mortgage”,¹⁵¹ which is supported by evidence supplied by Reger (1992:324) that, between 314 and 167 BC, the temple lent money to private persons, using private land as security – out of general temple funds and/or any number of private foundations with which it was associated. Also, Davies (2005) asserts that credit transfer was a characteristic feature of banking in Delos where cash transactions “were replaced by real credit receipts and payments made on simple instructions with accounts kept for each client”.

Nevertheless, Winkler (1933:22) points out that the temple bank on Delos also has the dubious distinction of suffering the first recorded instance of a government loan default when, between 377-373 BC, two Greek city-states defaulted totally on loans extended by the temple, and some others defaulted partially. Temin (2001:22) informs us that “there were banks in Greece before Rome came that continued in operation after the Roman conquest”; and Davies (2005) confirms that, after the main commercial rivals of Delos (i.e. Carthage and Corinth) were both destroyed by the Romans, “it was natural that the Bank of Delos should become the model most closely imitated by the banks of

¹⁵⁰ According to Finley (1973:174), in the second century BC, “the affluent temple of Apollo at Delos stored both its own savings and those of the city-state of Delos in its divinely protected strong-room [...] The two treasuries were called the ‘sacred chest’ and the ‘public chest’”. He states that the treasury held substantial savings: e.g. one group of jars contained 48,000 drachmas (or 8 talents).

¹⁵¹ Temin cites *Inscriptions de Delos* (Paris: H. Champion, 1926); Frank, Tenney (ed.), *Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, vol. 4 (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1933:357); and also Reger (1992).

Rome". In addition, Temin (2002:25) writes that "temples were an important means of 'pooling' investment funds in the early Roman Empire" and that, as part of this lending activity, they extended credit to Roman businessmen looking for funding for their enterprises.

3.5 The ancient Jewish connection with banking

The earliest, albeit implicit reference to a banking facility in the Hebrew Bible can be found in Genesis 41:33-37ff., when Joseph advised Pharaoh on the establishment of what would be categorised as a royal grain bank.¹⁵²

In Genesis 42:6, in various ET bibles (e.g. NIV, KJV and Amplified version), we are told that Joseph was "governor over the land" of Egypt; however, I would argue that this title is not precise enough to describe a person who is portrayed in explicit terms as being in control of the national economy.¹⁵³ The Hebrew words *shalliyt* (Genesis 42:6) and *mashal* (45:26) both carry the general-purpose meaning of 'ruler'¹⁵⁴ or 'one who has dominion'; but, more specifically, in Genesis 41:43, we are told that Joseph ruled as second-in-command to Pharaoh. In the United Kingdom, the second most important politician after the Prime Minister is the Chancellor of the Exchequer: the most powerful financial position in the country. Accordingly, I would suggest that "Chancellor of the Exchequer" is a more accurate title to describe Joseph's position. I also find it no coincidence that, in

¹⁵² Chachi (2005:7) confirms that banking operations commenced in Egypt even before the introduction of coinage, with harvests being stored in state warehouses.

¹⁵³ Interestingly, the fact that Joseph's 70-member family settled as shepherd-pastoralists in Goshen (Genesis 46-47) meant that they were not part of Egypt's all-important 'grain economy'. The lack of ongoing involvement in this central economic powerbase may help explain why the Children of Israel became vulnerable to persecution under a later Pharaoh.

¹⁵⁴ The title 'ruler' is used by the NASB

Hebrew, the name given to Joseph by Pharaoh is *Tsophnath Pa`neach* (Genesis 41:45), which means ‘*treasury of the glorious rest*’ (my italics).¹⁵⁵

Furthermore, at Pharaoh’s decree, Joseph was given “Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On,¹⁵⁶ to be his wife” (Genesis 41:45), which may have been done in recognition of his evident priest-like qualities:¹⁵⁷ e.g. “a man in whom is the Spirit of God” (Genesis 41:38). However, implicit in this gesture are two possibilities: firstly, it is likely that temple banks already existed in Egypt; therefore, Joseph needed be accorded some sort of high priestly status in order to control them. Or, secondly, that this new, royal grain bank was to be granted the secondary status of a temple bank, to demonstrate to the people of Egypt and surrounding nations that it would enjoy protection and patronage at the highest possible levels of authority – both secular and sacred. Finally, if we take into consideration Sterba’s comment concerning stored goods representing both cash and loanable funds, it is also possible that the Mosaic-Sinai covenant promise whereby Yahweh will ‘command’ (Hebrew: *tsavah*, ‘cause to exist’) a blessing in the people’s barns and storehouses (Deuteronomy 28:8) implies the potential operation of grain banks by the Children of Israel. Interestingly, in this same passage, we find the aforementioned promise that they will lend to many nations (28:12) out of a “surplus of prosperity” (28:11), which would occur as a result of extraordinarily abundant grain harvests.

After the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great, in 539 BC, Mesopotamian temple estates (and their attendant banking operations) ceased to be any kind of economic

¹⁵⁵ See Strong’s Concordance (H6847)

¹⁵⁶ ‘On’ is Hebrew for the name of the city later known in Greek as *Heliopolis*, Ἡλιούπολις, meaning ‘city of the sun’, since it was the principal seat of sun worship to *Re-Atum* or *Atum-Re*, “the evening sun”.

¹⁵⁷ Other historical examples of extremely powerful priest-statesmen include the cardinals Wolsey (Lord Chancellor of England, 1515-1519) and Richelieu (Prime Minister of France, 1624-1643)

force. According to Chachi (2005:8), as a result of the conquest, “Persian traders managed to learn the Babylonian banking methods”. They also leveraged their own widespread use of weights and measures (introduced under the Achaemenid dynasty sometime after 700 BC) and coinage (a benefit of Cyrus’ conquest of the Lydian empire, in 546 BC). Consequently, the combination of these earlier innovations plus established Babylonian banking practices stimulated foreign commerce and facilitated an expansion in banking activities. Of particular interest to the present enquiry is the evidence of links between the Jewish people and prominent Babylonian banking firms, even from the pre-exilic era. For example, in the seventh century BC, perhaps the most prominent banking group in Babylon was the “House of Egibi”.¹⁵⁸ Davies (2002:51) informs us that they carried out a “very wide variety of business activities combined with their banking”; they also gave loans against security and accepted a wide range of deposits.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Gross (1975:10) speculates that the founder of this banking firm may have been Jewish, citing support not only from the man’s name, Jacob, but also from the fact that loans were formally extended without interest.

A later prominent Babylonian mercantile/banking group with attested links to the Jewish people is the Sons of Murashu. This firm operated during the fifth century BC and was based in Nippur, which Tadmor (1976:162) reminds us is near the River Chebar;

¹⁵⁸ Known later as the “Grandsons of Egibi”; however, on occasion, the patriarch/founder of this firm has also been referred to as “Igibi”

¹⁵⁹ Davies cites Heichelheim (1958:72), who writes that “Customers could have current accounts with them and withdraw the whole or parts of certain deposits with cheques [...] Speculation and investment for secure income were combined in the business pattern of this bank”. Chachi (2005:8) confirms that, among other things, the “Grandsons of Igibi” floated loans.

the area where, perhaps not coincidentally, the Jewish exiles were originally settled.¹⁶⁰ According to Davies (2002:51), the Sons of Musashu not only carried on the same kind of banking functions as the Grandsons of Egibi, they also administered the royal and larger private estates – as agents or tax farmers. Archives belonging to this firm were excavated in 1893 and consist of a corpus of some seven hundred and thirty tablets, dating from the reigns of Artaxerxes I (464 to 424 BC) and Darius II (424 to 404 BC). The tablets contain seventy names identified as Jewish, along with proof, according to Gross (1975:10), of “major contracts signed by wealthy Jewish landowners in their own right who traded with the Murashu sons on a basis of equality”.¹⁶¹ Coogan (1974:7) writes that:

The names of the principals and witnesses in the various contracts show that Nippur was a cosmopolitan city under Persian rule. Apart from the large number of individuals with Babylonian names there were also many Persians, Medes, Egyptians and West Semites; the last group included Jews with biblical names such as Hanani, Shabbatai and Jonathan.¹⁶²

Coogan (1974:10) also states that, in the tablet known as UM 121, we find evidence of a Jew called El-yadin, the son of Yadi'-yaw, acting as co-creditor in a loan transaction with Rimit-ninurta, a member of the Murashu firm. So here, from the fifth century BC, we have definitive proof of a Jew directly involved in an ancient example of a mer-

¹⁶⁰ As mentioned in Ezekiel 1:1. Gross (1974:9) confirms that the exiles “developed a new center in and around Nippur, the second largest city in Babylonia, which was located on the ‘river’ Chebar or, rather, the canal connecting the Euphrates and Tigris”.

¹⁶¹ For a detailed discussion of the Jewish names recorded in the Murashu documents, see Coogan (1974:6-12). He states that, even though at times it is difficult to separate names that are Jewish from those of other Western Semitic nations, many of the names are Yahwistic and therefore can be determined as Jewish. Also, many names are attested in the biblical record of returning exiles.

¹⁶² One tablet, IX.45, dated the 36th year of Artaxerxes (428 BC), depicts a contract between the Sons of Murashu and various Jewish principals acting jointly with members of a family under the headship of the family patriarch, Yadi'-yaw.

chant-banking syndicate. In addition, we also have evidence from the post-exilic period to show that the temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem was used for secular as well as religious purposes. In Nehemiah 13:13, two Levites, Pedaiah and Hanan, are listed as members of what Schaper (1997:202) calls “the Temple Treasury Committee” (referred to in Nehemiah 13:13 as “treasurers over the storerooms”). He goes on to explain (1997:204) that “the committee members oversaw not just the collection of tithes but also that of Persian imperial taxes”.

3.6 Factors behind the shift in Jewish economic activities

In Babylon, the Jewish exiles experienced a critical shift in their economic activities, as Gross remarks (1975:10): “The people who at home had devoted itself largely to agriculture and small crafts now assumed an important role in banking and far-flung commerce”.¹⁶³

He also writes that, “In Babylonia, particularly, which at that time marched in the vanguard of a semicapitalistic civilization, Jews entered the stream of advanced mercantile exchanges”, which is corroborated by Erlich (2009:760) with evidence from the royal Babylonian archives that several Jews acted as royal merchants or commercial agents. Likewise, Gross (1974:11) adds that, “by acclimatizing themselves to their surroundings, many Jews, especially those living in Babylonia, acquired considerable wealth and ex-

¹⁶³ The pace and extent of this change is open to debate: e.g. Botticini and Eckstein (2003:3) assert that the significant transition of Jews from agriculture to crafts, trade, and money-lending did not commence until the Talmudic period. Their argument is based on the widely-accepted view that, in Babylon, the majority of Judeans were involved in agriculture, as holders of small plots (“bow-lands”), lessees of fields (along canals), tenants, gardeners and shepherds. However, Erlich (2009:760) challenges this view, which he argues “is dictated by the [available] documentation, *which is mostly about grain fields and palm groves*” (my italics), and further asserts that “The almost total lack of information about Judean artisans [i.e. non-agrarian occupations in Babylon] can be ascribed to the nature of the documentation”.

tensive political as well as business contacts with the ruling classes of the empire". For support, he cites the edict from Cyrus (Ezra 1:4) commanding the Jews who remained in Babylon to equip the returning exiles "with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill-offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem".

Although their research focuses on a later period (i.e. post-70 AD), Botticini and Eckstein (2003) offer some interesting insight into possible "human capital" reasons behind the progressive shift by the Jews towards mercantile occupations, which they argue was caused primarily by the growth in literacy amongst the Jewish people. Erlich (2009:760) notes that, in relative terms, "many Judeans were employed [in Babylon] as alphabet scribes, who wrote in Aramaic script, in contradistinction to the exclusively Babylonian scribes writing on clay"; and, interestingly, he suggests that the reason why Jews were overrepresented in this profession – and not Aramaeans or other West Semites – is because literacy became widespread in Judah in the late pre-exilic period, as attested in the rich epigraphic finds; in particular, the ostraca and bullae.

The ancient link between literacy and commerce is confirmed by Oates (1979:15, 25) who argues that "the invention of writing represented at first merely a technical advance in economic administration".¹⁶⁴ From Aberbach (1982:19), we learn that exceptional economic conditions during the third century BC made it possible to expand the learning of the Torah and also the educational system;¹⁶⁵ and later, in about the first cen-

¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, Davies (2002:50) suggests a specific link with banking with his claim that "writing first appeared because of the prosaic need to record debts and credits. Handwriting from its very beginnings was closely associated and improved in parallel with the keeping of accounts".

¹⁶⁵ In the first century AD, Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.12) also emphasised the importance of education to the Jews: "Our principal care of all is this, to educate our children well; and we think it to be the most necessary business of our whole life to observe the laws that have been given us, and to keep those rules of piety that have been delivered down to us." According to Botticini and Eckstein (2003:3), primary education became

tury BC, Simeon ben Shetah made secondary schools compulsory. However, of particular interest to the present enquiry is the comment by Botticini and Eckstein (2003:15) that “The ability to read and write religious texts also enabled the Jews to read and write any other documents written in Hebrew, such as business letters, contracts, loans and sales. Therefore, the religious requirement to learn the Torah in Hebrew turned out to be profitable in the economic sphere as well”. They also mention the fact (2003:12) that “many pagans converted to Judaism at that time, as they saw that the Jews were doing well from an economic point of view”.

Since Elazar (1986) informs us that, in Greco-Roman times, the Jews of the Diaspora were concentrated in cities (except in Egypt), it would be logical to find urbanised Jews adopting non-agrarian trades and occupations. However, Botticini and Eckstein’s model suggests that the potential for superior earnings was also an influencing factor. They contend (2003:3) that “Jewish education has a positive effect on a merchant’s income but not on a farmer’s income”; and their model shows that the propensity for Jews to invest in their children’s education leads to a preference for those children to become merchants. The attraction of economic gain is implicit in the claim by Kuznets (1960:1621) that, throughout history, “people engaged in handicrafts, trade and finance earned, on average, more than farmers”. In support, we have evidence from Sperber (1966:250-251) that, in Roman Palestine in the first century AD, an educated non-agrarian worker could earn on average twice as much as an agrarian worker: e.g. the daily wage of a vineyard worker was one *denarius*; whereas, the fee for a doctor and the daily wage

mandatory for boys in 64 AD, when the high priest Joshua ben Gamala issued an ordinance that “teachers had to be appointed in each district and every city and that boys of the age of six or seven should be sent”.

of a scribe was two *denarii*.¹⁶⁶ Finally, a comment by Edersheim (1904:96) suggests that this shift towards mercantile activities may also have been a response to the oppression experienced by the Jews.

When Israel was scattered by units, hundreds, or even thousands, but still a miserable, vanquished, homeless, weak minority among the nations of the earth – avoided, down-trodden, and at the mercy of popular passion – no other course was open to them than to follow commerce [...] Moreover, it was necessary for their self-defence – almost for their existence – that they should gain influence. And in their circumstances this could only be obtained by the possession of wealth, and the sole road to this was commerce.

3.7 An economic paradigm shift with social consequences

It is perhaps no coincidence that the earlier stages of this Jewish occupational shift were played out against the backdrop of major economic changes in the Greek world: namely, the genesis of the so-called “market economy”. According to Cohen (1997:5), in Athens, in the fifth century BC, Aristotle complained about the “relatively recent development of a new type of economic activity that has adversely affected traditional values and methods”. This ‘monied mode of acquisition’ (*chrēmatiskē ktētikē*) has arisen, he says, from “the new dominance of distribution by experienced businessmen motivated by profit considerations (‘making money from one another’). The individual pursuit of profit reflects so-

¹⁶⁶ According to Sperber (1966:187), there is evidence from the same period for a similar earnings differential in Egypt, where the daily wage of a farm worker varied from $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{6}$ *denarius* (while a man who harvested was paid just half that amount), compared to a teacher who earned $\frac{1}{4}$ *denarius*.

ciety's new functioning through the exchange of goods and services for money, not bound by societal relations, replacing the prior system of household production/consumption, which had been augmented sporadically, where necessary, by barter within defined social relationships".¹⁶⁷

Cohen (1997:6) argues that this move from what is described as an "embedded" to a "market" economy was a fundamental paradigm shift in economic practice.¹⁶⁸ Before the fourth century, the Athenian economy was organised in such a way as to enable the *oikos* or 'household' (i.e. an estate of significant size and worth, owned by a wealthy elite) to be self-sufficient, since the vast majority of economic activity was designed to produce goods for either consumption by the *oikos* or to secure/expand its assets and wealth. However, Cohen writes that, by the fourth century, "agricultural products were increasingly being produced for cash sale; consumer items were now often produced by commercial workshops; aristocratic marriages for dynastic continuity had disappeared. Financial stability had become dependent on the credibility (*pistis*) in the marketplace of former slaves who were able to marshal unprecedentedly large monetary resources". Furthermore, Davies (2002:71) adds that "the Greek prejudice against manual labour and against the everyday boredom of business life left the field wide open to enterprising 'metics' or foreign residents, many of who were to become prominent in banking".

Note how far-reaching these changes were. For example, the change in economic practice coincides with the disappearance of a traditional and previously critical social

¹⁶⁷ *Politics* 1256a-1257b and 1258b 1-4; cited in Cohen (1997:5)

¹⁶⁸ As Moxnes (2004:29) explains: "In antiquity the economy was [...] *embedded* in society and in its power structures [my italics]. This structure of power ruled production and exchange systems, which therefore did not operate according to a 'free market' economy".

practice: namely, aristocratic marriages arranged for dynastic reasons; since, for whatever reason, the market economy was now considered a more efficient (or perhaps less problematic) way to protect/augment the family estate or patrimony than doing so through an arranged marriage. Also, the burden or responsibility for economic stability moved out of the hands of the ruling class and became dependent on foreigners and former slaves, which was obviously not just an economic paradigm shift, but one with considerable socio-economic impact as well.

3.8 Conclusion

As we can see, banking grew out of an opportunity to do something profitable with the surplus from abundant grain harvests. From this, we may infer that it would have been perceived by the people of Yahweh as a key component of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant, and therefore an important dynamic within the fulfilment of the OT salvation-restoration oracles – as proclaimed by Joel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel et al, and also alluded to by the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost.

The connection between banking and ancient religions is attested by evidence of temple banks that dates back far into antiquity; and it was still important throughout the Greek and Roman period, including the first century AD in Jerusalem, as we shall discuss in the next section. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to discover an important and enduring connection between the people of Yahweh and banking, which the Deuteronomist editors imply was orchestrated by Yahweh Himself. However, even though this connection appears to have been birthed out of the extreme circumstances of famine and exile, over time it became an important factor in that people's shift from an economy that

was predominantly agrarian in nature to one that was extensively mercantile, and therefore more prosperous. Consequently, we find it not only plausible but also likely that there were numerous merchants and merchant-financiers among the crowd of Hellenist Diaspora Jews listening to Peter on the Day of Pentecost.¹⁶⁹ And we would also expect them to be notably affluent if not wealthy, especially since the price of land and the cost of living in Jerusalem was expensive, as discussed below.

Furthermore, if a significant number of those merchants and merchant-financiers joined the primitive church congregation, we might then expect this group to break off all business connections with the Temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem, which was controlled by a Sanhedrin who had, in the apostle Peter's words, "crucified and put away [Jesus] by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). In that scenario, logic (i.e. historical precedent, combined with commercial necessity) dictates that they would establish their own, separate banking facility. And if that kind of economic defection took place alongside the obvious religious/sectarian defection, it then becomes clear why the Sadducee elite may have seen the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers as a serious threat to their economic as well as their religious powerbase – a theory we shall now explore in more detail.

¹⁶⁹ As mentioned above, Edersheim (1904:98) writes that, for the Jews "dispersed abroad" among the Gentile nations, commerce was "a necessity, and in fact, the grand staple of their existence".

4. FROM PENTECOST TO PERSECUTION: THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF ACTS 2 TO 8

4.1 Introduction

For a long time, Luke's account of the primitive church has presented problems for scholars grappling with questions such as why strife (some even suggest schism) appeared to enter the community after a period of marked harmony (Acts 6:1), or why the Hellenist-Believers were driven out of Jerusalem while the Hebrew apostles were able to remain (8:1).

Unfortunately, the answers provided by the various exegetical approaches taken to date, ranging from textual criticism to sociological analysis, have not proven wholly satisfactory. In this section, I intend to address these and other questions through an examination of the economic and, where relevant, political dynamics portrayed in the early part of Acts; in particular, the second through eighth chapters. From this, I hope to augment our understanding of the Lukan text, and simultaneously illustrate the exegetical value of an economic perspective – as well as provide circumstantial evidence in support of my central argument that the primitive church experienced the dual economic and spiritual “outpourings” that were promised in the OT salvation-restoration oracles. In doing so, I readily acknowledge that we should beware of looking for “the money angle” (i.e. commercial motivation) behind every phrase, action or circumstance. On the other hand, we should also beware of ignoring the potential benefit of some kind of economically-slanted analysis of the text when it is employed forensically as an exegetical tool.

As mentioned previously, according to Greek and Roman mythology, money was originally associated with the gods, and was subsequently deposited for safekeeping

– by all classes of people – in the local temple, giving rise to the concept and practice of temple banks. In first century Jerusalem, the Temple treasury-bank held not only the wealth of the ruling aristocrats, but also the surplus funds of the city’s middle class and numerous traders and craftsmen; and, according to Hamilton (1964:368), there is evidence that temple funds were invested in a “directly commercial sense”. The commercial activity that centred on the Temple cult provided the majority of the city’s annual income, and Josephus (*Antiquities* 15.11.1) informs us that between 10,000 and 18,000 workmen, as well as 1,000 priests, were employed in the rebuilding and expansion of the temple complex,¹⁷⁰ a hugely expensive project commissioned by Herod the Great that lasted more than eighty years. Consequently, when Jesus disrupted the commercial activity of the money-changers (Greek: *trapezitai*, as well as *kollubistōn*)¹⁷¹ and other merchants operating within the temple precincts (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46), this action, more than any theological or doctrinal clash, brought Him into direct conflict with the vested interests of the powerful, priestly and lay aristocratic families of Jerusalem.¹⁷²

As Hamilton (1964:371) writes, “This challenge to the power of the Sanhedrin, especially in the form of interference with the keystone of the Judean economy, could hardly go unnoticed”. However, this single, somewhat symbolic act of protest pales in

¹⁷⁰ From Josephus (*Antiquities* 15.11.2), we learn that Herod “chose out ten thousand of the most skilful workmen” to build/enlarge the Temple platform, an area the size of 35 acres when finished; however, by the time it was completed, the number working on the project had reputedly grown to around 18,000. In addition, he used 1,000 priests who were trained in carpentry and masonry, among other things, to build the Temple itself, because laity were banned from working in the consecrated area (i.e. the *Hakhal* and *Devir*). .

¹⁷¹ Also *kermatistas* (κερματιστὰς), from *kerma* (κερμα), meaning ‘small pieces of money or change, small coin’, as used in John 2:14.

¹⁷² According to Schürer et al (1979:212), “The civil authority of the Great Sanhedrin in the time of Jesus was restricted to the eleven toparchies of Judea proper. It consequently had no judicial authority at all over Jesus whilst he remained in Galilee. He came directly under its jurisdiction only in Judea”.

comparison to the greater threat posed by the possible establishment and operation of a rival temple-banking facility – or what Cohen (1997:7) calls a “trapezitic business” – within the primitive church, which I argue was controlled initially by the Hebrew apostles, but was eventually placed under the day-to-day management of a group of seven Hellenist *trapezitai* (i.e. merchant-financiers operating as bankers), whose leaders were known for their anti-temple sentiment. I also suggest that the fear of this growing economic threat led to an outbreak of persecution in which Stephen, as head *trapezitēs*, was specifically targeted by the Sadducee elite, who either encouraged or perhaps even directly engaged a group of willing Hellenist-Jews to do their dirty work for them. On that basis, as with Jesus before him, Stephen’s alleged blasphemy supplied a convenient religious excuse for what was obviously an economically and politically motivated execution.

The flourishing commercial activities of this rival banking operation – as well as its growing power and influence – would have been driven by the not insignificant participation of thousands of members of the primitive church drawn from the multitude of Diaspora Jews then residing in Jerusalem. And within this larger group of market-savvy converts, there would have been a core, highly-experienced cadre of first century “capitalists”¹⁷³ who had access to various, interconnected commercial networks that covered most of the then known world and included politically-important cities like Rome and Susa, as well as Alexandria, a powerful international trade and financial centre. This is no doubt why the *Hellenistae* involved in this new economic powerbase became a target

¹⁷³ This nomenclature is used by Chachi (2005:5) to describe bankers in ancient Babylon; also by Edersheim (1904:27) in a reference to Roman merchant-aristocrats of the equestrian order.

for persecution by the political-economic elite in Jerusalem, with its numerous mercantile and banking interests – which may also explain why the Hebrew apostles were able to remain in the city amidst this patently selective programme of persecution, while the Hellenist *trapezitai* and other Hellenist-Believers had to flee for their lives (Acts 8:1).

Finally, in this section, as discussed previously, I have moved beyond traditional descriptions or compilations of economic and political conditions during the period depicted by the Book of Acts, as per say Jeremias (1969), Schürer et al (1979) and Cassidy (1987), in order to investigate the underlying dynamics (i.e. the “motivating or driving forces”)¹⁷⁴ that were often aggravated by what might be regarded as seemingly minor events; and which were present within the tensions of ideas both new and old, and the clashes between entrenched groups and idealistic individuals. Because of that, there are times when this approach will appear to provide themes and theories that resemble the plot for a novel or drama. But, as we shall see below, when viewed through an economic and/or political lens, the Lukan text reveals the basest human motives of greed, corruption, lust for power and even conspiracy to murder.

4.2 Key elements behind the tension between temple and sect

Luke's description of the Christian communities in their confrontation with the Judaic world is, from the sociological point of view and in the terminology of Ernst Troeltsch, a testimony of a *sectarian* identity (Bovon, 1992:189, my italics).

¹⁷⁴ The definition of “dynamics” from the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2006

The clash between the old faith and the new was to a large degree a struggle for power, although this is not to deny that strong feelings over doctrinal matters also played a part (Esler, 1987:21).

The purpose of wealth is to acquire power. The purpose of power is to protect wealth (Hock, 2005:137).

The historic and long-standing power and privileges of the ruling Sadducees were established on the three pillars of religion, politics and economics.

However, according to Jeremias (1969:232), by the time of the events described by Luke, the Sadducee elite had been experiencing a steady and unstoppable erosion of their religious authority and power for almost a century, commencing sometime during the reign of Queen Alexandra (c. 76 BC). Likewise, under the Romans and Herodians, they experienced a significant erosion of their political autonomy and power, when the office of high priest ceased to be life-long and hereditary. As Schürer et al (1979:228) write, “Both Herod and the Romans deposed and appointed High Priests at will”; and, in this way, Jeremias (1969:159) argues, “Herod achieved his aim, in part at least, to make the high priest wholly dependent on [secular] political authority”. Nevertheless, through their continued control of the Temple cult and Temple treasury-bank, the Sadducee elite had managed to maintain their economic powerbase. But now, if we accept the alternative, banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, that too was under threat – from a new sect, whose Hebrew leaders had established a form of temple-banking operation that appears to have expanded even more rapidly when placed under the control of seven Hellenist *trapezitai*.

Against this background, the various details recorded in Acts 2 to 8, even some incidental and seemingly minor ones, provide the basis of a plot in both the literary and political sense; and one, I submit, that is cohesive as well as believable. It would now therefore be helpful to review Luke's narrative detail, as Esler (1987:21) recommends, being "continually open to the political implications of the New Testament texts" – as well as those of an economic nature.

4.3 The Temple-centric economy of Jerusalem

Just as the Temple dominated the skyline of Jerusalem, so it also dominated the city's economy. According to Jeremias, the Temple drew the largest share of the city's all important foreign trade (1969:38) and was also the most important factor in the city's internal commerce (1969:57), since "both by its rebuilding and by the daily cult, [the Temple] provided a focal point for various industries" (1969:4). In agreement, Sanders (1992:124) asserts that the needs of the Temple "directly or indirectly generated most of the city's business".

We learn from Josephus (*Antiquities* 15.380; 20.129) that work on the reconstruction of the Temple and surrounding buildings was started under Herod the Great, in 19-20 BC, and was not finished until the governorship of Albinus, in 62-64 AD. Jeremias (1969:56) comments on the enormous volume and quality of material that was consumed in those eighty-two or so years; and also explains (1969:138) that "The cultus provided the main source of income for the city.¹⁷⁵ It maintained the priestly aristocracy, the priesthood and the Temple employees. The vast expenditure from the Temple treasury

¹⁷⁵ He also confirms (1969:25) the importance with which the cultus was treated: "During the eighty-two to eighty-four years that the Temple was being built, the ceremonial was not interrupted for even an hour".

[...] to say nothing of the many ceremonial activities of the devout, such as sacrifices and vows, provided numerous opportunities of money-making for the trade and commerce of the city". He also asserts that what he calls the middle classes (e.g. the retail traders, *kapēloi*, who had shops in one of the bazaars, and the small industrialists or craftsmen) benefited greatly from their connection with the Temple and its pilgrims; more so the tavern owners, who depended almost entirely on what Sanders (1992:121) refers to as "the tourist trade".

At this point, I feel it necessary to draw attention to the possible confusion arising from the traditional view of the temple "treasury" in Jerusalem. The use of the Hebrew word *ʾôṣār* has helped to create an erroneous impression that the temple treasury was merely some kind of storage area where the gold and silver ceremonial (i.e. sacred) vessels, as well as the robes and other cultic artefacts, were kept for safekeeping. However, Feldman et al (2000:25) explain that "The sacred treasures of the temple (κεμηλία) are not to be confused with the treasury (θησαυρός), with its largely cash holdings".¹⁷⁶ Also, Schaper (1997:204) argues that *ʾôṣār* is interchangeable with *lʿšākôt*, which depicts a more sophisticated treasury operation, and which Tcherikover (1959:155) asserts "played the part of a state exchequer"¹⁷⁷ that over time developed into a full-scale banking function.

In addition, Hamilton (1964:366, n. 5) confirms that "There are clues in the OT (e.g. I Kings 7:51; II Kings 18:15; I Chronicles 9:26, 28:11-12; II Chronicles 36:18; Nehe-

¹⁷⁶ Josephus uses different phrases to describe both the sacred and secular workings of the temple treasury: 'the treasury of God' (*War* 2.50, 2.331; *Antiquities* 7.367, 69; 8.95, 258; 9.170, 202); 'the sacred treasury' (*War* 2.175, 293; 5.187); 'the treasury-chamber' (*War* 5.200; 6.282; *Antiquities* 9.164; 11.119, 126; 13.429; 19.294); and, finally, 'the public treasury' (*War* 2.564; 4.140; 5.518).

¹⁷⁷ Steinsaltz (2006:217) confirms that "the Temple treasury acted as the national exchequer"; and Tcherikover (1959:155) explains that "this was the direct outcome of the fact that the government of Judea was 'theocratic' or 'hierocratic', that is, that the priests who stood at the head of the cult also held the secular power".

miah 13:12, 13) as well as in Sirach (Ecclesiasticus 42:7) and Tobit (1:14, 9:5) to [the existence of] a bank in the temple at Jerusalem and to the attendant practices of private deposit and bookkeeping". Also, according to Feldman et al (2000:34), "Like other temples, the one in Jerusalem served also as a bank and a place of safe deposit. It was relatively secure because of its divinely protected status (*asylum*) and, practically, because of its thick walls and fortress-like position". Finally, Hamilton (1964:368-369) reminds us that the Temple treasury-bank extended loans and was used to finance public works (e.g. an aqueduct to bring water to the city);¹⁷⁸ and also that it was "in the control of the high-priestly well-to-do aristocracy".

During the Roman era, temples were still important to banking and, as Rostovtzeff asserts (1926:541, n. 45), "the temple of Jerusalem continued to be the place where Jews, both rich and poor, kept their money on deposit".¹⁷⁹ Jeremias (1969:55-56) writes that "From ancient times, the political centre had also been the centre of attraction for the national wealth. [...] The money was deposited in the Temple where, according to IV Maccabees 4:3,¹⁸⁰ myriads of private fortunes were kept". Moreover, this "national wealth" would not have been restricted to funds or assets belonging to the local elite, since Garnsey (1970:256) asserts that there are indications, in the Eastern cities in particu-

¹⁷⁸ Josephus (*War* 2.9.4; cf. *Antiquities* 18.3.2) reports that Pilate caused a "disturbance" by "exhausting the sacred treasury – it is called the *corbanas* – on a water conduit". Also, Stegemann and Stegemann (2001:106) mention the episode recorded by Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.209-221) when "Agrippa II, after the completion of the temple construction, intentionally created work for the newly-unemployed by having them pave Jerusalem streets with the help of capital from the temple treasury".

¹⁷⁹ Rostovtzeff cites Josephus (*War* 6.5.2), who states that, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, in the temple treasury they found "immense amounts of money" because it was the place where "the entire riches of the Jews were heaped up together". Likewise, Feldman et al (2000:34) cite the remark from Josephus that, at the time of the final conquest, "the treasury-chambers contained vast sums of money deposited by Jerusalem's wealthiest citizens for safekeeping", which is also mentioned by Stegemann and Stegemann (2001:125).

¹⁸⁰ According to *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, IV Macabees was written "probably at the close of the last century B.C.E. or during the first century C.E., and before the time of Caligula, for the Jews seem to have been at peace at the time".

lar, that wealth was to be found beyond the elite circle consisting of the local *Decuriae*. To suggest the extent of funds on deposit in the temple, Hamilton (1964:367) cites a report in II Macabees 3:16,¹⁸¹ from Simon, the captain of the temple, that “the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold sums of money, so that the amount of the funds could not be reckoned, and that they did not belong to the account of the sacrifices”.¹⁸² Also, according to Edersheim (1997:55), “the case of people leaving the whole of their fortune to the Temple is so often discussed that it must have been a by no means uncommon occurrence”.¹⁸³ Finally, Stegemann (1988:70) has gone so far as to compare first century Jerusalem with modern Switzerland:

Manifold privileges had by then made the Jerusalem Temple the safest bank in the Middle East. In the investment area, it enjoyed a respect like that of Switzerland today. Many foreigners, merchants and politicians held accounts there – a lucrative business for the Temple bank, due to the deposit taxes it levied.

In addition, Stegemann (1998:73) writes that, “As the Romans took Jerusalem in the summer of AD 70, they plundered – according to the report of Flavius Josephus (*Jewish War* 6.317) – such rich hoards of treasure that the price of gold in Syria plummeted by half”. Also, Josephus (*War* 7.148-150) records that Vespasian and his son Titus plundered

¹⁸¹ Harris (1985) contends that II Macabees was written about 142 BC. However, *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* states that “There is a reference in ch. xv. 37 to the Book of Esther, which would preclude any earlier date of authorship than about 130 B.C. (see Cornill, “Einleitung,” p. 252). On the other hand, II Maccabees was known to the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (see Peak, in “The Century Bible,” p. 223) and to Philo (see Schürer, *l.c.* p. 214). The work, therefore, must have been composed about the beginning of the common era”.

¹⁸² Feldman et al (2000:34) explain that “It remains unclear as to what extent the temple’s funds were maintained in separate accounts for temple use, civic projects (e.g. Josephus *War* 2.175, 564; 4.141; 5.518), and private savings”.

¹⁸³ Tacitus (*History* 5.7) writes that Jerusalem had a temple “of enormous wealth”.

some 50 tons of gold and silver from the Temple, and that this wealth was paraded in triumph in the streets of Rome in AD 71 prior to being used to help finance the building of the Coliseum.

Now, phrases like “myriads of private fortunes” and “untold sums of money” may sound impressive, but they are not explicit enough for our purposes.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, in order to provide us with a more accurate indication of the monetary value of the vast wealth on deposit in the Jerusalem Temple’s treasury-bank in the first century AD, it might be useful to examine some historical accounts dealing with particular tranches of those assets. For example, from Puech (2004:80), we learn that “Antiochus IV Epiphanes carried off 1,800 talents from the temple” (II Maccabees 5.21); also that “Crassus plundered the treasury of the Temple, carrying off 8,000 talents of gold and 2,000 talents of silver that Pompey had left in the treasury” (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.78, 105-110). And since the Attic-Ptolemaic standard talent was worth 6,000 *denarii* – and a *denarius* was the daily wage for a manual labourer in first century Palestine – we can use this ancient wage-rate to calculate a modern value of those 10,000 talents plundered by Crassus – which will then provide us with a better sense of the value of the funds on deposit in the Jerusalem temple-bank at the time under review.

This approach of using the cost of a unit of human labour as the numeraire to calculate different values in different historical periods and/or locations has a long and distinguished pedigree in economics, reaching back to Adam Smith (1776), who argued that differences in the standard of living should be expressed precisely in such a unit; and

¹⁸⁴ Likewise, over a century ago, Edersheim (1898:369) estimated that the value of temple treasury funds was “£2,500,000 Sterling”; however, that was obviously according to late nineteenth century reckoning and thus not particularly helpful.

was also cited by Ricardo (1816) and finally John Maynard Keynes, who used wage-rate rather than the price level as the numeraire. Consequently, if we use the US Bureau of Labor's mean hourly wage estimate (for May 2010) of \$21.09 for US construction workers (an acceptable modern counterpart for ancient manual labourers),¹⁸⁵ we arrive at a modern equivalent value for a talent that is slightly in excess of one million US dollars ($\$21.09 \times 8 \times 6,000 = \$1,012,320$) – a rather conservative estimate perhaps, since it is based on a modern working day of 8 hours, rather than the 12-hour day described in Matthew 20:1-16. On that basis, the 10,000 talents plundered by Crassus, for example, would have a modern equivalent value slightly in excess of 10 billion US dollars.

Therefore, we may infer from the above reports that, at the time of the events described by Luke in the early part of Acts (i.e. 33 to 37 AD), the Temple treasury-bank held vast quantities of gold and silver on deposit – as well as other valuable assets.¹⁸⁶

4.4 The Sadducee elite: a brood of vipers?

There is voluminous literature dealing with the Sanhedrin and its two major factions, the Sadducees and Pharisees, who, according to Schürer et al (1979:404), “are known, in particular from the evidence of Josephus and the NT, to have been mutually hostile”. These hostilities arose primarily from their theological differences;¹⁸⁷ however, Schürer et al as-

¹⁸⁵ The mean hourly wage cited is available online at http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#47-0000; accessed on August 6th 2011.

¹⁸⁶ It is also worth remembering that all this extensive wealth was stored in a temple-bank located in a city with only 55,000 permanent residents, according to Jeremias (1969:83).

¹⁸⁷ For a comprehensive explanation of the theological differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees, see Schürer et al (1979:388-414) and also Jeremias (1969:229-232).

sert hat “Sharp economic and social differences added to the political controversies”.¹⁸⁸ From Schürer et al (1979:202-203), we also learn that the first mention of the Sanhedrin occurs in Josephus (*Antiquities* 7.3.3) in the time of Antiochus the Great (233-187 BC);¹⁸⁹ and because the council was referred to by the title of *Gerousia*, which denotes a non-democratic body, he asserts that it consisted of aristocrats.¹⁹⁰

Esler (1987:171) agrees, stating that, within the Roman Empire, the members of the Sanhedrin were recognised as provincial gentry, known as Decurions.¹⁹¹ He also cites the claim by Gagé (1971:163, in Esler, 1987:171) that, in order to qualify for selection as a *Decurion*, the candidate had to own property worth a minimum of 25,000 *denarii* – a sum that, in the early part of the first century AD, would take an agricultural labourer, for example, who worked for a single *denarius* a day, almost 80 years to earn.¹⁹² Jeremias (1969:96) confirms that the lay members of the Sanhedrin were drawn from the wealthy classes and included “landowners, tax-farmers, bankers and men of private means”,¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Schürer et al (1979:404) inform us that “The Sadducees, representatives of the priest and lay aristocracy, had every reason to resist customs and belief evolved by the masses under the leadership of middle class and ‘plebeian’ intellectuals”.

¹⁸⁹ Schürer et al (1979:404) write that, “from the beginning of the Greek and even the Persian period, it was the priests and their aristocratic lay allies who ruled the Jewish state”, citing Josephus, *Vita* 1. They also state (1979:203) that the powers of the Sanhedrin at that time “must have been fairly extensive. For the Hellenistic kings left considerable freedom to the cities in internal affairs and were content as long as taxes were paid and their sovereignty acknowledged”.

¹⁹⁰ Schürer et al (1979:202, n. 5) quote a surviving fragment of the *Aegyptiaca* by Hecataeus of Abdera, a contemporary of Alexander the Great and Ptolemy I Lagus: “He (Moses) selected the men of most refinement and the greatest ability to head the entire nation, and appointed them priests [...] These same men he appointed to be judges in all major disputes, and entrusted to them the guardianship of the laws and customs” (Hecataeus, in *Diodorus* xl, 3; preserved in *Photius, Cod.* 244.

¹⁹¹ Decurions ranked third in the listings of Roman nobility; above them were ‘equestrians’ and then ultimately ‘senators’; the latter residing mainly in Rome. MacMullen (1974:88-99) informs us that, of the fifty million or so inhabitants of the Empire in Tacitus’ day, the total percentage of provincial Decurions was around five percent.

¹⁹² Using our previously established wage rate numeraire, this 25,000 *denarii* minimum patrimony would be the equivalent of around USD \$4,300,000 today

¹⁹³ An early link between tax farming and banking in Jerusalem is mentioned by Armstrong (1997:106), who writes that, during the reign of Ptolemy II (282-246 BC), a member of the Tobiad clan, called Joseph, was ap-

along with “merchants dealing in grain, wine and oil, and wood”. He writes (1969:228) that “these privileged families were originally landowning families, as is shown by their supplies of natural products to the Temple”, and argues (1969:222-223) that the group of “elders” in the Sanhedrin were the heads of the most influential lay families. He notes (1969:96) the NT reference to Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43; Matthew 17:57; Luke 23:50ff.; John 19:38-42),¹⁹⁴ who Jeremias claims was a rich landowner,¹⁹⁵ since, in Mark 15:43, Joseph is described as *euschēmōn* (εὐσχήμων), ‘honourable’, and “the papyri make it clear that this means a wealthy landowner”. He further argues that the councillor Nicodemus (John 7:50; 3:1; cf. 12:42) was also wealthy, based on the reference in John 19:39 that he brought a hundred Roman pounds’ worth of ointments and spices for Jesus’ burial.

For reasons that will become clear, it is the Sadducees and their secular (i.e. economic and political) activities that concern us most in this enquiry, and the rationale for this is quite simple. In the gospels, the initial confrontations between Christ and the religious authorities involve matters of doctrine, and the majority of these are instigated by Pharisees,¹⁹⁶ who we readily associate with disputes concerning doctrine and law. But then, after the “temple cleansing” episode (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17 and Luke

pointed as a tax farmer for the province of Syria (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.6.2-4); and, during the 22 years he held this position, he “was able to introduce the high finance of the Hellenes into Jerusalem”, thus establishing himself as a banker. Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.6.10) writes that “He was a good man, and of great magnanimity; and brought the Jews out of a state of poverty and meanness, to one that was more splendid.”

¹⁹⁴ As Joseph of Arimathea was neither priest nor scribe, Jeremias (1969:223, n. 7) counts him among the group of ‘elders’ in the Sanhedrin.

¹⁹⁵ Jeremias (1969:96) asserts that Joseph of Arimathea “was a rich man and owned a garden to the north of the city with a family grave hewn from the rock (John 19:41; cf. 20:15). The main part of his property would probably be in his native city, since the Jerusalem site had not been long in the possession of his family, for the grave was newly hewn”.

¹⁹⁶ See Matthew 9:10-12, 32-24; 12:1-2, 22-24, 38; 15:1-2; 16:1-4; 19:3; 22:15-22, 34-40; Mark 2:15-17, 23-24; 3:1-3; 7:1-3; 8:10-12; 10:1-2; 12:13-17; Luke 5:20-22, 29-31; 7:39; 11:36-39, 53-54; 14:1-3; 15:1-2; 17:20-21; 19:37-40; John 7:31-33; 8:2-4, 12-19; 9:13-14

19:45-46), which brought Christ into direct conflict with the vested, economic interests of the priestly and lay aristocratic members of the Sanhedrin, the main opposition to Jesus shifts from the Pharisees to members or representatives of the Sadducee elite; in particular, the Chief Priest and the elders.¹⁹⁷ Likewise, in Acts 2 to 8, it is the Sadducees (especially the circle surrounding the High Priest)¹⁹⁸ who constitute the main opposition to the followers of Jesus – particularly the sect leadership – which supports further speculation that the primary reason for the post-Pentecost tension may also be something other than doctrine.

According to Schürer et al (1979:404), the Sadducees emerged from the priestly circles and were “aristocrats, wealthy, and persons of rank”, who “by virtue of their wealth and office held an influential position in civil life” (1979:405).¹⁹⁹ However, as Josephus informs us, their support came from a small but elite sector of the Jewish community: “this doctrine is received but by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity” (*Antiquities* 18.1.4); also, “the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, [whereas] the Pharisees have the multitude on their side” (*Antiquities* 13.10.6). Hence, Schürer et al (1979:414) contend that, because of their small support-base, the Sadducees frequently had to play politics: “in the performance of their official functions they had to accommodate themselves to popular Pharisaic

¹⁹⁷ See Matthew 21:23; 26:47, 59; 27:1; Mark 8:31; 10:33; 11:18, 27; 14:1, 55; 15:1-3, 10-11; Luke 19:47; 20:1, 16, 19; 22:2; 23:10; 19:6, 15. According to Weber (1966:219), “In the Passion narrative [depicting Jesus’ time in Jerusalem] the opponents of Jesus are not the Pharisees, or Sadducees, or scribes independently. Rather, they are the chief priest and the elders”; also mentioned by Moxnes (2004:14-15), who confirms (2004:161) that “The opponents of the Apostles in Acts are greedy and avaricious, just as were the opponents of Jesus in [Luke’s] Gospel”.

¹⁹⁸ Jeremias (1969:229) reminds us that the high priest Joseph, surnamed Caiaphas (18-37 AD), was a Sadducee, and notes that “Acts 5:17 calls the Sadducees ‘all they that were with him’, i.e. with the high priest, who was then Caiaphas: Acts 4:6”.

¹⁹⁹ Schürer et al (1979:405) suggest that the Sadducees derived their name (Σαδδουκαῖοι) from the priest Zadok whose descendants had held the priestly office in Jerusalem since Solomon’s time.

views”; otherwise, “the people would not have tolerated them”.²⁰⁰ Likewise, Jeremias (1969:159) comments that “The high priests with Sadducean sympathies had to accustom themselves to withholding their views in council and to carrying out the Temple rites according to Pharisaic traditions”.

Originally, the position of High Priest, *kōhēn gādōl*, was hereditary; however, the Romans and Herodians discontinued this tradition for political reasons, and Schürer et al (1979:232-233) further explain that, “With the High Priests constantly changing, there were always a considerable number of them no longer in office”. Nonetheless, even when High Priests no longer held the position, they apparently did not lose their prestige or power, as “It is clear from the NT that the elder Ananus or Annus enjoyed a great esteem even as a deposed High Priest [...] It therefore appears that removal from office in no way condemned these men to political inactivity”. We also learn from Schürer et al (1979:234) that the position of High Priest “was regarded as the prerogative of a few families”, and “the mere fact of belonging to one of the privileged families must have conferred a particular distinction”.²⁰¹

Jeremias (1969:49) reports that the high priestly families owned some of the shops in the temple court and carried on “a flourishing trade” (1969:31); he also maintains that their houses contained “great luxury” (1969:96-98).²⁰² From Josephus (*War* 2.246; 5.506),

²⁰⁰ This is a paraphrase of Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.1.4): “when [the Sadducees] become magistrates [...] they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them”.

²⁰¹ Smallwood (1970:91) agrees that “The High Priesthood tended to be confined to members of a small group of families, and the current holder together with the ex-High Priests were known collectively as ‘the High Priests’”.

²⁰² For instance, Jeremias (1969:96-98) informs us that, “The house where lived the ex-high priest Annas, father-in-law of the officiating high priest, to whom John says Jesus was first taken after his arrest (John 18:13), had a spacious court (John 18:15). A woman doorkeeper (John 18:16) and other servants belonged to the household (John 18:18, where the group who took Jesus prisoner is no doubt included). The officiating high

we learn that the High Priest Ananias lived in the upper part of Jerusalem, as did Annas and Caiaphas, according to tradition; and that Annas' grave, in the south-east of the city, must have been a large construction dominating the district. Schaller (1963, in Collins, 1983:139) informs us that, from the second century BC onwards, the traditional tithe was no longer given to the Levites, but to the priests;²⁰³ and the tithe of the tithe (i.e. ten per cent of each priest's income) therefore went to the High Priest – which would have represented a substantial income indeed. And Jeremias (1969:49) confirms that the holder of the high-priestly office possessed private means: "One had only to think of the Day of Atonement, when the high priest had to supply the sacrifice at his own expense".²⁰⁴

According to Cassidy (1987:14), apart from issues that affected the security of the empire, the Romans' expectations concerning their vassal states and provinces were predominantly financial and, "As a means of fulfilling their objectives within a particular province, the Romans frequently enlisted the aid of indigenous leaders and leadership groups. In the furtherance of their aims the Romans were also prepared to grant the people of the conquered areas considerable latitude in their social, economic, religious and even political practices".²⁰⁵ He makes it clear (1987:14) that the Romans' main expectation (of the local Decuriate) was the regular payment of a large number of taxes, which

priest, to whom Jesus was taken next, lived in a house large enough to accommodate an emergency session of the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:53; Luke 22:66), and it apparently possessed a gate-house (Matthew 26:71; Mark 14:68). He had in his household a fair number of servants, both men and women". Also Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; John 18:10; servants of the high priest took part in the arrest of Jesus; so too Matthew 26:58; Mark 14:54; Luke 22:55. Servants of the high priest are also mentioned in the *Tosephta Menahoth* xii.21; Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.181, 206 (1969:97, n. 30)

²⁰³ Schaller's argument is accepted by N. Walter, "Pseudo-Hekataios I and II" in *Fragmente jüdisch-hellenistischer Historiker* (Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit 1/2, Gutersloh: Mohn, 1976), pp. 144-148; and both are cited in Collins, 1983:139 and p. 169, n.11

²⁰⁴ See Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.10.2-3, cf. Leviticus 16:3

²⁰⁵ This is confirmed by Rostovtzeff (1926:138) who explains that "The imperial bureaucracy very seldom interfered with local city affairs".

would have created significant tension between the Sadducees and Pharisees who, we know from the gospel accounts, regarded tax collectors – and thus tax officials of all classes – as comparable to “sinners” (see Matthew 9:10, 11:19; Mark 2:16; Luke 7:34, 15:1, 18:13). Jeremias (1969:228) explains that:

The [Roman] procurator was careful to choose his officials from among the ‘elders’ of the Sanhedrin and other heads of families – his tax officials,²⁰⁶ the *dekaprotoi* (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.194).²⁰⁷ These were charged with assessing the citizens liable to taxation, the tribute which Rome imposed on Judea, and guaranteed the correct payment from their own resources. This ‘liturgical’ office of the *dekaprotos* required men of considerable means,²⁰⁸ principally men who were landowners, as we know in Egypt; this shows that the heads of patrician families, at any rate those with seats in the Sanhedrin, were men of great wealth.

When Jesus “cleansed” the Temple and overturned the tables of the money-changers, He said that “My house shall be a house of prayer but you have made it a den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46);²⁰⁹ and, according to Thayer, *lēstēs*

²⁰⁶ According to Stegemann and Stegemann (2001:116), in 47 BC, Caesar forbade the collection of taxes in Judea by Roman *publicani*; consequently, we learn from Josephus (*War*, 2.405 and 2.407) that local *archontes* and councillors collected taxes; and *archontes* and patricians were presented to the procurator for nomination as tax officials.

²⁰⁷ The *dekaprotoi* were a fiscal council of ten: from *deka*, ‘ten’; and *protos*, ‘first; foremost (in time, place, order or importance)’.

²⁰⁸ Finley (1973:151) explains that the term “liturgy” (Greek: *leitourgia*), which today refers to ‘service to the divinity’, originally meant ‘work for the people’, and subsequently ‘service to the state’. Hence the ancient position of tax official was deemed a “liturgical” office.

²⁰⁹ Jesus was quoting from Jeremiah 7:11.

means ‘robber, plunderer, freebooter or brigand’,²¹⁰ which is even more derogatory. Hamilton (1966:372) queries this allegation and claims that the money-changers were providing a necessary service for the festal pilgrims, and were therefore not “robbers”. That may or may not be true concerning the *trapezitai* or *kollubistōn*; however, with regard to the other traders in the temple precincts, Hamilton’s argument is contradicted by the account of profiteers selling doves to pilgrims at one hundred times their normal price,²¹¹ something even the staunchest advocates of free market forces would find impossible to justify morally on the basis of supply and demand alone. Nevertheless, I suggest that Hamilton has missed the point of Jesus’ accusation, since He was not specifically directing His anger at the money-changers but at their commercial masters: the priestly Sadducee elite, whose record of duplicity and corruption is substantial.

Finally, we learn from Schürer et al (1979:411) that the Sadducees rejected belief in bodily resurrection and reward in a life to come; and Rabbi Nathan (in Goldin, 1955:39) provides some interesting insight as to how the theology of the priestly and lay aristocracy shaped their lifestyle: “the Sadducees and Boethusians used silver vessels and gold vessels all their lives (because they denied the resurrection of the dead and thus wished to make the most of earthly life)”. Consequently, I would suggest that this materialistic attitude,²¹² driven by their disbelief in life beyond the grave, motivated their this-

²¹⁰ See <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3027&t=KJV>; accessed on March 27th 2009

²¹¹ See *Mishnah Kerithoth* 1.7; also mentioned in Section 4.6: “The initial tranche of converts”.

²¹² Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.6.1-2) describes the High Priest Onias, for example, as being “a great lover of money”; so much so, that the historian was concerned that – because of his greed – Onias might “endure to see his country in danger [...] and his countrymen suffer the greatest damages”. On the other hand, Luke 16:14 states that the Pharisees were likewise “covetous and lovers of money” (*philagyroí*), which echoes the remark in Luke 11:39 when Jesus accused them of being “full of greed and robbery and extortion and malice and wickedness”.

worldly economic and political ambitions, which is perhaps why they were so willing to go to great lengths to defend what Esler has referred to as their privileged position, as I shall discuss later.

4.5 The 'wicked priests'

Schürer et al (1979:215) claim that "The unanimous testimony of Josephus and the NT is that the High Priest was always President of the Sanhedrin [...] and, in the Roman period, Josephus expressly indicates that the High Priests were also the political heads of the nation". Jeremias (1969:148) confirms this, writing that "Israel at the time of Jesus was a pure theocracy, and the priesthood was the primary representative of the nobility. Thus the reigning head of the priests, in times when there was no king, was the most eminent member of the nation". Unfortunately but perhaps predictably, the secular role of the priestly aristocracy meant that "Political issues and interests radically affected their whole attitude. But the more these took precedence, the more those of religion fell behind" (Schürer et al, 1979:412).

Edersheim (1997:69) states that "Originally the office of high-priest was regarded as being held for life and hereditary; but the troubles of later times made it a matter of cabal, crime, or bribery". For an example of bribery in which priests were involved, Jeremias (1969:99, n. 39) refers to an incident reported by Josephus.²¹³ He also mentions rivalry among the chief priests and informs us that nepotism (for financial gain) was rife:

²¹³ Josephus in fact mentions two separate incidents of bribery. In *Vita* 13, he reports the incident when John, son of Levi, "corrupted with money" the two legate-priests who were travelling with Josephus, "who were very ready to take a bribe". He also writes in *Vita* 39 that Simon, son of Gamaliel, bribed Artanus, the high priest "and those with him" to agree "to expel [Josephus] out of Galilee without making the rest of the citizens acquainted with what they were doing".

“this aristocracy appears to have been particularly interested in the Temple treasure and to have filled the post of Temple treasurer from the younger members of its families”.²¹⁴ Jeremias (1969:196) also writes that the influence of the priestly aristocracy “depended on their power politics, exercised sometimes ruthlessly, sometimes by intrigue, and that by this means they were able to control the most important offices in the Temple as well as the taxes and the money”. In addition, Gross (1975:17) contends that there was “much chicanery” in the collection of tithes, by the powerful priestly families who “used their political power to the disadvantage of their fellow priests”.²¹⁵

Jeremias (1969:98) further informs us that, “Over and over again, e.g. II Macc. 4.7-10, 24, 32, we find records of the high-priestly office being bought, as in the case of Joshua b. Gamaliel (c. AD 63-65)”. II Maccabees 4:7-10 refers to “the surpassing wickedness of Jason” (4:10), who obtained the high priesthood by corruption (4:7),²¹⁶ and also by promising Antiochus Epiphanes between 360 and 440 talents of silver (4:8). However, when he sent Menelaus to deliver the agreed amount of money to the king, Menelaus usurped Jason as a result of outbidding him by 300 talents (4:24).²¹⁷ In addition, II Maccabees 4:21-27 records the high priesthood of Menelaus who possessed “no qualifications for the high priesthood” and also had “the hot temper of a cruel tyrant and the rage

²¹⁴ See *Babylon Talmud Pesahim* 57a in the Baraita tradition; *Tosephta Menahoth* xii.21, 533. Citing the reference in Acts 4:5-6, Jeremias (1969:197) also explains that, not only was the son-in-law of the former high priest Annas the reigning high priest, and his son captain of the Temple, but the ruling house of Annas had others, and perhaps all, of the chief-priestly positions in its control.

²¹⁵ Gross cites the account in Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.8.8; 20.9.2) when the servants of High Priest Ananias (47-59 CE) “went to the threshing floors and took away tithes that belonged to the priests by violence and did not refrain from beating such as would not give these tithes to them”. Jeremias (1969:98-99) also mentions a “plundering of the inferior priests”, but cites the Mishnah as his source, which refers to a different plundering of sycamore trees in Jericho, as described in the *Babylon Talmud Pesahim* 57a in the Baraita tradition.

²¹⁶ According to II Maccabees 4:7 (KJV), Jason “laboured underhand to be high priest”

²¹⁷ Jerusalem *Talmud Yoma* i.1, 38c, 43 also describe how the candidates for the chief priestly office bid against each other; cited in Jeremias, 1969:159, n. 38

of a savage beast". He also reputedly "stole some of the gold vessels of the temple and gave them to Andronicus; other vessels, as it happened, he had sold to Tyre and the neighbouring cities" (4:32). Eventually, Menelaus was brought to trial, but he too resorted to bribery, and "because of the cupidity of those in power, remained in office, growing in wickedness, having become the chief plotter against his fellow citizens" (4:50).

Finally, in *Pesher Habbakuk* (from Qumran), there is a reference to "the Wicked Priest", whose heart became proud "when he ruled over Israel" (1QpHab 8.9-10) and who "robbed and amassed the riches of the men of violence who rebelled against God, and took the wealth of the peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself" (1QpHab 8.11-12). This not only illustrates the alleged crimes of "the Wicked Priest", but also implies that this particular person (or persons) wielded great political power and thus appears to be describing one or more people who held the position of High Priest, since the High Priest was also the head of the nation.²¹⁸ In addition, according to Puech (2004:86), the Damascus Document from Qumran (CD 3.12)²¹⁹ contains a similar reference to "the wicked priests serving in the Temple", which appears to be alluding to a succession of six High Priests: Judas, Alcimus, Jonathan, Simon, John Hyrcanus, and Alexander Hyrcanus.

²¹⁸ As stated by Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.10.1). Magness (2003:37) agrees that "The term Wicked Priest refers to a high priest, since the name is a transparent play on words: *haKohen haRasha* (the Wicked Priest) for *haKohen haRosh* (the high priest).

²¹⁹ The prefix 'CD' stands for "Cairo Damascus" and refers to the medieval copies of the Damascus Document (10-12th century) discovered in the Ben Ezra synagogue in Old Cairo, in 1896, and published by Solomon Schechter in 1910 in a volume entitled *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*; as mentioned by Magness (2003:25).

4.6 The initial tranche of converts

Now there were then residing in Jerusalem Jews, devout and God-fearing men from every country under heaven (Acts 2:5).

There are three important questions to be answered concerning this group from whom, according to Luke, the large, initial tranche of converts to the nascent sect were drawn. Firstly, were they Jews only, or a mixture of Jews and Gentile “God-fearers”? Secondly, were they residents or festal pilgrims? And thirdly, how wide an area were they drawn from?

On the first question, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1920:18), Bruce (1970:83), Barrett (1994:118) and Witherington (1998:135) all explain that the use of *eulabēs* (εὐλαβής) for ‘devout’ (also ‘pious, religious, reverencing God’) – as found elsewhere in Acts 8:2, 22:12 and Luke 2:25 – means that these men were Jews and *not* God-fearing Gentiles: i.e. Gentiles who were attracted to Jewish ethics, theology and worship, but did not become proselytes.²²⁰ Barrett argues specifically that, “On the basis of [the] evidence the adjective [*eulabēs*] can hardly be taken to denote a specific class of ‘God-fearers’”,²²¹ a category of person that does not appear in the Lukan narrative until Acts 10:2, when we meet Cornelius, the centurion.²²² Consequently, I find problems with Esler (1989:154-163), who ex-

²²⁰ For a detailed and helpful exposition of “God-fearers”, see Barrett (1994:499-501).

²²¹ He cites Bultmann (no specific reference), also Kittel and Friedrich, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 2.750, and H. Kosmala, *Hebräer-Essener-Christen* (Studia, Post-Biblica 1: Leiden, 1959), pp. 71, 297, 341

²²² In Acts 10:2 (and also in 10:7, to describe one of Cornelius’ soldiers), Luke uses a different word for ‘devout’: *eusebēs* (εὐσεβής). According to Runesson et al (2008:120-121), Luke also uses the phrase *phoboumenos ton theon* (‘fearing God’) or *sebomenos ton theon* (‘worshipping God’) to designate God-fearing Gentiles: e.g. Acts 13:16 (at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch); 13:50 (the ‘devout’ women of high standing in the same town); 16:14 (Lydia, the seller of purple at Philippi); 17:4 (a large company of God-fearing Greeks); 17:17 (‘devout’ persons in the synagogue at Athens); and 18:7 (Titus Justus, who owned the house next to the synagogue in Corinth, and who is described as ‘one worshipping God’).

pendes a lot of effort to establish the presence of Gentile “God-fearers” in Jerusalem – in order to support his theory concerning their possible impact within the primitive church community, even to the point of arguing that their relationship (involving possible table-fellowship) with the Hellenist Jews in the congregation was a key component of the conflict between the Hebrews and Hellenists highlighted in Acts 6:1. Even so, he does not attempt to claim that these Gentile “God-fearers” were part of the *eulabēs* mentioned in Acts 2:5.²²³

On the second question, it is extremely doubtful that Luke is referring here to festival pilgrims. From Philo (*Special Laws* I, 69), we learn that “Countless multitudes from countless cities come, some over land, others over sea, from east and west and north and south, at every feast”. However, Sanders (1992:130) explains that Jews in the Diaspora were exempt from the biblical requirement to attend three festivals each year.²²⁴ He also asserts that it is doubtful that many came more than once in their lifetime; and the most likely reason for this is a combination of distance and expense. Jeremias (1969:76) agrees that the poorer people, as well as those living at a greater distance, could only afford to make the journey at Passover; consequently, of the three major festivals, Passover drew the biggest crowds: on average, around 180,000, which consisted of 125,000 visitors and

²²³ Esler (1987:160) claims – but admits that it cannot be proven – that there were Gentiles among the *Hellenistae* in the primitive church in Jerusalem; but he does not offer any suggestions as to when they may have joined the congregation. On the other hand, Fitzmeyer (1976:238) argues that, in Acts 6:1, “the distinction of Hellenists and Hebrews does not introduce into the [Jerusalem] church a non-Jewish element”. Furthermore, Peter’s comment (Acts 10:28) when he arrived at the house of Cornelius, concerning “how it is not lawful or permissible for a Jew to keep company with or to visit or [even] to come near or to speak first to anyone of another nationality”, implies that we cannot acknowledge the presence of Gentile ‘God-fearers’ within the primitive church until after this event.

²²⁴ As evidence, Sanders cites Josephus’ summary of the Mosaic legislation (*War* 5.199)

55,000 residents (1969:83).²²⁵ He also qualifies Philo's comment about sea travel with an assertion that the journey was usually made on foot and, on the whole, the roads were bad (1969:59).

Leyerle (2000:460) confirms the slow pace of road travel in those days, and cites Casson's estimate (1974:188) that a person walking on level ground, could only manage on average 15-20 miles per day.²²⁶ He contends (2000:468-469) that sea travel was also problematic. Seasonal weather conditions meant that the sea was virtually closed to navigation from early November to early March. Moreover, sea passage for a pilgrim was in the main an indirect, disjointed and delay-ridden journey, cobbled together by using a combination of predictable cargo routes and other sailing schedules that were often unpredictable. For example, Philo (*In Flaccum* 5:26) explains that a passenger heading to Palestine from Rome was well advised to board a grain ship for Alexandria and proceed from there to Palestine.²²⁷

Once the pilgrims reached Jerusalem, the high cost of living in the capital would have prohibited the vast majority of them from staying for the entire seven weeks from Passover to the Festival of Weeks or Harvest (i.e. Pentecost). Jeremias explains that prices were high in the capital because, firstly, it was a large city (1969:33); and, secondly, Jerusalem was "a highland city, always short of water and of raw materials for industry, and lying in a very unfavourable position for trade and commerce" (1969:120). From this, he

²²⁵ On the other hand, Sanders (1992:128), while acknowledging the "uncertainty" of ascertaining ancient numbers, thinks it "reasonable" that there were between 300,000 and 500,000 pilgrims in attendance in Jerusalem at Passover.

²²⁶ As an example, Leyerle (2000:460) cites Ramsay's calculation that Ignatius' forced march from Antioch to Rome would have taken 86 days of walking and 9 days by ship.

²²⁷ For a comprehensive review of road and sea travel across the Roman Empire in the first century AD, see Leyerle (2000:458-469).

concludes (1969:120-121) that “this state of affairs was bound to result in a very high cost of living”, and provides the following list of examples:

In Jerusalem one *‘isār* would buy only three or four figs, in the country the same money would buy ten or even twenty figs from the tree (*Mishnah Maaseroth* 2.6). We generally find that cattle and pearls (*Mishnah Arakhin* 6.5), crops and wine (*Mishnah Maaser Shenit* 4.1) fetched a higher price in the city than they did in the country [...] Fruit in Jerusalem, as is shown by one example, cost three to six times its price in the country (*Mishnah Maaseroth* 2.5f.). Because of the huge demand, the price of doves for sacrifice was inflated by city profiteers to as much as a hundred times the normal price (*Mishnah Kerithoth* 1.7).

Furthermore, I would suggest that the time and trouble involved in any return journey would also have made festal pilgrims anxious to return to homes and businesses as soon as their Passover obligations had been fulfilled.

To support his argument that Acts 2:5, 9-11 does not describe festal pilgrims, Barrett (1994:118) cites Schneider (1980:251) who “thinks that the Jews were not pilgrims from the Diaspora, but Diaspora Jews who had come to live (retire) in or near Jerusalem”. In agreement, Johnson and Harrington (1992:43) argue that “[Luke’s] use of *katoikountes* [literally, ‘habitual dweller’] (compare 1:19; 4:16; 7:2, 4; 9:22, etc.) indicates Jews who had come from all over the world to settle in the city”.²²⁸ Finally, according to

²²⁸ Johnson and Harrington are referring to Acts 2:14, when the apostle Peter addresses his Pentecost sermon to “Ye men of Judaea, and all ye who dwell (κατοικοῦντες) in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:14, KJV). Schürer et al (1979:149, n. 45) also assert that the list in Acts 2:9-11 relates to “Jews from abroad who had settled in Jerusalem”.

Foakes Jackson and Lake (1920:19), the list of cities and countries in Acts 2:9-11 is “a rhetorical way of saying that every nation and land was represented”;²²⁹ whereas, Bruce (1970:83) narrows the parameters of the list on a religious basis, writing that *apo pantos ethnous tōn upō ton ouranon* in Acts 2:5 translates as “from every land where there were Jews”. Consequently, from the above, we can reject the idea that Acts 2:5, 9-11 denotes festal pilgrims, and assume that the crowd from which the converts were drawn on the Day of Pentecost consisted primarily of devout and affluent if not wealthy Jews, from key locations within both the Roman and Parthian empires, who were at that time residing in Jerusalem.

It is important that we address these questions because I suggest that a group of wealthy and well-connected Hellenist converts – from key, political capitals like Susa and Rome,²³⁰ and economically important banking and trading centres such as Alexandria – who were resident and also likely to be involved in commerce in Jerusalem at the time, would pose more of a serious, long-term threat to the vested interests of the Sadducee elite than would some visiting pilgrims who, out of economic necessity and for personal reasons, needed to return home to family and business as soon as possible. Also, there is no doubt that these Hellenist Jews were extremely important to the local economy in Jerusalem, which included the Temple cult and the Temple treasury-bank. Consequently, defection by a significant number of this group to a new sect whose Hel-

²²⁹ Jeremias (1969:62) calls the list of locations “undoubtedly stylized”

²³⁰ Conzelmann (1987:14) agrees that the “visitors” mentioned in Acts 2:10 were Jews who were originally from Rome, but now lived in Jerusalem. However, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:20) assert that “Ῥωμαῖος regularly means a citizen of the Roman Empire, not an inhabitant of the city of Rome (cf. Acts 22:25ff.)”. It is therefore possible that a significant number of these Jews were freedmen or the offspring of freedmen, who would automatically qualify for Roman citizenship. For more on this group, see Section 4.25, “Freedmen and their economic importance”.

lenist leaders were considered anti-temple would obviously be a source of serious concern for the Sadducees.

4.7 Converting for 'more mundane' reasons

We tend to assume that, because the "3,000 souls" added to the primitive church on the Day of Pentecost were drawn from a larger audience described as "devout" (Acts 2:5), their decision to repent, be baptised and convert to the new sect would have been for noble, pious reasons.

However, Baumgarten (1997:63) reminds us that there are examples of conversions within various religious sects for reasons that he calls "more mundane": i.e. political and/or economic reasons that were driven by an individual or collective instinct for survival, the desire for a better life, or perhaps even naked ambition in some cases. For example, as mentioned previously, Botticini and Eckstein (2003:12) assert that, in the first century BC, many pagans converted to Judaism because they saw that the Jews were doing well from an economic standpoint. However, perhaps the highest profile example of a "more mundane" reason for conversion is when Josephus joined the Pharisees, apparently suppressing his distaste for the sect in order to do so.²³¹ We are told by Baumgarten that Josephus took something like four years to weigh up all the options before deciding on this course of action, which he believed would offer him the best possible prospects for a successful political career in Jerusalem. He also mentions equally "mundane" rea-

²³¹ Josephus (*Vita* 1) claims that, through his mother, he was "of the royal blood; for the children of Asamoneus, from whom that family was derived, had both the office of the high priesthood, and the dignity of a king". Consequently, as a member of the aristocratic priestly class, he would have been expected to automatically join the Sadducee party rather than the Pharisees, who Schürer et al (1979:404) inform us were regarded as middle class "plebeian intellectuals".

sons for conversion among the Essenes and Qumran communities who he asserts (1997:64) both ate well; their diet being significantly richer than the minimum standard of the time, since Josephus (*War* 2.133) informs us that the Essene meal, for example, included meat and wine.²³²

It seems that an abundance of gifted individuals within their communities, who were more intellectually endowed than the “ordinary peasants” in the region, meant that the community was able to employ more advanced agricultural techniques when working the land. As Baumgarten writes (1997:64-65), “These advantages would have given the Essenes and the Qumran sect an attractiveness that was overwhelming in times of crisis. For the Qumran sect, as we learn from 4QpPs^a iii, 2-5, in days of famine, when the wicked perished, the congregation of God’s chosen ones, as well as those who chose to [join them in the desert] fared well”. Likewise, according to Stein (1992:162, in Baumgarten, 1997:65), many centuries later, “the simple but plentiful food of Shaker communities,

²³² The Essenes arose out of pious Jewish reaction to the failure of the Hasmoneans to restore the traditional high priesthood after they retook Jerusalem and purified the Temple (in 164 BC). Instead, they installed members of their own family as a new and royal priesthood; first with Jonathan (160-142 BC), followed by Simon (142-134 BC). This action, as Crossan (1999:459) argues, was for some Jews, “worse than the Syrian persecution itself [i.e. the profanation of the Temple by Syrian paganism and persecution of the faithful]. If the high priest was illegitimate, how could the Temple service be valid, the covenant between people and God be maintained, and the linkage between earth and heaven be certified?” The Essene sect and/or community is mentioned in Philo (*Hypothetica: Apology for the Jews*; extant only in Eusebius’ *The Preparation for the Gospel* II:1-18), Josephus (*War* 2.119-161 and *Antiquities* 18.18-22), and also Pliny the Elder (*Natural History*). The Essene communal centre at Qumran was excavated between 1946 and 1956, and their hidden library recovered from eleven caves nearby. According to Crossan (1999:450), “For almost 200 years, before its destruction by the Roman legions in 68 AD, a Jewish community lived in caves, huts or tents around a central complex of communal buildings later called Khirbet Qumran on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea”. However, Beall (1988:49) cites the various references in the *Damascus Document* to “camps” and “cities” to suggest that “These seem to point to groups of the sectarians living in areas outside the Qumran”. Also, based on his interpretation of the different statutes listed in the *Rule of the Community* and the *Damascus Document*, Vermes (1985:87, 106) argues that the sect was organised as “a single religious movement with two branches”; namely, “a kind of monastic society” plus “an ordinary lay existence”. This is supported by Josephus’ description of a group of Essenes consisting of adult celibate men, as well as “another order of Essenes” who marry and have children (*War* 2.160-161; cited in Magness, 2003:43).

a result of their technological sophistication and organization, was a source of great appeal to those in need, particularly as winter approached”.

On this basis, we cannot rule out the possibility that some of the “3,000 souls” who responded positively to Peter’s call for repentance and baptism on the Day of Pentecost did so for the more mundane reasons of economic improvement, if not survival; just like the examples given above. After all, the economic environment of 33 AD was such that people would have been willing to give serious consideration to any possible solution to the acute financial problems they faced, which we shall now examine.

4.8 The Roman financial crisis in 33 AD

According to Andreau (1999:102), Rome was regularly afflicted by debt and liquidity crises, which occurred in 193-192 BC, during the 80s BC, in 63 BC, in 49 BC and also in 33 AD, during the reign of Tiberius.

Of all the Roman financial crises, this last event has been studied the most thoroughly, and is of significant interest to this enquiry because of its potential impact on the economic and political environment of Jerusalem during the period immediately prior to and after Pentecost. According to Temin (2001:1), “the economy of the early Roman Empire was primarily a market economy and that the parts of this economy located far from each other were not tied together as tightly as markets often are today, *but they still functioned as part of a comprehensive Mediterranean market*” (my italics). Similarly, Rathbone (2007:315) explains that, in the eastern Mediterranean, a combination of Roman commercial practices, mediated through banks, “created an increasingly integrated commercial

world”;²³³ also (2007:317) that the interlocking commercial networks formed through the numerous banks connected “the disparate economic corners of the Roman Empire into a global village”.²³⁴ From this, we may infer that any financial crisis originating in Italy would have created a ripple effect throughout the “comprehensive Mediterranean market” – and would therefore have had a material impact in some if not all of the provincial economies.

It seems that the underlying problem revolved around and was also exacerbated by people’s fear of a collapse in the price of real estate. During his short reign (49 to 44 BC), Julius Caesar introduced legislation that sought to regulate money-lending and debts, and also reduce interest rates; and Andreau (1999:104) tells us that one of the ways he attempted to do this was by establishing a maximum proportion of an aristocrat’s patrimony that could be used in extending loans. Verboven (2008: 9) cites Tacitus’ report that many senators had invested more than a third of their wealth in loans, and also comments that:

Even if this is exaggerated, it should now be admitted that senatorial fortunes typically consisted at least for a substantial part in loans. If we assume that the average senator invested only 10 percent of his fortune in interest bearing loans, we still arrive at a total of at least 600 – but probably much more – million sesterces out on loan for senators alone. To this

²³³ Walbank (1969:20, 31) refers to the Roman Empire of the first century AD as “a single economic unit”; however, Finley (1973:33) is sceptical, but concedes that the Roman economy indeed functioned within “a single political unit”.

²³⁴ Rathbone (cited in Verboven, 2008:9) estimates that, in the first century AD, there were at least a thousand banks in Rome and Italy alone, which, according to Verboven’s calculations (2008:10) had a turnover close to 500 million sesterces; thus, in Rathbone’s words, “Roman banking was big business”.

should be added the debt claims held by knights, local elites, business men and others. However great the uncertainty entailed in such figures, clearly the total sum of outstanding debts at any moment in the Early Empire must be reckoned in terms of many billions of sesterces [...] No matter how volatile such figures may be, no one can reasonably doubt the huge scale they indicate.

Andreau (1999:27) writes that “many *generatores* from the aristocracy did not limit themselves to lending their own funds; they also loaned sums entrusted to them by other members of the elite [...] They themselves were part of the aristocracy, and it was, furthermore, for an elite clientele that they acted as financiers”. However, he also suggests (1999:28) that the all-pervasive economic power of the elite – namely, “its ability to control everything and profit from everything” – in fact stifled the Roman economy. Furthermore, there was sometimes a self-interested if not sinister side to these credit activities, as the elite often lent money to dependants who could not make ends meet, and who could only maintain their affluent lifestyle by getting further and further into debt.²³⁵ This suited many aristocratic *generatores*, with their ambitions for an expanded patrimony because, as Andreau writes (1999:28), when “small-scale landowners offered their land as security, this speeded up the process which led ultimately to the concentration of real estate in the hands of the elite”.

²³⁵ A. M. H. Jones (1974:126) claims that it required 500,000 sesterces a year to enable “impoverished” noblemen to keep up their station, and refers to that amount as “a pittance”.

By the reign of Tiberius, Caesar's law had fallen into disuse;²³⁶ however, one of the magistrates decided to reapply it, which Andreau (1999:104) suggests is evidence that a debt crisis had developed. He states that legislation passed by the Senate carried a stipulation that two-thirds of sums loaned by the elite should be invested in land in Italy. The intention was to avoid a collapse in local land prices, which would then lead to further problems in the economy. Tiberius gave the senators eighteen months to comply;²³⁷ however, the measure did nothing to stop the crisis, since Tacitus (*Annals* 6.17.1) informs us that Rome was already faced with a shortage of liquid cash, even before Caesar's law was reapplied. He attributes this liquidity problem in part to the sale of the large amount of confiscated property and possessions belonging to Sejanus – along with the assets of all those who Tiberius had executed as being allies of the condemned man – since the sale of properties confiscated by the state meant that cash was withdrawn from the local economy and transferred into the coffers of the state treasury, thus removing vital liquidity from the public markets.²³⁸

The result of the reapplied law, when added to the existing cash shortage, was disastrous; so much so that, according to Andreau (1999:105), Tiberius had to intervene:

In AD 33, the lack of cash continued to become increasingly serious. To remedy the situation, through the intermediary of ad hoc financial offices directed by senators, the Emperor himself offered interest-free loans

²³⁶ Tacitus (*Annals* 6.21.2) remarks that, by 33 AD, Caesar's law was "long obsolete because the public good is sacrificed to private interest."

²³⁷ According to Tacitus (*Annals* 6.16), it was necessary to give the senators time to comply because "not one of them was free from guilt" of breaking Caesar's law.

²³⁸ Sejanus was executed in October of 31 AD for conspiring against Tiberius. Tacitus reports that "the great scarcity of money", which created "a great shock to all credit", occurred as a "consequence of the conviction of so many persons and the sale of their property, [the "coin"] being locked up in the imperial treasury or the public exchequer".

amounting to an overall sum of 100,000,000 sesterces from his personal fortune for the duration of three years. The borrowers were required to offer security in the form of real estate or buildings.²³⁹

Andreau goes on to say that confidence was eventually restored to the local (Italian) economy. However, in the meantime, the combined effect of senatorial legislation and imperial initiative would have had a significant, negative impact on the credit markets of the day, particularly in the provinces. Put simply, by fixing the maximum proportion and, in effect, reducing the amount of a Roman aristocrat's patrimony that could be used in extending "productive" loans (i.e. loans for business purposes), and simultaneously forcing the elite to increase and also concentrate their real estate investments in Italy, this would have starved the international credit markets of both funds and vital liquidity – thus causing the *negotiatores*, the elite's agents in the provinces,²⁴⁰ to reduce their financing activity proportionally, or perhaps even cease it altogether. In terms of this enquiry, we are only really interested in one particular province: Judea. And we can only speculate as to how this empire-wide credit vacuum might have impacted the financing of trade in the Temple-centric economy of Jerusalem;²⁴¹ especially since, by 33 AD, Palestine had its own local economic problems, caused in part by the Herodians, as we shall now discuss.

²³⁹ In fact, according to Tacitus (*Annals* 6.22.7), the loans from Tiberius had to be secured by land worth double the value of the loan.

²⁴⁰ According to Andreau (1999:35), one half of the funerary inscriptions from the Early Empire that concern *negotiatores* or *negotiantes* are attested in the western provinces.

²⁴¹ Since the remedial loans offered by Tiberius had to be repaid over a three year period, this suggests that the impact of this "empire-wide credit vacuum" may have lasted from 33 to 36/37 AD: precisely the period covered by Acts 2 to 8.

4.9 Economic conditions in first century Jerusalem

Edwards (1949:116) informs us that, in the half-century preceding the period described by Luke in the early chapters of Acts, general economic conditions throughout the Roman Empire were quite good.

The reign of Augustus (c. 27 BC to 14 AD) inaugurated a new fiscal system throughout the Roman world. Under the late republic, conditions had been very unfavorable. The succession of civil wars had led to political and economic chaos. A policy of free trade was extended. Within this vast area, economic life quickened, and there was general prosperity. Economic stability was further developed by a well regulated monetary system. Private property was safeguarded, and as a result, the accumulation of capital was encouraged. Probably never before in human history had there been so great a capital accumulation.

However, all this unprecedented accumulation of capital does not appear to have been for the benefit of the population as a whole, but primarily for the privileged elite.²⁴² Edwards (1949:118) writes that, in Palestine, for example, "In the cities the merchant princes erected their palaces, and in the country they bought up the plots of the small farmers and consolidated them into vast estates. The small farmers became tenants or

²⁴² Crossan (1999:154) cites a socio-economic model developed by Lenski (1966:228) to show that, in agrarian societies, the elite/governing classes (1 to 2 percent of the population) usually took/received 50 to 65 percent of the agricultural productivity. His figure of "1 to 2 percent" (for the elite class) is based on Alföldy's calculations (1985:147) that the three Roman aristocratic orders (i.e. the "upper strata") represented 200,000 adult males who, with their wives and children, presented "no more than 1 percent of the total population of the empire".

drifted to the towns and cities.²⁴³ In either case there was a large landless class. The Jewish tenant farmer was generally in a very unsatisfactory state". He also asserts that "excavation of the homes of the lower classes [in general] show pitifully low standards of living". Furthermore, we know from Edersheim (1904), Edwards (1949), Jeremias (1969) and also Schürer et al (1979) that Jerusalem was dependent on foreign trade in order to satisfy the demands of its inhabitants; in fact, more than half of the articles of commerce mentioned in the Talmud and Midrash came from abroad.

This demand for what were mainly luxury items was driven chiefly by the massive needs of the Temple and its cultus, as well as by the activities of the Herodian monarchy, whose programme of building works was both extensive and extremely costly, and whose court life was also extravagant. However, even though the foreign trade of Palestine was considerable, Edwards injects an appropriate note of economic scepticism concerning the dubious (e.g. unequal socio-economic) benefits realised by that trade. For instance, the region was famous for its agriculture and the export of goods was mostly in foodstuffs; and Schürer et al (1979:79) confirm that Palestine "made her own large contribution to international trade: the products of her agriculture and industry were exported into every nation". The soil in Galilee in particular was fertile; and, in Judea, according to Aristeas, "the zeal of farmers [was] indeed remarkable".²⁴⁴ This is confirmed by Josephus (*Contra Apionem* 1.60), who wrote that the Jews "devote [themselves] to the cultivation of the productive country with which we are blessed". Nevertheless, Ed-

²⁴³ Oakman (1986:73) explains that "First-century Palestine evidence for a debt problem and the growth of tenancy is [...] mostly pertinent to Judea. Goodman [1982:149] has argued that the influx of wealth into Jerusalem from trade and business surrounding the Temple left much surplus capital in the hands of the pro-Roman oligarchy, and that this wealth was at hand to loan to hard-pressed smallholders and petty artisans, or to sink into land available for purchase".

²⁴⁴ Cited in Sanders, 1992:118

wards (1949:118) argues that this foreign trade was not only “unbalanced” and discriminatory, but also profligate to the point of being unsustainable: “it drained the nation of the foodstuffs which the masses could well have used, and supplied mainly the needs of the upper class for ornament and ostentation”.

Josephus (*Antiquities* 17.11.24) reports that the annual tax income raised by Herod in Judea was approximately 1,600 talents of gold. However, these taxes provided minimal benefit to the country because much of it was spent outside its borders. For instance, Josephus (*Antiquities* 15.9.5) comments on Herod “building cities after an extravagant manner and erecting temples not in Judea indeed, for that would not have been borne [...] but still he did this in the country out of our bounds, and in the cities thereof”. He further states (*Antiquities* 16.5.4) that Herod bestowed generous subsidies on cities, “both in Syria and in Greece, and in all the places he came to in his voyages”. Consequently, we find at this time a nation whose elite class had become very used to an abundance of prosperity that – through debt – fuelled an increasingly luxurious but ultimately unsustainable lifestyle, mixed with an outsized ego-driven obsession with expensive gestures of self-aggrandisement.²⁴⁵ In other words, the nation was collectively living beyond its means, with the elite class leading by example. For instance, around 35 AD, Agrippa

²⁴⁵ As Ste Croix (2001:425) informs us, “The Graeco-Roman world was obsessively concerned with wealth and status, and wealth was by far the most important determinant of status”. Hence, Kautsky (1982:187-197) devotes several pages to discuss the “Conspicuous Consumption and Wealth” of Aristocratic Empires. He writes (1982:188) that “Wealth is accumulated by aristocrats in aristocratic empires not to be saved or invested but to be displayed”.

ended up massively in debt to the Imperial Treasury, in the amount of 300,000 pieces of silver.²⁴⁶

This kind of widespread, socially-ambitious, over-spending and over-borrowing to “keep up with the Joneses” (in this case, the elite in Italy, who were likewise infected by the same ego-driven, economic contagion) invariably leads to what stock market professionals euphemistically call a “correction”; however, in this particular instance, it resulted in a serious, empire-wide financial crisis, as discussed above. Thanks to the political and fiscal reforms of Augustus, the previous major Roman economic crisis was in 49 BC. Consequently, by the time the events we are considering took place, the inhabitants of the empire had more than enough time to be lulled into a false sense of economic security and perhaps even came to believe that their prosperity would continue unabated – hence their apparent readiness to borrow without any concern about ever being unable to repay the debt.

This then was the economic reality of life in Jerusalem and Palestine (if not throughout the Roman empire) on the Day of Pentecost, when Peter was preaching about Jesus but, as I have suggested, his audience of Diaspora Jews were also thinking about Joel or, to be more precise, the promises of economic restoration found in the Book of Joel – and elsewhere in the OT. Collins (1983:14) writes that an essential part of the motivation for the Jews of the Diaspora to keep the Deuteronomic covenant was its aspects of blessings and cursings, which promised well-being to the faithful and punishment to the rebellious; and that “this understanding of the covenant persisted through-

²⁴⁶ To enforce collection of the debt, Agrippa was arrested by the Romans, but managed to escape. For more details concerning this episode, see Section 5, “Barnabas: a re-evaluation of his status”; specifically 5.9, “Possible links with powerful groups in Alexandria”.

out the Hellenistic and Roman periods". Consequently, the Diaspora Jews' knowledge and understanding of scripture would have combined with contemporary financial problems to ensure that the economic ramifications of Peter's reference to Joel in the opening gambit of his Pentecost sermon, along with his subsequent call for repentance, were patently obvious and thus clearly understood. And if some of his hearers made a decision to repent and be baptised for "mundane reasons", who can blame them? Not only were they being human, so to speak, they were also following a well-worn path of determining loyalty to a particular deity on the basis of potential economic benefit; a path that had been taken by many of their ancestors – as well as the ancient people of the surrounding nations – for well over a millennium, as we have seen above.

4.10 This crooked generation

And [Peter] solemnly and earnestly witnessed and admonished with much more continuous speaking and warned them, saying, Be saved from this crooked (perverse, wicked, unjust) generation (Acts 2:40).

Peter's defamatory reference to a "crooked generation" would have undoubtedly created a certain amount of tension amongst a particular section of his audience. Allen (1976:104) asserts that using *skolios* to describe that particular generation indicates that "it is ripe for the judgement associated with the Day [of Yahweh], a judgement that the citation of Psalm 110:1 in Acts 2:34f. specifies as certain to be inflicted on the enemies of the exalted Christ".²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ *Skolios* (σκολιός) means 'crooked, wicked, perverse, untoward'

In agreement, Barrett (1994:156) states that Peter was urging his audience to seek salvation from this wicked/crooked generation “so that one no longer shares its ways or its destiny”, thus implying divine judgement. Furthermore, according to Marshall (1980:82), “perverse generation” is “an Old Testament phrase for the people of Israel who rebelled against God in the wilderness” (Deuteronomy 32:5); and, by implication, the “enemies of the exalted Christ” would consist of those who, according to Peter’s earlier accusation in Acts 2:23, crucified Jesus and “put [Him] away by the hand of lawless men”. Therefore, the religious authorities in the audience would have been both affronted by Peter’s accusation and also extremely uncomfortable with if not angered by the message and implicit agenda being proclaimed. Also, even though the use of the word *skolios* is usually taken, as in this instance, to describe moral obliquity, it can also be translated as ‘corrupt’ and could equally be interpreted as an accusation concerning the ‘crooked’ way in which the leaders of “this generation” conducted their commercial dealings. This again would have been a sensitive issue to any Sadducees in the audience, especially those who controlled the Temple cult and temple-centric economy in Jerusalem.

Finally, this next point may be pure speculation; however, Wolff (1977:61) raises an intriguing issue when he writes that, in Joel 2:19, “The promise of ‘grain, new wine and olive oil’ points back clearly at first to the calamity described in chapter 1. But, strangely, it does not say that this will make ‘meal offerings and libations’ possible again [...] The blessing as that which makes new life possible, which was asked upon ‘meal offerings and libations’ (2:14), takes on instead the form of the pouring out of the spirit, which brings into existence a whole people of prophets (3:1) rather than ‘ministers of the

altar’”. This implies that, for whatever reasons, the serving priesthood might not escape divine judgement; or, alternatively, that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would perhaps usher in a time in which cultic priests and perhaps even the cult itself would be redundant. Either way, it raises the question as to how the priestly Sadducees in first century Jerusalem, who depended on and also prospered from the cult, would have interpreted and consequently reacted to any kind of reference to this scenario in the apostle’s message.

However, any suggestion of significant concern exhibited by the Sadducees has to be weighed against the fact that Peter’s defamatory remarks and insinuations, with their implications of divine judgement and/or justice, were made by a Galilean fisherman who, less than two months earlier, had shown that he did not have the backbone to pose any kind of threat. Therefore, in the minds of the local elite, his Pentecost tirade perhaps did not need to be taken seriously. On the other hand, the economic threat that soon emerged from this new sect’s *trapeza*, which was supported by more than 3,000 “devout and God-fearing men from every country under heaven”, and eventually placed under the control of a core group of educated and well-connected Hellenist *trapezitai*, would have been impossible to ignore.

4.11 All things in common

And all who believed (who adhered to and trusted in and relied on Jesus Christ) were united and [together] they had everything in common (Acts 2:44).

According to Countryman (1980:1), the debate over the historical accounts dealing with the reputed practice of communal property in the primitive and early Church, and its merits versus private property, “has called forth a great deal of literature over the last century and a quarter, largely because it has been caught up in the modern collision between capitalism and communism. Apologists for a variety of political tendencies have sought to use the early Christians as champions of their own or whipping boys for the opponents’ point of view”.²⁴⁸

However, it is not my intention to go over old ground and become embroiled in what is by now perhaps an overworked debate. Instead, I intend to explore this important and controversial question from a different perspective, utilising my professional knowledge of banks and banking practice, and also through an examination of the following points: firstly, the possibility that first century Jewish practice if not law did not permit a man to dispose of more than 20 per cent of his “means” in acts of religious piety, even if it was on behalf of the poor; secondly, the various arguments that traditional interpretations of the above passage have been highly if not overly-romanticised (apparently, for propaganda purposes); thirdly, apart from the two references in Acts 2:44 and 4:32, the idea of the members of the primitive church community “having all things in common” is never mentioned again; and, finally, some historical accounts that describe the failure of socio-economic experiments of a communistic nature, if indeed that is what it was.

²⁴⁸ In his introductory chapter, entitled “History of the Modern Discussion”, Countryman (1980:1-34) provides a comprehensive overview of the literature generated by this debate, starting with Johann Lorenz Mosheim in 1733, and finishing with Martin Hengel in 1974.

Jeremias (1969:126-127) informs us that, although almsgiving played an important part in Jewish piety, “the evidence of contemporary literature does not allow the ‘all’ [of Acts 2:44] to be pressed too far. According to the Mishnah (*M. Arak.* viii.4), a man may devote only part of his means to the Temple, and to go further than this was not valid. This passage demonstrates that men were obliged to set a limit to their generosity. It had already been recognized as a precept in the first century AD that it was not permissible to spend more than a fifth of one’s means on acts of charity (*j. Peah* i.I, 15b.23)”. This is confirmed by Hengel (1974:20), who writes that the “surrender of one’s own resources [was] taboo among the rabbis; to protect a man from making himself penniless a limit was put on the amount of alms to be given to the poor. The most a man could give was twenty per cent of his total income; the least, two or three per cent”. In addition, Jeremias (1969:131) states that common ownership of goods in the primitive church has been a matter of considerable controversy; while Watson (1996:6) expresses doubt as to the extent of the activity, writing that “How complete this communism was is impossible to tell”; and, finally, Conzelmann (1987:24) advises that Luke’s portrayal should not be taken as historical.

From Countryman (1980:90) we gain some helpful insight that the early church authors were perhaps more interested in the polemic than the practice, since “none of [the early] authors except for Sextus seriously urged his readers to the practice of communism; nor is there any firm evidence that community of goods was ever normal within the church, *even in the primitive church in Jerusalem* [my italics]. Apologists described Christian almsgiving in communist terms in order to appeal to philosophically-minded pagans; moralists cast doubts on the validity of private property in order to en-

courage almsgiving. That is all". Thus, we are led to believe that Acts 2:44 and 4:32 were created for propaganda purposes (and exploited by later Christian authors for fundraising reasons), and should therefore be viewed as a statement of the ideal rather than fact, as Mealand explains (1977:98):

In ever varied form Greek and Roman writers maintained that in some long vanished golden age, or in distant climes, or in some ideal future state people had shared, or did share, or would share, everything in common. So when Jewish writers were commending the customs and practices of their religion to those for whom they wrote in Greek, it is only to be expected that they should portray members of a close knit Jewish sect as fulfilling some of the Greek Utopian ideals.

In agreement, Kollman (2004:12) asserts that "The generalised Lukan reports of a renunciation of property both obligatory and comprehensive are not, however, covered by the underlying traditions and owe their existence to a transfigured portrayal of the life of the Christian community of Jerusalem, influenced by Pythagorean-Essene ideals of organised communal holding of property".²⁴⁹ In support, Johnson and Harrington (1992:61) offer evidence of this influence in the following literary precedents:

A Hellenistic reader would recognise in Luke's description the sort of 'foundation story' that was rather widespread in Hellenistic literature. An early example is Plato's *Critias*, which pictures the early days of Athens as a time when 'none of its members possessed any private property, but

²⁴⁹ According to Countryman (1980:43, n. 63), "Josephus [likewise] 'oversold' the Essenes to his Greek audience by assimilating them more closely to the Pythagoreans than the facts warranted".

they regarded all they had as the common property of all' (110 C-D).²⁵⁰

Another example is Ovid's description of the 'Golden Age' of humanity (*Metamorphoses* 1:88-111). Political thinkers like Plato saw such sharing of possessions as a feature of the ideal state (see *Republic* 420C-422B; 462B-464A; *Laws* 679B-C; 684C-D; 744B-746C; 757A).

Conzelmann (1987:24) agrees that Luke's picture of sharing property is idealised; and Hengel (1974:4) also concurs, stating that these ideals hearken back to romanticised notions of some utopian golden age where, "in the primal childhood of the human race, all possessions were held in common", and that "the downfall of man began with the introduction of private property". Commenting on Acts 2:44, he writes (1974:9) that "Here we have the familiar picture of the restoration of the perfect 'primal state' which has analogies, even to the way it was formulated, with the sharing of goods among the Scythians,²⁵¹ Plato's doctrine of the state (*Politics* 462, etc.) or the 'primal community' of the Pythagoreans in Southern Italy".²⁵² Finally, Dibelius (1956:128) argues that Luke used the individual instances he knew of in order to compose a picture of "an ideal such as constantly appears in Greek literature since Plato"; and Lüdemann (1989:61) asserts that Luke was not interested in what he calls "petty details", but in "showing that Old Testament and Greek ideals were being realized in the Jerusalem community".

²⁵⁰ William Bradford, governor of the second British Colony in North America from 1620 to 1646, wrote that the decision behind the disastrous experiment by the Pilgrim Fathers to have all things in common was based on the "conceite of Platos and other ancients".

²⁵¹ The Scythians were idealised by Strabo as being "frugal in their ways of living and not money-getters, they [...] are orderly towards one another, because they have all things in common". See *Geography* 7, 3, 9: ET by Horace Leonard Jones from *Leob Classic Library*, London, in Hengel, 1974:5, n. 8, on p. 93

²⁵² Hengel cites E. Plumacher, *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller*, SUNT 9, Göttingen (1972); p. 17f.

With regard to the possible extent of the practice, Watson (1996:117-118) makes the point that, after Stephen's speech, "there is no talk of Christians holding all property in common"; and Hengel (1974:35) suggests that the voluntary nature of the activity may have ensured its demise, since "in the long run, the form of 'love communism' practised in Jerusalem was just not possible."²⁵³ It was impossible to maintain a sharing of goods in a free form, without the kind of fixed organisation and common production which we find, say, at Qumran".²⁵⁴ Similarly, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:63) claim that "Acts 6:1-6 narrates the appointment of the Seven, and is clearly intended by the writer to explain why the communistic experiment broke down", and the point is noted by Cassidy (1987:29, n. 14), who agrees, but cautions that "It is indeed possible to theorize that the initial economic practices of the apostolic community in Jerusalem ended in failure. However, such is not the portrayal given by Luke within Acts". I agree with Cassidy that Luke's text does not portray the actual failure of the economic activity itself. However, as I argue below, it does portray the failure of the apostles to manage that activity properly; their limited administrative abilities and capabilities overwhelmed by the extraordinary increase in the financial component of their leadership-related workload, which occurred within a reasonably short time.

Consequently, if we accept the existence of a banking facility (*trapeza*) operating within the post-Pentecost primitive church community in Jerusalem, the silence from

²⁵³ The phrase "love communism" was coined by Ernst Troeltsch (1912)

²⁵⁴ According to Kollman (2002:12), "In the initiation ritual of the Pythagoreans (Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* 17:72-74), as well as the Essenes (Philo, *Hyp.* 11:4; Josephus, *War* II:122, 124-127), complete alienation of private property, or rather the handing over of private property for communal ownership, was firmly institutionalized". On the other hand, Bloch (1959:1488) stresses "the spontaneous and voluntary character of this 'love communism' [in Jerusalem]. It was not organized, nor was it subjected to external compulsion. The decisive thing was *koinōnia*, not organization". Also, Barrett (1994:253) suggests that "it is probable that some kind of sharing was practiced in Jerusalem. It was probably not organized".

Luke on the above economic practice “after Stephen’s speech” gives rise to the following speculation. If a change in economic practice is linked in any way to Stephen’s death and the subsequent persecution and scattering of the Hellenist *trapezitai* (Acts 7-8), then the mention of holding “all things in common” (Acts 2:44 and 4:32) may not be a reference to communism as such – especially since there is some agreement among commentators that this practice was voluntary²⁵⁵ – but to a kind of community-centric capitalism that ceased with the departure of the Hellenist *trapezitai* who controlled it, and the attendant demise of the community banking facility that provided the engine to power it.²⁵⁶ On the other hand, if there was indeed some sort of communistic economic practice within the primitive church community in Jerusalem, then its breakdown and/or disappearance could be explained by the fact that it was an example of what some have described as a flawed, if not failed experiment.

For example, Miller (2007:66) writes that, after the Berlin Wall came down, “communism and Marxism were generally seen to have been flawed experiments: inefficient economically, fraught with corruption, harmful environmentally, stifling to human creativity, abusive of individual human rights, and void of spiritual guidance and moral authority”. Also, according to Ball (2004:278), “experience tells us that a rigidly controlled economy (like that of the former Soviet Union) works against the interests of both general welfare and efficiency [...] An interacting-agents model of the economy devised by Zdzislaw Burda at the Jagellonian University in Cracow, Poland, and his colleagues,

²⁵⁵ Jeremias (1969:131, n. 19) notes that “Common ownership in the primitive church has been a matter of considerable controversy. The reasons that are cited against it do not seem to me to be convincing, provided it is remembered that the participation was voluntary”.

²⁵⁶ For a fuller explanation of the benefits of this kind of economic activity, see Section 4.15, “The significance of meeting in Solomon’s porch”

suggests that ‘socialist’ economies which severely restrict trade are apt to collapse into a state in which a large proportion of the wealth ends up in the hands of one person. In other words, they are more prone to corruption”.

Interestingly, the argument against having “all things in common” is not new, and can be found, for example, in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica II Part 2*, written between 1265 and 1274 AD.²⁵⁷ Essentially, Aquinas contends that common ownership impedes positive economic outcomes, since “each one would shirk the labour and leave to another that which concerns the community”. Conversely, he argues that private ownership would (a) create less confusion, “because human affairs are conducted in more orderly fashion if each man is charged with taking care of some particular thing himself”; and (b) result in more peace, since “it is to be observed that quarrels arise more frequently where there is no division of the things possessed”. Also, from the seventeenth century, we find a similar argument in the account of the plight of the Pilgrim Fathers who founded the second British Colony in North America in 1620. In his “History of Plymouth Plantation”, William Bradford, second governor of the colony, reports that the Pilgrims had made an agreement with their English sponsors that “all profits” (i.e. all crops, fish and trade goods) would “remain still in the common stock” from which all colonists were to take their food and goods.²⁵⁸

According to Bradford, sharing everything in common was not successful, and this misguided experiment resulted in the colonists almost starving. As a consequence,

²⁵⁷ See Aquinas’ reply to Question 66, article 2: “Whether it is lawful for a man to possess a thing as his own?”

²⁵⁸ Bradford expands this statement to say that “all such persons as are of this collonie, are to have their meate, drink, apparell, and all provissions out of the common stock and goods of the said collonie”.

the Pilgrim Fathers decided to make a change in their economic practice. Each family was assigned a parcel of land and could keep whatever they could grow on it, and Bradford writes that:

At length, after much debate of things, the Gov^r (with the advise of the cheefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corne every man for his owne perticuler, and in that regard trust to them selves; in all other things to goe on in the generall way as before. And so assigned to every family a parcell of land, according to the proportion of their number for that end [...] This had very good success; for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corne was planted then other wise would have bene by any means the Gov^t or any other could use, and saved him a great deall of trouble, and gave far better contente.

Interestingly, to celebrate the abundant harvest that resulted from the change in economic practice, the Pilgrims set apart a day of thanksgiving.

More recently, Easterly (2006:93-94) recounts a similar experience amongst rice-growers in Communist China in the late 1970s. He cites a report from Groves et al (1994:183-209) to explain that “the commune system that the Communists had in place all over China was leading to a breakdown in food production. Under this system, everybody was collectively responsible for tilling the land, and everybody had a share in the land’s output”. In 1978, the villagers of Xiaogang, in Anhui province, secretly rebelled against this communal system and divided the land amongst themselves, agreeing that each family would farm their own plot individually, and also keep the results of their

own harvest. According to Easterly, “Rice production in Xiaogang shot up. The results were too spectacular to stay secret for long. Neighboring villages wanted to know how Xiaogang had increased its rice production so much. Other villages also put into place individual farming”. The growth and success of this rebellion eventually came to the notice of the authorities in Beijing who reacted positively: by 1982, individual farming was approved by the Central Communist Party and, by 1984, there were no communes operating in China.

When the apostle Peter was condemning the actions of Ananias and Sapphira, he posed the rhetorical question (Acts 5:4): “As long as [the land] remained unsold, was it not still your own? And [even] after it was sold, was not [the money] at your disposal and under your control?” Here, the word ‘control’ is the Greek *exousia* (ἐξουσία), which means ‘personal authority, control and/or privilege’. Thus, Peter’s question would only be relevant if the kind of economic activity described in Acts 2:44 was indeed voluntary, which also suggests that it may not have been community-wide. For example, Weiser (1981:138) claims that Barnabas’ sale of his field, in order to present the funds to the church, was “an exception and not simply the usual behaviour of everyone”. Furthermore, in his commentary on the episode involving Ananias and Sapphira, Barrett (1994:267) argues that Luke “never suggests, or hints, that church members ought at all times to dispose of their capital assets, and it is clear from the rest of [Acts] that they did not do so”. He also asserts (1994:252) that “It is impossible to evade the conclusion that (at least as far as this verse is concerned) the sale of property and distribution of the proceeds was voluntary”. Johnson and Harrington (1992:88) agree, and Lüdemann (1989:63-64) writes that “In content [Acts 5:4] rejects the idea of any obligation to renounce pos-

sessions and stresses the voluntary nature of the sale of property and the handing over of the proceeds”.

Consequently, the voluntary nature of the activity, plus the Jewish teaching/edict proscribing the disbursement of more than 20 per cent of one’s means on pious or charitable activity, which Jeremias states was a recognised precept in the first century AD, suggests that Acts 2:44 and 4:32 do not refer to any form of communism or communalism as we might understand it. However, in the end, the activity itself is far less important than its outcome. If having “all things in common” was a reference to an early form of communism (which is extremely doubtful) or even idealised communalism then, just like similar socio-economic experiments that followed throughout history, it obviously did not work. On the other hand, if it referred to a form of community-centric capitalism, then, because it was managed via a banking facility operated originally by the apostles, whose “calling” ensured that the economic activity involved was not a major priority, this too perhaps did not work, at least not as efficiently as it should, and was soon replaced by something that did: i.e. the new (or at least improved) *trapeza*, controlled by the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*. Either way, because it – whatever *it* might be – did not work, it did not survive for very long, and was replaced by something better. As a result, it did not deserve a further mention in the Acts narrative.

4.12 Illiterate Hebrews and learned Hellenists

Now when [the Sanhedrin] saw the boldness and unfettered eloquence of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned and untrained in the schools... (Acts 4:13)

According to this verse, Peter and John (and, by implication, the other Hebrew apostles no doubt) were considered by the Sanhedrin to be ‘unlearned and ignorant’ (KJV).²⁵⁹ The Greek is *agrammatos* (ἀγράμματος), which means ‘illiterate, without learning’, and *idiōtēs* (ιδιώτης), meaning an ‘unlearned, illiterate man, as opposed to learned and educated’. Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:44) inform us that “ἀγράμματος is very common in papyri after the Ptolemaic period and elsewhere of persons who cannot write”. They also use the word ‘illiterate’, which Marshall (1980:101) agrees is a possible meaning here.

On this basis, I suggest that the Sadducee elite would *not* (at this stage, at least) have regarded the Hebrew apostles as a serious political or economic threat to their vested interests in Jerusalem, especially since they assumedly did not speak Greek,²⁶⁰ which Edersheim (1904:14) contends was necessary for interaction with the Roman authorities and the numerous civil and military officials.²⁶¹ However, the Hellenist Jesus-Believers, which included the *trapezitai*, would have been another matter, since Collins (1983:4) claims that “It is evident from the literature of the Diaspora that Jews were educated, by whatever means, in Greek literature and philosophy”. For instance, Barrett (1994:428) describes the Greek attributed to Phillip, one of the Seven, in his conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch (in Acts 8:26-38) as “stylish”. This implies that the Sadducee elite would have considered the threat posed by the Hellenist *trapezitai* and their fellow

²⁵⁹ According to Conzelmann (1987:33), the apostles are also described as uneducated by Justin (*Apology* 1.39.3); Origen (*Contra Celsus* 1.62) and Pseudo-Clement (*Recognition* 1.62)

²⁶⁰ In his commentary on Acts 2:7, Barrett (1994:120) writes that the degree of education to be expected in Galileans was such that they “would be unlikely to speak foreign languages”. For support, he cites the popular opinions of Galileans provided by Géza Vermes in *Jesus the Jew: a historian’s reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins, 1973), pp. 42-57

²⁶¹ MacCulloch (2010:43) confirms that Greek “was the *lingua franca* of the Middle East in the time of Jesus”.

merchant-financiers to be quite serious. After all, apart from their level of education and literacy in Greek, Acts 2:8-11 implies that they also had significant commercial and political contacts in Rome, Alexandria, Susa and other major cities.

4.13 No needy person among them

Nor was there a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses proceeded to sell them, and one by one they brought the amount received from the sales. And laid it at the feet of the apostles, Then distribution was made according as anyone had need (Acts 4:34-35).

Cassidy (1987:24) expresses surprise that the Greek word for the poor, *ptōchos* (πτωχός), does not appear at all within the text of Acts.²⁶² Here, Luke uses *endeēs* (ἐνδεής), which has the meaning of ‘in want’ or ‘in need’,²⁶³ and is generally understood to refer to material wants and needs.

Unfortunately, biblical scholars have almost universally tended to assume that references to material needs apply exclusively to the poor; whereas businesses and also governments frequently need or lack (another word that warrants a second look, exegetically speaking) certain products or services that are integral to their normal commercial operations. Furthermore, in order to procure whatever they lack, these groups often need some form of loan or investment; and that need is usually met by a bank. As mentioned previously, in his account of the origins of banking in Mesopotamia, Chachi states that “a very advanced banking system was carried out by the religious temples which

²⁶² In fact, Fitzmeyer (1976:245) describes the absence of *ptōchos* in Acts as “striking”.

²⁶³ Interestingly, Barrett (1994:252) states that *endeēs* occurs nowhere else in the NT.

used to [...] give loans to those who *need* finance” (2005:21, my italics).²⁶⁴ And if we adopt the banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, I would suggest that Luke’s use of *endeēs* may imply various levels of commercial need.²⁶⁵

However, to better understand why there may have been no “needy person among them” (i.e. the primitive church), we need to clarify what is meant in Greco-Roman literature by the descriptive term “the poor”. Countryman (1980:25) provides the following instructive insight:

The poor, by contrast [with rich landowners], were those who lived by their own labor. Here we must distinguish between two groups of people for whom the Greeks and Romans had distinct terms, but whom we commonly lump together in English as ‘the poor’. At the bottom of the economic scale stood those whom the ancients called *ptōchoi* or *indigentes*; we shall refer to them here as ‘the indigent’, that is, people utterly without resources. They owned nothing by way of property or tools of trade, and they lived a hand-to-mouth existence, dependent on day-labor or begging. At a higher level stood the *penētai* or *pauperes*. Unfortunately, we have no distinct word for them in English – only the catch-all term ‘poor’. They were small shopkeepers, artisans and farmers, people who owned property and the tools of their trade and could expect a reliable income

²⁶⁴ As mentioned previously, one of the earliest, attested records of temple banking depicts a loan transaction: a Mesopotamian farmer *needed* sesame and, since he did not have the wherewithal to buy it, he therefore required a loan from the priestess of the temple to finance his purchase (Homoud, 1985:17-18).

²⁶⁵ One reason why it cannot be claimed with 100% certainty that here Luke is referring unambiguously to the needs of those who were truly poor is because, in Acts 4:35 (and previously in 2:45), the Greek used for ‘need’ is *chreia*, which also appears in Acts 6:3, where, in the KJV and Amplified version, it is translated as ‘business’, in line with the definition from Thayer’s Greek Lexicon.

from their own labor. Even if a man owned a considerable staff of slaves and a prosperous shop, he was ‘poor’ as long as he engaged actively and directly in the business.²⁶⁶

Therefore, in Greco-Roman literature, the English word “poor” describes anyone who was not rich enough to be in a position where they did not need to engage regularly (i.e. actively and directly) in a trade or business – no matter how successful that trade or business may have been. Since this rather broad definition could be applied to the vast majority of the primitive church congregation, we should be far more scrupulous when examining that community’s attitude towards and/or activities on behalf of the so-called poor. Furthermore, we are told that Luke used the LXX as his main source of the OT scriptures, which also may shed further light on his use of *endeēs* rather than *ptōchos*.

When Lüdemann asserts that Luke’s real purpose in Acts is to show that “Old Testament ideals” were being realised in the primitive church community, one of the ideal situations he is no doubt alluding to is found in Deuteronomy 15:4 (“...there will be no poor among you, for the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess”), part of the covenantal promises attributed to Yahweh prior to the Children of Israel entering and possessing the Promised Land of Canaan. Here again, in the LXX, the Greek for ‘poor’ is *endeēs* and not *ptōchos*; and what is of particular interest to this enquiry is the fact that, to ensure that this particular ideal

²⁶⁶ See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s. vv. πένης and πεινῆς by Friederick Hauck; πτωχός, πτωχεία and πτωεύ by Friederick Hauck and Ernst Bammel; noted in Countryman, 1980:25, n. 57. Finley (1973:41) also refers to the difference between *ptōchoi* and *penētai*, and explains that “A *plousios* [from *ploutos*, meaning ‘wealth’] was a man who was rich enough to live properly on his income”: i.e. without the need to work. Furthermore, Stegemann and Stegemann (2001:71) advise that the line between the upper echelons of the *penētai* and the rich is frequently blurred; therefore, it can often be difficult to divide these two groups.

situation would transpire, Yahweh's proposed solution involved not acts of charity, but lending; as we see a few verses later in Deuteronomy 15:7-8:

If there is among you a poor man, one of your kinsmen in any of the towns of your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your [minds and] hearts or close your hands to your poor brother; But you shall open your hands wide to him and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.

Again, in the LXX, the word for 'poor' here is not *ptōchos* but *endeēs*; and in LXX Deuteronomy 15:11 we find an even more interesting example: "For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hands to your brother, to your needy, and to your poor in your land". Here too, the Greek word translated as 'poor' is *endeēs*; however, the word for 'needy' in this example is different: *penēti*, which, as we see above, is used to denote "small shopkeepers, artisans and farmers, people who owned property and the tools of their trade and could expect a reliable income from their own labor" (Countryman, 1980:25). On the other hand, in LXX Proverbs 19:17 ("He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and that which he has given He will repay to him"), the author specifically uses *ptōchon* for the word 'poor'. Therefore, it would appear that, where appropriate, the LXX differentiates clearly between *ptōchos* and *endeēs*; and I would suggest that Luke likewise may have deliberately used *endeēs* in Acts for a specific purpose: i.e. to denote a group of people who did not include *ptōchoi* –

which also implies that he was not necessarily alluding to acts of charity as the primary if not sole means of meeting their needs.²⁶⁷

Consequently, I would argue that, if we take into account more than three millennia of religious and economic historical precedents, it is possible that Acts 4:34-35 depicts the apostles – in their capacity as leaders of a new religious sect – performing a role traditionally associated with the banking or treasury operations of religious communities and ancient temples.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, I submit that the primitive church congregation would have expected the apostles to fulfil such a role. After all, many members of the community were no doubt used to having both personal and business dealings with the local temple-based bank; and we must also not forget that all this activity took place in the area of the Jerusalem Temple known as Solomon's porch. And so, ironically, Jesus' own cadre of *trapezitai* (and *kapēloi*) were now operating inside the temple precincts.

But before we leave this discussion of Acts 4:34-35, it would be helpful to briefly consider this passage in its wider context, along with that of a similar description of the community economic activity given earlier in the Lukan text. In Acts 2:42-45, we read that, in the immediate post-Pentecost period, the key activities within the primitive church community fell into four broad categories: study and prayer (2:42); signs and wonders (2:43); community-centric economic activity (2:44-45) and, finally, close fellowship (2:46). Similarly, the activities depicted in Acts 4:31-35 fell into comparable group-

²⁶⁷ Like the LXX, the Hebrew Bible is also careful to differentiate. Deuteronomy 15:4 uses *'ebyown*, which appears 61 times in the OT, primarily as 'needy' (35), then 'poor' (24), 'beggar' (1) and finally 'poor man' (1). Likewise, it uses a different word in Proverbs 19:17, i.e. *dal*, which is translated primarily as 'poor' (43 times), then 'needy' (2), 'weaker' (1) and 'lean' (1). The implication here is that the 'needy' in both Acts 4:34 and Deuteronomy 15:4 do not correspond to the 'poor' as we would understand the term.

²⁶⁸ This is supported by Sterba's comment (1976:19) mentioned above that "the Mesopotamian temple corporation combined many functions of a modern day public treasury, commercial bank, accounting firm and welfare agency"

ings: prayer followed by signs and wonders (4:31), as well as close fellowship and community-centric economic activity (4:32). It is impossible to determine conclusively whether this was an intentional allusion by Luke to the elements of the OT salvation-restoration oracles or simply mere coincidence. However, it does seem to imply that, on one hand, Luke may have understood the connection between spiritual and economic transformation; and, on the other hand, both occurred in some form within the primitive church in the immediate post-Pentecost period.

4.14 Commercial repercussions of the Ananias and Sapphira episode

And the whole church and all others who heard of [the deception and deaths of Ananias and Sapphira] were appalled [great awe and strange terror and dread seized them] (Acts 5:11).

Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:50), Marshall (1980:111), Johnson and Harrington (1992:88), and also Lüdemann (1989:66) all note that, in Acts 5:2, the severity of Ananias' "sin" is depicted in the use of the word *enosphisato* (ἐνοσφίσατο), meaning 'withheld' or 'kept back', which Johnson and Harrington state is "at home in the context of financial fraud".²⁶⁹ However, of greater importance here, especially in the minds of a first-century Jewish audience, is the allusion to the story of Achan in Joshua 7:1-26 who, after the conquest of Jericho, kept something back (*enosphisanto* in the LXX) from the goods and possessions placed under the ban or *herem* – and thus dedicated to the Lord. In this ancient pericope, Achan's death was ordered by Yahweh; and Barrett (1994:268) asserts that, in

²⁶⁹ They cite II Maccabees 4:32

first century Jerusalem, the dread that fell upon the populace, after the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, “is the fear of the supernatural”.

As mentioned earlier, temples were used as banks because the people believed that they were safe depositories for their assets; in part because of the long-standing, mythological relationship between the gods and money. Therefore, if we accept the existence of a temple-banking operation within the primitive church, then physical evidence of divine retribution for anyone who attempted to deceive the presiding deity²⁷⁰ would have convinced the astonished populace of Jerusalem that this particular iteration of temple banking had “the hand of God” upon it. Consequently, such a powerful, divine testimonial (to use a marketing communications term) would be guaranteed to attract a great deal of new business for that particular temple-banking operation; and thus substantially increase the workload pressure on the apostles – which would have exposed their competency or workload problem, as highlighted soon after in Acts 6:1.

4.15 The significance of meeting in Solomon’s porch

And by common consent they all met together [at the temple] in the covered porch called Solomon’s (Acts 5:12)

Without seeming to appreciate the wider implications, Esler (1987:149) alludes to the potential significance of the detail in verse 12.

²⁷⁰ As suggested by Peter’s accusations: “You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:4); and also “How could you two have agreed and conspired together to try to deceive the Spirit of the Lord?” (5:9).

The stoa on the eastern side [of the Temple] bore the name ‘Solomon’s Portico’²⁷¹ and appears to have functioned as a meeting-place for the early Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 3:11, 5:12). Under and in front the front of these porticoes took place the bustling activities of the Temple mount. Here merchants sold animals for sacrifice and money-lenders conducted their trade, especially the exchange of Greek and Roman coinage for the half-shekels with which the Jews paid the annual Temple tax.

In other words, the regular meeting place of the large and rapidly growing community of Jesus-Believers was adjacent to the area where the Temple traders (*kapēloi*) and money-changers (*kollubistōn* or *trapezitai*) conducted their daily business. Consequently, these traders and money-changers would have witnessed first-hand the numerical and economic growth of this new sect, and no doubt reported everything they saw and heard to their masters within the Sadducee elite.

However, Solomon’s porch was not the only venue where members of the primitive church met together on a regular basis; according to Acts 2:46, “day after day [the members of the new sect] regularly assembled in the temple with united purpose, and in their homes they broke bread”. Here, the phrase “with united purpose” is *homothymadon* (ὁμοθυμαδόν), which is the same Greek compound used in Acts 5:12 for “with common consent” (Amplified) or “by one accord” (NASB and KJV). It is an unusual word/phrase used in various parts of Acts to depict the extraordinary depth of unity exhibited by the

²⁷¹ Esler is citing Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.220-222

primitive church congregation.²⁷² This, plus circumstantial evidence examined elsewhere, gives rise to speculation that members of the primitive church may have formed themselves into more than just a closely-knit religious community. Regular fellowship in each other's homes would have further strengthened relationships within the community, thus creating a significant level of trust – on both the personal *and* business front. As a consequence, it is highly likely that numerous opportunities would have presented themselves for sect members to do business with each other, especially given the involvement of so many merchants from the Jewish Diaspora.²⁷³

The possibility of sect members trading with each other on a recurring basis represents an important factor that, if true, would have contributed greatly to the economic growth experienced by the community. This dynamic also has significant ramifications today, and is perhaps best explained by citing the problems that occur when this form of what has been occasionally mislabelled “cooperative economics” is absent.²⁷⁴ For example, over the past decade or so, many African-American leaders in the United States have lamented the virtual non-existence of economic cooperation and/or patronage

²⁷² For example, see Acts 1:14 and 2:1 (in the upper room); 4:24 (after Peter and John were released by the chief priests and elders); and also 15:25 (in the letter written by the church elders to the brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia).

²⁷³ From Zak and Knack (2001:295-321), we learn that “high trust societies” have higher rates of investment and growth. This is confirmed by a personal research project conducted in 1993 to examine small business financing problems in the UK. As part of this exercise, I interviewed a senior executive from Rabobank in Holland. At one point, he stated that, in 1990, Rabobank lent money to small local business owners at the same interest rate that they charged the Dutch government. As this was such an extraordinary occurrence, I asked him how they were able to do it, and his answer was one word: trust. Apparently, Rabobank is so embedded in the local communities they serve (the bank branches are owned by members of the original, local co-operatives), there are numerous instances where bank executives are related by blood and/or marriage to their customers; hence the level of trust is much greater than in normal banking relationships.

²⁷⁴ The term “cooperative economics” dates back to a treatise by Robert Owen, “A New View of Society”, published in 1814; see *Report to the County of Lanark/A New Society* (Ringwood: Penguin Publishers, 1970). It was originally used in a socialist context, but that is not how the modern African-American leaders and writers mentioned here intended it to be understood. Therefore, perhaps a more appropriate description would be “community-centric capitalism”.

within their communities: i.e. Black people do *not* make a habit of buying Black-produced goods and services from Black-owned businesses. As a result of this situation, the so-called “Black dollar” is believed to circulate only once (or for less than one day) within the Black community before it leaves (i.e. is spent outside) the community. In his 1997 presidential address to the Progressive National Baptist Convention, in which he discussed community development, Thomas Kilgore commented:

We live in communities. We must try to live in community. They must spread beyond our church doors. We must develop a love affair with Black businessmen, politicians, fraternal groups, community centers and poor and disinherited people. Our financial resources must be pooled and wisely used. We can no longer afford to permit the Black dollar to circulate only 1½ times in the Black community. It leaves us before it does much good. This brief circulation accounts for our spending 92.5 percent of our 90 billion dollar income outside the Black community. What a tragedy.²⁷⁵

In the same speech, Kilgore claimed that the Chinese dollar circulated five times and the Jewish dollar seven times before it was spent outside those respective ethnic communities. Commenting on the same issue, Stephens (1996:18) cites a study conducted by Washington-based economic development specialist, John Wray, tracing the flow of dollars through different ethnic communities.

²⁷⁵ Cited in Avant (2004:58)

Wray found that in the Asian community, a dollar circulates among the community's banks, brokers, shopkeepers and business professionals for up to 28 days before it is spent with outsiders. In the Jewish community, the circulation period was 19 days; in the WASP community, 17 days; but in the African-American community – 6 hours!

It would be difficult to prove; however, the differences in dollar circulation periods for different ethnic communities may be linked in some way to their respective differences in incomes. From Easterly (2002:162-163) we learn that, in the United States, Blacks earn 41 percent less than Whites, while Asians earn 16 percent more.²⁷⁶ According to one website/blog, the failure by African-Americans to create and support an economic system that keeps and circulates their dollars within their own community is the primary reason why this particular community experiences less prosperity than other ethnic groups.²⁷⁷ Therefore, I would argue that, if the primitive church did engage in a form of community-centric capitalism, this would have been a critical factor in the community's remarkable economic growth.

4.16 None of those who were not of their number dared to join them

And none of those who were not of their number dared to join and associate with them, but the people held them in high regard and praised and made much of them. More and more there were being added to the Lord those who believed, crowds both of men and of women (Acts 5:13-14)

²⁷⁶ Easterly (2002:163, n. 21) is citing *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995*, tables 52 and 724

²⁷⁷ See <http://uvbc.blogspot.com/2006/06/state-of-africa-america-v-cooperative.html>; accessed on December 3rd 2007

The conundrum presented in these two verses has posed exegetical problems for some time. According to Bruce (1970:137-138), the theories as to why “none of those who were not of their number dared to join them” have ranged from acute politeness, in terms of waiting to be introduced properly (F. C. Burkitt, 1919); not wanting to meddle (Blass, 1898); and an unusual emending of the text by Hilgenfield, followed by Pallis (1928), to say that “of the Levites none dared to prevent them (i.e. from holding meetings in the Temple precincts)”. Conzelmann (1963:39) goes so far as to contend that “The apparent contradiction between verses 13 and 14 is mere clumsiness on the part of the narrator”.

However, I see no contradiction here, and would argue instead that those “who were not of their number” and “dared [not] join and associate with them” may refer to the avaricious and corrupt merchants and money-changers who used Solomon’s porch to conduct their business, as this particular group would have been wary of receiving the same fate as Ananias and Sapphira. On the other hand, “the people [who] held them in high regard and praised and made much of them” may refer to those merchants, residents and perhaps also pilgrims who would have been extremely pleased to see a degree of honesty and integrity return to the commercial activity within the Temple precincts. Nevertheless, interpretation aside, the end result, according to Luke, was that “More and more there were being added to the Lord those who believed, crowds both of men and of women” (Acts 5:13-14).

Again, I suggest that such explicit and undeniable evidence of the numerical and economic growth of the new sect would not have gone unnoticed by the Sadducees, and

would have confirmed their fears concerning the commercial threat posed to the Temple-centric economy under their control. This undoubtedly would have contributed an extra layer of tension to the episode described just a few verses later (Acts 5:17-18) in which “the high priest rose up and all who were his supporters, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and being filled with jealousy (*zēlos*) and indignation and rage, they seized and arrested the apostles”. According to Johnson and Harrington (1992:96), “Luke’s attribution of this vice to the leaders taps into a Hellenistic *topos* on envy, which consistently links envy with the urge to kill”;²⁷⁸ and Marshall (1980:121) agrees that the Sanhedrin were roused to fury, “and were of a mind to have the apostles put to death”.

4.17 The problem of the Hellenist widows re-examined

Now about this time, when the number of the disciples was greatly increasing, complaint was made by the Hellenists (the Greek-speaking Jews) against the [native] Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked and neglected in the daily ministration (Acts 6:1).

I submit that, by promulgating an idealised and/or over-spiritualised representation of the primitive church’s economic life, biblical scholars have created numerous exegetical problems that could otherwise be resolved.

In particular, the traditional, charity-oriented interpretation of the commercial activity depicted in the early part of Acts has resulted in an inordinate amount of attention being focused on the so-called problem of the Hellenist widows, which in turn has led to a range of unfruitful if not irrelevant speculations: e.g. whether the reputed underlying

²⁷⁸ They cite Plato, *Laws* 869E-870A; Plutarch, *On Brotherly Love* 17 [Mor. 487F].

tension between the Hebrews and Hellenists was say a “theological” problem (Horrell, 2000:138);²⁷⁹ a “Gentile God-fearer table-fellowship” problem (Esler, 1987:159); a sign of a growing schism between the two factions,²⁸⁰ who were supposedly separate, ideologically-defined parties within the primitive church (Baur, c. 1850); or because they practiced separate liturgies arising from their different languages (Hengel, 1983:14, 25-29).²⁸¹ On the other hand, when the alternative interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* is applied to Acts 6:2, the episode involving the Hellenist widows can be seen to highlight nothing more complicated or sinister than a competency or workload problem: namely, the Hebrew apostles’ inability to manage the volume and/or complexity of their community’s burgeoning financial activities – alongside their other duties.²⁸²

Esler (1987:136) writes that “Few verses in the NT cause one more surprise than Acts 6:1. For after all the initial images of unity and harmony among the early Christians, even to the extent of their having had community of goods, we suddenly find Luke, without any warning, describing a dispute within the Jerusalem church”. I suggest that this comment is unnecessarily melodramatic, since the matter can be clarified quite easily by examining two words that will help us better understand this episode: ‘murmuring’ and ‘neglected’. Furthermore, various exegetical efforts to explain the root cause of

²⁷⁹ Horrell states that “The dominant view in current scholarship is that the tension between the Hebrews and the Hellenists was theologically significant”. However, Witherington (1998:242) argues that “there is nothing in Acts 6 to suggest a significant doctrinal rift between these two groups of Christians”.

²⁸⁰ Watson (1996:12) argues that the complaint indicates “serious tension” between the two groups.

²⁸¹ According to Esler (1987:138-139), the traditional view is that the Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews, while the Hebrews were Aramaic-speaking Jews from Palestine. He cites Hengel (1983:14, 25-29), who argues that linguistically this is the only answer possible in the context. Bruce (1970:151) reminds us that this view dates back to Chrysostom, and asserts that “the strict Jerusalem Jews boycotted the use of Greek, cultivating the vernacular Aramaic, if not Mishnaic Hebrew [...] and so there was a linguistic cleavage”

²⁸² Johnson and Harrington (1992:106) suggest that “The pressures of community growth and the needs of the poor outstripped the administrative capabilities of the Twelve”. This conjecture is undoubtedly influenced by the timing of the so-called complaint: i.e. “when the number of the disciples was greatly increasing” (Acts 6:1).

this problem have over-complicated matters by attempting to interpret the English phrase “daily distribution” in terms of the traditional, Jewish charitable activities of the time, which, according to Cassidy (1987:27, n. 11), encounters “no little difficulty” because of the different interpretations of *diakonia*.²⁸³

Watson informs us (1996:11) that “At that time there were two Jewish systems for looking after the poor: the *tamhūy* or ‘poor bowl’ was distributed daily to the wandering poor and consisted of food; and the *quppāh* was a weekly distribution of food and clothing to the city’s poor”.²⁸⁴ However, Lüdemann (1989:75) queries any possible connection with the daily ‘poor bowl’ on the basis that we have yet to see an explanation of the contradiction that arises when citing the *tamhūy* to describe a kind of welfare supposedly provided to resident widows “which elsewhere is applied only to travelers in need”.²⁸⁵ Also, if we are meant to accept that *diakonia* in Acts 6:1 should be interpreted as some sort of first century “soup kitchen”, we then require a plausible explanation for the fact that this is a role for which the Seven, who reputedly possessed the lofty attributes described in Acts 6:3, would be considered over-qualified.

As mentioned previously, Esler (1987:154-163) expends a lot of effort to argue that the problem may have been caused by “table-fellowship” between the Hellenist-

²⁸³ Cassidy (1987:27) writes that, “Because of the various meanings possible for *diakonia*, there is no little difficulty in understanding what Luke intends to convey when he states that the Greek-speaking members of the community criticized the Hebrew-speaking members because their widows were being neglected in the daily *diakonia*. Interpretation is particularly complicated by the fact that *diakoneō* as an infinitive appears with *trapezais* in the next verse and then is again used as a noun in verse four”. He also argues (1987:179) that “in suggesting the image of a daily distribution of food, the RSV moved beyond what is actually indicated in the text”; likewise, The Message, NLT and Amplified versions.

²⁸⁴ Watson is citing Jeremias (1969:131) and also Strack and Billerbeck (1965:643ff.). From Lüdemann (1989:74), we learn that “The *tamhūy* was distributed daily among wandering paupers and consisted of food (bread, beans and fruits, with the prescribed cup of wine at Passover). The *quppāh* was a weekly dole to the poor of the city and consisted of food and clothing”; he too cites Jeremias (1969:131).

²⁸⁵ Talbert (1997:74) argues that “The daily distribution in Acts does not correspond with either model [of the two methods of first century Jewish poor-relief]”

Jewish Believers and Gentile God-fearers, even though there is no mention of the latter category of person until Acts 10:2-7. He suggests that the *Hebraioi* who administered the 'daily distribution' would have been unhappy to serve any *Hellenistae* who had become ritually impure by "breaking bread" with Gentile God-fearers who may have converted to the new sect, which he argues would "in all probability have led [the Hebrews] to 'overlook' the Hellenist widows".²⁸⁶ What's more, others have tried to reconcile the role of the Seven with how the role of deacon has developed over time: viz. liturgical assistants or assistant priests. For example, Collins (2002:54-57) speculates that the Hellenist widows were being deprived of good preaching – not just food.

In addition, based on the use of *trapeza* in Didache 11.9 to denote the Eucharist table, Schille (1983) argues that the phrase *diakonein trapezais* does not refer to material care but to cultic service at the Eucharist.²⁸⁷ These are just a few examples of how NT scholars have gone to unusual lengths to explain this so-called problem in a way that accommodates an overly-narrow context of charitable (and/or cultic) activities within the primitive church. Finally, Barrett (1994:309) suggests that, in Luke's Hellenist Greek, it is difficult to determine whether "the Hellenist widows here were in truth being overlooked", or whether it was "a mere unproven allegation". However, in my opinion, the amount of attention given to this so-called problem is unwarranted, to the point of becoming an unnecessary distraction.

²⁸⁶ Esler (1987:198) also goes so far to suggest that, "the scheme of social welfare put forward indirectly in Luke-Acts may, in fact, have been a Christian invention".

²⁸⁷ However, a comment by Goodenough (1976:52) argues against this possibility. He writes that, "at that time the 'Twelve' said that their business was to pray and preach, not as waiters at table (Acts 6:2). A man who felt himself a priest administering a sacrament could hardly have referred to the sacrament with such contempt".

As Esler (1987:136) tells us, in Acts 6:1, Luke is “describing a dispute within the Jerusalem church, with the Hellenists murmuring against the Hebrews because their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution”; and if we examine the words ‘murmuring’ and ‘neglected’, we will understand that the so-called problem was not as serious (or as melodramatic) as we have been led to believe. For instance, Thayer explains that *goggysmos* (γογγυσμός), ‘murmuring’, is ‘a secret debate or displeasure not openly avowed’, whilst Vine defines it similarly as ‘displeasure or complaining (more privately than in public)’.²⁸⁸ Also, both Thayer and Vine define *paratheōreō* (παράθεωρέω) as ‘to examine things placed beside each other, to compare’,²⁸⁹ which connotes a much lower level of harshness or callousness than we would infer from the modern definition of the English word ‘neglected’: i.e. “to be remiss in the care or treatment of something or someone; to omit, through indifference or carelessness”²⁹⁰ – not something we might accuse the apostles of doing. Consequently, there are no real grounds to talk of any serious dissension or dispute, let alone schism. Thus, a more accurate interpretation of Acts 6:1 would be that the Hellenist leadership went quietly, unobtrusively and perhaps even in secret to meet with the Hebrew apostles and discuss their “concern” (a less dramatic and more appropriate word) that, *comparatively speaking*, their widows were not being properly looked after.²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ For Thayer, see <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G1112&t=KJV> and for Vines, see <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?type=getTopic&TopicID=1872&DictID=9#Vines> (Noun B-1); both accessed on October 31st 2009

²⁸⁹ For Thayer, see <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3865&t=KJV> accessed on October 31st 2009

²⁹⁰ The definition of “neglected” from Dictionary.com (Unabridged); accessed on February 16th 2008

²⁹¹ Johnson and Harrington (1992:105) assert that, in this context, the note of discrimination suggested by ‘slighted’ is more appropriate as an interpretation for the verb *paratheōreō*; however, even that might be over-

Also, traditional exegetical efforts focusing on this so-called problem have invariably been based on a widely-accepted assumption that every member of this particular group of Hellenist widows was poor, even though Luke does not use *ptōchos* anywhere in Acts. However, this general assumption is not supported by the majority of references to widows in Luke's gospel. Bereft of a husband and, by implication, a source of income and/or protection,²⁹² widows are often grouped with "the fatherless" as being socially and economically disadvantaged and also vulnerable – and thus in need of care. But then, care does not always equate with charity. For example, Christ's caution to beware of the hypocritical scribes who "devour widows' houses" (Luke 20:46-47; Mark 12:40)²⁹³ implies the existence of widows who possessed valuable assets worth plundering, and were vulnerable only in the sense of their vulnerability to economic predation.

Likewise, we may infer from Christ's mention of the widow in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:3-5) that she was affluent enough to pursue justice through the courts. Similarly, we have enough circumstantial evidence to argue that Anna, the prophetess, "the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher" (Luke 2:36-37) also should *not* be designated as poor since, according to Bauckham (2002:85), she belonged to an Asherite family who returned from the Diaspora to live in Jerusalem,²⁹⁴ where land prices and the cost of living were high, as noted previously. Bauckham (2002:84) also cites Tobit 1:9, 3:14 and 4:12-13 to argue that Asherites viewed marrying within family and/or tribe as something of a duty. Consequently, it is highly likely that Anna's hus-

stating the case. Instead, I would suggest that this verse describes a situation in which, in the modern vernacular, the increasing workload of the apostles caused a few things to "fall through the cracks". That's all.

²⁹² The Greek for 'widow' is *chēra* (χήρα), feminine of the adjective *chēros*, 'bereft'; the Hebrew '*almanah*', 'widow', comes from the root '*alman*', which is translated as 'forsaken' in Jeremiah 51:5.

²⁹³ cf. Matthew 23:14 where Christ condemns the scribes and Pharisees directly

²⁹⁴ Anna's family were supposedly from Media

band was also an Asherite who perhaps accumulated enough wealth in the eastern part of the Diaspora to permit his widow to live in the holy (and highly expensive) capital. This possibility is supported by Luke's comment (in Luke 2:37) that she "lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four", which would imply that there was no financial necessity for her to remarry. In other words, her personal and/or family "means" were substantial enough to support her for more than six decades after the death of her husband.

On the other hand, Luke's gospel does contain references to two widows who either were or may have been truly poor: firstly, the widow of Zarephath, mentioned in Luke 4:26, who is depicted in the OT as truly poor, in the sense of being destitute (1 Kings 17:10-12); and, secondly, the widow at the Temple in Luke 21:2-3. This widow is twice described as 'poor'; however, in 21:2, Luke uses *penichros* (πενιχρός), 'poor and needy', which only appears once in the NT. The root is *penēs*, from which we get *penētai*, with the implication that this particular widow may have earned a living through her labours – and may even have owned a shop of some sort. But then, in 21:3, when Jesus describes her, Luke uses *ptōchos*, which means that she was presumably living a "hand-to-mouth existence", as Countryman explains above, and was thus truly poor at the time. Subsequently, Luke's use of both *penichros* and *ptōchos* could suggest that her impoverished condition may have been temporary.²⁹⁵ Finally, we have the widow of Nain, in Luke 7:12, who likewise may or may not have been poor: viz. she is not specified as poor, but was obviously bereft of both husband and son – before Jesus raised the latter from the dead. Interestingly, Luke states that "a large gathering from the town was ac-

²⁹⁵ It is indeed possible that her economic problems were recent and also temporary, given that Jesus encountered her in Jerusalem during the period of credit and liquidity problems that created the economic crisis in 33 AD

companying her”, which may imply that her family was well-known and respected in the community, and may even mean that her dead husband was a key figure in the local area, but this is pure speculation.

Even so, of the six passages referring to widows or widow groupings in Luke’s gospel, we have only one example that describes a woman who was truly poor – plus two examples of women who may or may not have been, and finally three examples of women who were either explicitly or implicitly *not* poor. This, combined with our knowledge of the general affluence of Hellenist Jews residing in Jerusalem, allows us to challenge the traditional assumption that *all* of the Hellenist widows mentioned in Acts 6:1 were actually poor (i.e. *ptōchos*) – and thus supposedly in need of charity (on a regular if not permanent basis). Consequently, I would argue that the problem highlighted in this verse could and therefore should be interpreted in a much more complex manner, even to the point of accommodating a possible banking-related issue,²⁹⁶ rather than accepting the traditional one-dimensional and problematic view: e.g. a dispute over the distribution of charity. After all, wealthy widows have been a source of capital for bankers to invest for centuries – in order to provide the widows with regular income. Therefore, it is not impossible that some aspect of the ‘murmuring’ by the *Hellenistae* was in response to a lack of attention to say the banking requirements of the Hellenist wid-

²⁹⁶ This argument is supported by Thayer’s translation and exposition of ‘treasury’, *gazophylakion* (γαζοφυλάκιον), “a repository of treasure, especially of public treasure, a treasury”, since he explains that “even the property of widows and orphans were deposited in the Temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem”. Therefore, we cannot ignore the possibility that these Hellenist widows – having withdrawn their assets and banking business from the Temple – subsequently used the nascent sect’s banking facility (*trapeza*) for their *everyday* banking needs.

ows,²⁹⁷ whose need for income led them to deposit funds with the primitive church *trapeza*, controlled at that time by the apostles.²⁹⁸

Nevertheless, if we do take the traditional view and assume that the reputed problem concerned the distribution of charity, it would be helpful to ascertain how serious it may have been; and one way of doing that is by establishing the possible number of Hellenist widows involved. Watson (1996:11) writes that we should expect to find many of them resident in Jerusalem, since pious Diaspora Jews often settled in the Jewish capital in their old age, in order to be buried there.²⁹⁹ However, this assertion needs to be tempered with the fact that widows with relatives living in the capital would not have been a burden on the funds of the primitive church, because we would expect their families to accept the traditional obligation to care for them, as we find depicted in Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 5:16: "If any believing woman or believing man has [relatives or persons in the household who are] widows, let him relieve them; let the church not be burdened [with them], so that it may [be free to] assist those who are truly widows (those who are all alone and are dependent)".³⁰⁰

Marshall (1980:126) also claims that "many widows came from the Dispersion to end their days in Jerusalem. They would not be able to work to keep themselves and, if

²⁹⁷ Perhaps Hengel (1983:14, 25-29) was to some extent correct in suggesting that there was a linguistic basis for the problem with the Hellenist widows, as the "illiterate" Hebrew apostles' inability to speak or write Greek would have created problems of varying degrees when trying to serve the *everyday* banking needs of their Greek-speaking clients – not just the widows among them.

²⁹⁸ Also of interest is the fact that, in the centuries-long theological debate over the charging/earning of interest, loans in which the interest charged provided income for widows (and/or orphans) have always been excluded from the category of 'usury'.

²⁹⁹ He is paraphrasing Haenchen (1971:260), who is not so confident. He writes that "*perhaps* the number of Hellenist widows was large" (my italics).

³⁰⁰ According to Agrell (1976:143), 1 Timothy 5:16 stresses that "the church (and thereby God) will provide *only* for those [widows] really alone and in need" [my italics]; and if one does not "provide for one's aged relatives, one denies the faith" (1976:148).

they had exhausted or given away their capital, they could be in real want". However, it is doubtful that widows would leave the city where they had lived with their late husband for many years, and where they had an existing support network of family and friends, to reside (on their own) in a large, expensive city where they knew very few people. Conversely, widows would not have wanted to remain in Jerusalem after their husbands died – *unless* they had a supportive family group living in the holy capital. Therefore, with respect, I submit that these assertions by Watson and Marshall constitute a clumsy attempt to legitimise the erroneously imputed seriousness and/or importance of the problem – which is yet another example of the traditional obsession with treating Luke's text as portraying an idealised state of affairs, rather than accepting a more obvious and "mundane" explanation.

Nonetheless, in order to ascertain the potential seriousness of the so-called problem, I have created a simple, theoretical model to help determine the possible number of Hellenist widows involved, via a reverse extrapolation of modern census statistics. For example, according the UK Office of National Statistics, in 1987 and 2007,³⁰¹ the United Kingdom had an adult population of 38,155,000 and 49,466,000 respectively.³⁰² And, in those same years, figures supplied by the UK Department of Works and Pensions³⁰³ show that widows over 50 years of age who received government support numbered 47,210 (1987) and 63,710 (2007) respectively. Therefore, in the two years surveyed, the

³⁰¹ 1987 and 2007 were two ONS data sets readily to hand; and since I am merely trying to establish a principle here, I deemed those sufficient for my purposes.

³⁰² In this instance, I have expanded the usual definition of adults to encompass males and females, 16 years and over

³⁰³ All DWP statics are available online at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/statistics.asp>; in particular, this information can be found at http://83.244.183.180/100pc/wb/cnage/cat/a_carate_r_cnage_c_cat_aug08.html; accessed on May 1st 2009. I have also expanded Paul's age criteria in 1 Timothy 5:9, by selecting the data for widows 50 years and over.

number of UK widows that would correspond more or less to our first century sample group, both in age and circumstances,³⁰⁴ represented just 0.124 percent (1987) and 0.129 percent (2007) of the total UK adult population.

Now, if we assume an adult population for the primitive church community at the time of around 7,000 “souls”,³⁰⁵ and use the 0.124 and 0.129 percent figures as our benchmark, in both instances, the *total* theoretical number of eligible women (i.e. both Hebrew and Hellenist widows over 50 years of age) comes to just nine – based on Luke’s numbers, which are usually disputed as being overly-ambitious, if not fanciful.³⁰⁶ Furthermore, even if we assume that *Hellenistae* were in the majority within the congregation, it means that the total number of Hellenist widows requiring charity would only have been say five or six. Obviously, given the lower life expectancy of males in the first century AD, we could possibly double that to twelve, or even treble it to eighteen.³⁰⁷ Even so, it puts the scale of the so-called problem into proper perspective – especially if we also bear in mind the comparative nature of the verb *paratheōreō*. In addition, the apostle Paul (writing in 67 AD) stipulated that only widows over 60 years of age and of good repute should be placed on the list of church members who qualify for support

³⁰⁴ Obviously, there are modern widows who do not appear in these DWP figures because they do not require government support. Likewise, it is highly likely that their first century socio-economic equivalents would *not* have required church support either; especially if they were part of the wealthy Hellenist population living in Jerusalem.

³⁰⁵ According to the Lukan text, at the time the so-called problem arose, the primitive church community had grown from “120” plus “3,000 souls” (Acts 1:15, 2:41) to “5,000” (4:4), to which “more and more there were [...] added to the Lord” (5:14), which eventually became a “multitude” (6:2) that was obviously much larger than 5,000; thus, 7,000 is reasonable.

³⁰⁶ For example, Lüdemann (1989:47) claims that “The number 3000 comes from Luke’s imagination and is meant to bring out the magnitude of the event”.

³⁰⁷ Then again, if we accept the view that Luke’s numbers are overly-ambitious, our original sample becomes smaller and the number of possible Hellenist widows affected is proportionally smaller than my theoretical calculations. Obviously, I am fully aware of the dangers of comparing ancient numbers with modern, and vice versa; however, this exercise does help to make the point.

from church funds, which, along with Paul's other stringent criteria,³⁰⁸ would limit the number of potential beneficiaries of this form of charity and thus decrease the possible number of Hellenist widows in our theoretical model.

Therefore, taking all of the above into consideration, I would argue that the small number of possible Hellenist widows involved meant that the alleged problem was a minor one indeed, which, on its own, did not warrant the radical "management restructuring" that took place immediately after the private discussion between the Hellenist leadership and the Hebrew apostles. This then raises our suspicions concerning the requirement for seven highly-qualified *Hellenistae* to handle the workload arising from what has been traditionally interpreted as a charitable function and that function alone.³⁰⁹ There must have been more involved.

4.18 The seven Hellenist 'trapezitai'

In order to better understand what may have actually occurred at the time, we also need to more clearly define the particular function or role of the seven Hellenists who were chosen from among the congregation,³¹⁰ which, in Acts 6:2, has been interpreted traditionally as 'to serve at tables'.

³⁰⁸ Paul wrote (1 Timothy 5:9-10), "Let no one be put on the roll of widows [who are to receive church support] who is under sixty years of age or who has been the wife of more than one man; And she must have a reputation for good deeds, as one who has brought up children, who has practiced hospitality to strangers [of the brotherhood], washed the feet of the saints, helped to relieve the distressed, [and] devoted herself diligently to doing good in every way". However, we cannot be totally confident that all these parameters were applied strictly in Jerusalem in the post-Pentecost period.

³⁰⁹ Interestingly, Haenchen (1971:261) notes that the two traditional forms of Jewish "poor-relief" provided in Jerusalem were administered by just three "relief officers" – not seven.

³¹⁰ Esler (1987:141) writes that "it is widely agreed that [the Seven] were *Hellenistae*"; e.g. according to Schneider (1980:426), "All the seven have Greek names: this makes their 'Hellenist' provenance clear". Also, Marshall (1980:126) asserts that the choice of seven "corresponded with Jewish practice of setting up boards of seven men for particular duties".

The Greek is *diakonein trapezais* (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις), and I would argue that, even though most expositions of this phrase have focused on *diakonos*, the more important word, in terms of improving our understanding of the function, is *trapeza*. According to Foakes Jackson and Lake (1920:64), “*trapeza* has two special meanings: (1) a money-changer’s table, and so a bank [my italics]; cf. *trapezitēs*, which became the usual word for a banker; (2) a dining table. It is usually taken here in the second sense. But it is not impossible that it was intended in the first sense to cover the general financial administration of the community”. Similarly, Thayer cites Josephus and at least five other ancient sources to describe *trapeza* as “the table or stand of a money-changer, where he sits, exchanging different kinds of money for a fee (*agio*), and paying back with interest loans or deposits”.³¹¹

Bruce (1970:152) appears to be ambivalent, suggesting that “*perhaps* τραπέζα is used here in the financial sense” (my italics), citing its use in Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15 and John 2:15; while Barrett (1994:311) confirms that *trapeza* is “also used for a banker’s counter (e.g. Luke 19:23)”, but insists on restricting any possible financial interpretation to one that is exclusively charitable in scope. He states that “it is possible *though less likely* [my italics] that the Twelve have in mind the supervision of the financial arrangements involved in service to the poor”. Likewise, Esler (1987:143) attempts to navigate a similar exegetical minefield in this passage, and asserts that the apostles “instituted a new system whereby the Hellenists set up a separate common fund and used this to support their own poor”. However, his comment raises an issue mentioned by Johnson and Har-

³¹¹ For Thayer, see <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5132&t=KJV>; accessed on October 31st 2009

rington (1992:110) that, “If we are to conclude from the Greek names of the seven that they were to take over the care of the ‘Hellenist’ widows, who would look after the ‘Hebrew’ widows once the apostles had left their station?” Also, in their reference to ‘the poor’, both Barrett and Esler seem to have ignored the fact that Luke does not use the word *ptōchos* anywhere in the text of Acts.

It is also noteworthy that, in the two instances in Christ’s parables where *trapeza* has been used, it has been given a banking interpretation. In particular, we note that Luke himself uses *trapeza* in the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:23) to denote a ‘bank’; and in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:27), *trapezitaís* is translated as ‘bankers’. Also, in three other NT verses where *trapeza* is used, it refers specifically to a table used by money-changers: *trapezas tōn kollubistōn* (τραπεζῆς τῶν κολλυβιστῶν) in Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15 and John 2:15.³¹² Furthermore, at the time Luke was writing, *trapeza* had been used – and thus understood – in a distinctly commercial context throughout the Greco-Roman world for around 400 years,³¹³ and, according to Davies (2002:72), was associated with the function of a “minor banker”. In support, we have Cohen’s statement (1997:63-64) that, in the fourth century BC, “In popular parlance, and even in legal documents,³¹⁴ the banking business [...] was referred to and recognized under the term *trapeza*”.

In addition, Cohen (1997:27-28) asserts that we have significant forensic attestation for the operation of what he calls “trapezitic businesses” through examination of the

³¹² Of the other nine instances of the NT use of *trapeza*, four concern a reference to the Lord’s table

³¹³ For evidence, see Plato, *Apologia Sōkratous* 17c and Lysias 9.6, *For the Soldier* (5th to 4th century BC); Isokratēs 17.2 and also Demosthenes 33.10, 33.24, 33.9 and 36.6 (4th century BC); *Papyrus Elephantine* 27.22 (223/2 BC); *Papyrus Enteuxis* 38.1 (221 BC); *Tebtunis Papyri* 27.70 (118 BC); IG22.2336.180 (1st century BC); *Oxyrhynchus papyri* 2.305 and 4.835 (1st century AD)

³¹⁴ As an early example, Cohen (1997: 63-64, n. 7) cites an extract from Demosthenes 45.31, concerning the matter of the lease on Pasiōn’s bank: “ΜΙΣΘΩΣΙΣ - κατὰ τὰδε ἐμίσθωσε Πασίων τράπεζαν Φορμίῳνι”

extent to which fourth century Athenian bankers provided credit for commercial loans. This can be found not only in the references within the corpus of thirty-three speeches by Demosthenes, where at least 130 separate extensions of credit can be identified, as well as some speeches by Isokratēs, but also from a variety of literary, epigraphic, numismatic and papyrological sources from classical Greek antiquity that identify perhaps 1,000 separate loan transactions.³¹⁵ He also comments (1997:31) on how remarkable it is, given the relatively small population of fourth century Athens and the highly fragmentary nature of the evidence, that more than thirty bankers from this period alone are known by name and profession: i.e. as *trapezitai*.³¹⁶

However, the suggested reinterpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 does not rely on linguistic arguments alone. By the first century AD, banking operations had been an integral component of the economic activities of religious sects for well over three millennia. Therefore, it is likely that the new sect of Jesus-Believers would also have chosen to operate their own banking facility. Also, it is possible that their decision to do so would have been heavily influenced by the precedent set by the Essenes who, some 185 years prior to Pentecost, ceased to provide offerings and/or income for the Temple in Jerusalem (as discussed in some detail below) – which implies that they also removed their banking business – motivated by similar anti-Sadducee sentiments that are well attested.³¹⁷ Consequently, we can infer from the historical and religious context of this pe-

³¹⁵ Cohen cites Millett's claim (1983:43) to have catalogued almost 900 such transactions "from the whole of classical Greece".

³¹⁶ In fact, Davies (2002:73-74) argues that the available records of Greek banking are only the tip of the iceberg, since much of Greek business was informal and spontaneous, based mostly on the private banker employing the minimum of written accounts.

³¹⁷ See Section 4.27, "The Copper Scroll of Qumran: a possible reason for Sadducee paranoia". Also, Puech (2004:87) provides various examples of authors who "show the Essene restrictions concerning participation

riod that the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers would also have chosen to establish their own, separate banking-treasury operation.

Thus, we have a combination of historical and religious/sectarian precedents to reinforce the linguistic argument, and so make ‘bank’ a more appropriate interpretation for *trapeza*, rather than the more prosaic word ‘table’. I therefore recommend adoption of the alternative, banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, to help us understand that the primitive church had at its heart a widely-recognised banking function, whose financial activities would perhaps not have been as limited in scope as those of a modern deposit and loan bank.³¹⁸ Consequently, the seven Hellenists – who Chrysostom claims “were neither presbyters nor deacons”³¹⁹ – were chosen by “the multitude” and appointed by the Twelve as *trapezitai*: i.e. bankers to the growing sect community. Once this interpretation is adopted, it opens up possible solutions to various exegetical issues within the Lukan text that hitherto have remained unresolved.

For example, Esler (1987:141) writes that “one feature of [the account in Acts 6:1-5] in particular arouses an immediate suspicion as to its accuracy: the fact that after this assembly there is never any mention made of the Seven being engaged in such a ministry”. Johnson and Harrington (1992:111) raise the same issue, stating that “The seven

in the Jerusalem treasury”: e.g. J. M. Baumgarten, “Halakhic Polemics in New Fragments from Qumran Cave 4”, in J. Amatai (ed.), *Biblical Archeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archeology, Jerusalem, April 1984* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; ASOR, 1985), pp. 390-399; and E. and H. Eshel, “4Q471 Fragment 1 and Ma ‘amadot in the War Scroll”, in J. Trebolle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner (eds.), *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid 18-21 March, 1991* (2 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill; Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1992), II, pp. 611-620.

³¹⁸ See Section 6, “The primitive church ‘trapeza’: a theoretical model”.

³¹⁹ Cited in Barrett (1994:304). Bruce (1970:152) also reminds us that the Seven are not called *diakonoi* (διάκονοι), though of course they were *diakonoi* in the ordinary sense of ‘servants’; and Marshall (1980: 126) states that “It is noteworthy that Luke does not refer to the Seven as deacons; their task had no formal name”.

were selected precisely to be ‘in charge of this responsibility’ of the daily distribution (6:3). But although the entire narrative from this point until the end of chapter 8 is devoted to two of the seven (Stephen and Philip), neither of them has the slightest connection with ‘the service of the tables’ [...] The problem of this passage is that there is no obvious connection between the purported role of the seven and the actual function”.³²⁰ I would suggest, however, that there is no problem with this passage (from an exegetical perspective); and the lack of mention of this purported charitable function later in the text can be explained both logically and historically.

For instance, following the discussion between the Hellenist leaders and the Hebrew apostles, the so-called problem would appear to have been solved, as implied in Acts 6:5 by the multitude’s positive reception of the solution put forward by the Twelve. After all, in the context of the life of a community numbering many thousands, a problem that involved barely a dozen women would have been so minor, it could easily have been swallowed up in the overall, day-to-day operations of the reorganised banking facility, and therefore no longer merited a mention. On the other hand, we find an even more plausible explanation from Cohen (1997:20-21) who, citing a fourth century BC oration by Isokratēs, explains that, in the normal scheme of day-to-day operations of an ancient *trapeza*, we rarely if ever find the leading *trapezitai* actually “serving at tables”, but instead they are out and about “in the city”, involved in the higher level contract negotiations and interaction with clients and officials.³²¹ Therefore, if the so-called daily ‘min-

³²⁰ We also have Weiser’s comment (1981:171) that “Stephen is not depicted ‘serving at tables’ but in public”.

³²¹ See Section 4.20, “Beyond the tables”

istration' (*diakonia*) in question involved banking activity, and not merely charity, the answer to the conundrum posed by Esler, Johnson and Harrington becomes apparent.

Finally, it would be helpful to comment on the author of Acts and his intended readership. Bruce (1970:27) argues that, "In general, we may describe Luke's style as good Hellenist Greek, somewhat more literary than the Greek of most NT writers". He also asserts that Luke has a much fuller vocabulary than the other NT writers. Conzelmann (1987:xxxv) agrees that "Elements of literary Greek are more pronounced in [Luke's] work than elsewhere in the New Testament (with the exception of Hebrews) [...] The vocabulary is considerable and exhibits points of contact with Josephus, Plutarch, Lucian, and most of all with the LXX". Furthermore, according to Esler (1987:184), "the high literary style of parts of Luke-Acts, especially of the prologue (Luke 1:1-4) and of the sea voyage and shipwreck description in Acts 27, implies that the author came from the upper segment of Greco-Roman society".³²² He also suggests that it is "unlikely that Luke was the only member of his community with his background; there were, presumably, others capable of savouring his recourse to excellent Greek". Finally, Marshall (1980:18) writes that, "The language and style of Luke stand out in the New Testament and show that he was perhaps the most conscious of all its writers that he was writing literature for an educated audience".

³²² A.H.M. Jones (1966:285) informs us that the literary education available in Hellenist cities was "largely inaccessible to the lower orders"; and Dibelius (1956:103) claims that Acts "was not written only for the Christian communities [...] but also for cultured readers, whether Gentile or Christian. Only they were able to appreciate the full scope of [Luke's] work".

I therefore suggest that Luke's "higher circle of readers", as Dibelius (1956:103) calls them,³²³ would have been quite knowledgeable and astute when it came to contemporary political and economic matters; and would have fully understood the economic and political background, as well as the implications, of the details in his narrative – both at the local and international level. In addition, we should take into consideration what Read-Heimerdinger (1999:29) refers to as the "Jewish exegetical framework" of Acts. She states that "It is important to understand that a large part of such methods depends on silent comment. This comment is achieved by an awareness shared by the narrator and his audience of accepted practices that constitute a common ground between them". Therefore, when Luke used *diakonein trapezais* (in Acts 6:2) to describe the function or role undertaken by the Seven, on the basis of "accepted practice" (i.e. not only how he had used the word *trapeza* in his earlier gospel account, but also how it had been used throughout the Greco-Roman world for something like four centuries), his educated, Jewish-Hellenist audience would have understood exactly what he meant.

4.19 The blurred line between banking and charity

In Acts 4:35, Luke writes that members of the primitive church community took funds raised from the sale of their goods and property and laid them down at the feet of the apostles, which Barrett (1994:255) comments, "seems to be a Lucanism". The Greek verb is *tithēmi* (τίθημι), 'to set, put, place', and, interestingly, Cohen (1997:111-112) writes that

³²³ Dibelius (1954:103) writes that, "The fact that the book [of Acts] was destined for a 'higher circle' of readers comes out in a number of details. The stylised description of Athens, with its carefully weighted words, which introduces Paul's Areopagus speech, the speech and trial scenes interwoven with uniform, apologetic ideas (Acts 22–26), or the placing of the Pentecost story, by means of the catalogue of nations, in its setting of world evangelism – who but the cultured reader could understand the full significance of all of this?"

two Greek nouns for ‘placements’, *thema* and *parathema*, were also employed in the latter Hellenistic period as terms with the specialised meaning of ‘bank deposit’.

On that basis, the language in Luke’s reference to the “placing” of funds at the feet of the apostles could be deemed to support an interpretation that depicts some sort of commercial or banking-related activity, as opposed to the public donation scenario to which we have become accustomed.³²⁴ Besides that, in the matter of charitable giving, Jesus specifically condemned any kind of act conducted in public, and stipulated privacy, if not secrecy, to the point where our left hand should not know what our right hand was doing (Matthew 6:3). We know from Matthew 6:1-2 that Christ prescribed a secretive method of almsgiving in the hope of rescuing a pious act from the propensity for self-aggrandisement within Jewish ritual. We may further speculate that He also specified secrecy in order to differentiate it from pagan votive offerings dating back to ancient Greek and Roman times that, according to Conzelmann (1987:36), were “laid at the feet” of the deity.³²⁵

Therefore, the description of funds being laid or “placed” at the feet of the apostles in Acts 4:34 presents us with something of an exegetical conundrum. If the language describing this particular event is meant to be interpreted as the depiction of charitable activity, then its public nature – and Christ’s specific instruction not to “publicise” charitable giving in any manner whatsoever – argues against a charitable context, and thus in favour of something more appropriate for enactment in public, or at least before third

³²⁴ Johnson (1980:200) suggests that this description is indicative of Luke’s use of possessions as a symbol of the self: i.e. the members of the congregations are laying themselves at the feet of the apostles. Obviously, I disagree with this unwarranted over-spiritualisation.

³²⁵ See, for example, Lucian, *Philopseudes* 20

party witnesses:³²⁶ e.g. some activity of a commercial nature, which possibly includes banking.³²⁷ However, I am not suggesting that this activity was entirely commercial in nature, as the amalgamation of banking and charitable activities within religious groups is attested as far back as the ancient Mesopotamian temple estates, according to the assertion by Sterba (1976:19) quoted earlier.

Acts 6:2-3 offers a further example where Luke's language would appear to blur the line between commerce and charity: when the apostles asked the multitude to put forward seven suitable candidates to "look after this business", referring to the activity depicted by the Greek phrase *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2. As discussed above, this activity has been interpreted traditionally as some form of charitable work that looked after the needs of the reputedly poor widows within the community. However, the Greek for 'business' here (sometimes referred to as 'duty', 'affair' or 'office') is *chreia* (χρεία),³²⁸ and, interestingly, the Zenon papyri contain the variant spelling of *chrea*,³²⁹ which Cohen (1997:201) informs us is one of the two words specifically used for 'loans'; the other being *daneismata*. Furthermore, Vine defines *chreia* as 'business [...] as in the distribution of funds' (i.e. money),³³⁰ which does not tally with an exclusively charitable interpretation

³²⁶ Acts 5:6 states that, after the death of Ananias, "the young men arose and wrapped up [the body] and carried it out and buried it". This suggests that other people may have been present when Ananias 'placed' his deceptive if not fraudulent (so-called) offering at the feet of the apostles. If so, it reinforces the public nature of the event. Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:48-49) cite Preuschen, who thinks that Acts 4:35, 37 and 5:2 refers to an old legal custom by which, in a transfer of property, the giver places it at or under the feet of the receiver, which again supports my argument that Acts 4:35 depicts a commercial transaction.

³²⁷ We learn from Cohen (1997:113) that, in fourth century Athens, "Deposits placed with banks are even denominated as 'loans' to the *trapezai*", and also (1997:206) that "lenders [and consequently so-called depositors] needed witnesses who could confirm that the requisite monies had actually been advanced to the borrowers".

³²⁸ According to Foakes Jackson and Lake (1922:65), and also Bruce (1970:152), in Hellenistic Greek, *chreia* generally means 'office'

³²⁹ See *Cairo Zenon Papyri* 25.2, 148

³³⁰ See <http://www2.mf.no/bibelprog/vines?word=%AFt0000392>; accessed on January 20th 2009.

of this passage,³³¹ given what we know about the non-financial content of the daily *tamhūy* and/or weekly *quppāh*.

I appreciate that Vine does not enjoy widespread acceptance amongst biblical scholars; however, his definition is supported in part by Strong's Concordance, which states that *chreia* (G5532) comes from the root *chraomai* (G5530), whose various meanings include 'to receive a loan' and also 'to borrow'. This too makes it reasonably clear that the activity under discussion is something other than the normal food and/or clothing-related charitable practices of the time. Also, acceptance of 'the distribution of funds' as an appropriate interpretation of *chreia* provides a better match for the description of the activity mentioned in Acts 2:45 when, according to Barrett (1994:169), money obtained from the sale of property and private possessions was "shared out to the needy *as anyone from time to time had need*". This would seem to refer to some kind of ad hoc activity involving money – in contrast to the regular distribution of non-financial goods, as in the *tamhūy* or *quppāh* – which again supports my argument that, initially, the apostles and, subsequently, the Hellenist *trapezitai* were involved in something akin to the kind of banking and other financial activity historically associated with temples and religious sects.

According to Bogaert (1966, in de Roover, 1967:252), the typical bank of the Greco-Roman era was "an institution which accepts demand deposits and re-lends part of these funds while keeping a sufficient cash reserve to meet withdrawals". Luke's account of the primitive church implies that it is unlikely that any *trapeza* at the heart of the

³³¹ The interpretation of *chreia*, in Acts 6:3, as 'the distribution of funds' is also supported indirectly by Nida and Louw (1992:57.230) who suggest that *diakonein trapezais*, in Acts 6:2, can be translated *idiomatically* as "to be responsible for the financial aspects of an enterprise – 'to handle finances'".

congregation operated with depositors' funds repayable on demand. However, the possible practice of lending raises an interesting point, if we assume that, in the day-to-day operations of the *trapeza*, both Hebrew apostles and Hellenist *trapezitai* would have been guided by their memories of Christ's instructions concerning loans: e.g. "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? (Luke 6:34); also, "do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:34). In this latter edict, Jesus was no doubt alluding to Deuteronomy 15:7-8 and, as we might expect, in the OT passage, the emphasis is on lending the person what he needs (or lacks), rather than on the most basic of commercial/credit criteria: i.e. what he can repay.³³²

As Bogaert reminds us, the depositors of a typical commercial bank usually lend their money to the bank for the purpose of onward lending to those in need of funds,³³³ and so, in practice, they expect their money returned – usually with interest – when they want it, or at least after an agreed period.³³⁴ However, if the depositors-cum-donors within the primitive church provided funds as loan stock for distribution via the congregation's *trapeza* – without expectation of repayment – we can understand why Luke's description of this activity in Acts 4:32 could be so easily misconstrued as being purely of a charitable nature. In such a blatantly altruistic environment, we would expect any so-called depositors to *not* exhibit a legalistic, proprietary attitude, and thus *not* consider

³³² "If there is among you a poor man, one of the kinsmen in any of the towns of your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your [mind and] heart, or close your hand to your poor brother. But you shall open your hand wide to him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his needs, which he lacks" (Deuteronomy 15:7-8).

³³³ See Cohen (1997:113) who explains that "Linguistically, the Greeks defined 'lending' and 'borrowing' by the same term, *daniez* [...] Thus it was natural to describe the receipt of funds by a bank as a loan, and the disbursement of money to others also as a loan". Similarly, the Hebrew *lavah* is used for both 'to lend' (Hi-phil: literally, 'to cause to borrow') or 'to borrow' (Qal): e.g. Deuteronomy 28:12, "you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow".

³³⁴ As in the case of modern term deposits, which offer higher than average interest to those prepared to leave their funds with the bank for set periods that are normally longer than usual

that “anything which he possessed was [exclusively] his own, but everything they had was [in practice] in common and for the use of all” (Acts 4:32).³³⁵ But then, even if we were to interpret this verse exclusively within a charitable context, it does not rule out the possibility of the involvement of a banking operation in this style of activity, since such a facility would ensure that the distribution of funds to those in need was conducted in a more efficient and effective manner – particularly after the Hellenist *trapezitai* were put in charge. In addition, utilisation of the *trapeza* facility in a quasi-commercial manner would have permitted any aggressively-generous depositors-cum-donors to skirt the 20 per cent limitation for charitable giving, as apparently prescribed by Jewish practice if not law at the time.

The possible adherence to the edicts of Christ and OT law by the leadership and members of the nascent sect also raises an interesting question: in practical economic terms, what is the difference between acts of charity (i.e. donations) and loans that are not expected to be repaid? The answer is simple but profound. Donations are the financial equivalent of non-renewable resources, which, sooner or later, will be fully expended; whereas, loans that are not expected to be repaid – *if repaid* – can be recycled almost indefinitely. An interesting example of this phenomenon can be found in the work of modern, faith-based microfinance groups that make microloans (i.e. “productive loans” for business purposes) to needy clients in less developed countries, such as Pakistan, Africa and The Philippines. Capital for these loans is raised primarily through do-

³³⁵ According to Andreau (1999:40-41), there were two main categories of bank deposits in the Roman Empire. So-called “sealed deposits” had to be returned to the owner-depositor in their original form: i.e. the same coins, etc., that were left on deposit. However, “non-sealed deposits” allowed the banker to reinvest or onward lend the funds, provided he subsequently restored an equivalent sum to the depositor. Thus, although the link may be considered somewhat tenuous, the non-proprietary attitude towards possessions described in Acts 4:32 could be alluding to the Roman banking practice known as “non-sealed” deposits.

nations collected in developed countries, such as North America, Europe and Australia; and the only material benefit available to the donors comes in the form of a tax deduction (but only in jurisdictions where such charitable giving is deductible). Paradoxically, their capital raising methodology has forced these microfinance organisations to register as charities in their home countries, and not as banks;³³⁶ thus providing contemporary evidence to suggest how the line between the two functions may also have been blurred in first century Jerusalem.

Moreover, if the collective credit record of the “needy” among the primitive church in first century Jerusalem was anything like that of the modern poor in less developed countries (i.e. a loan default rate of less than 3 per cent),³³⁷ then it is entirely plausible that a vast majority of the loans advanced by the apostles and Hellenist *trapezitai* would have been repaid within a reasonably short period of time, thus allowing the original funds to be recycled as new loans to other “needy persons” within the congregation.³³⁸ Also, if we take into account the large amount of foreign trade being conducted in Jerusalem at that time, and the significant number of Diaspora Jews within the nascent

³³⁶ In 2001, the microfinance group, Opportunity International, obtained a banking charter from the Filipino government to become that country’s first “Thrift Bank to the Poor”. This banking licence allows the Opportunity Microfinance Bank to accept deposits from local customers, and also raise loan capital in the international wholesale interbank market – in order to augment donations from western donors. The stated mission of the OMB is “to strive to make banking a means to help the poor develop their God-given capabilities, nurture their faith and lift themselves out of poverty”. See <http://www.mixmarket.org/mfi/omb>; accessed on June 23rd 2010.

³³⁷ Based on a sample of 704 Micro-Finance Institutions, the median figure in 2006 for Portfolio at Risk was 2.8% [Source: Microfinance Information Exchange, Inc. report, available online at <http://www.themix.org/publications.aspx?level1=001-IND>]; accessed on August 7th 2009.

³³⁸ It is highly likely that first century loans extended to pious Jewish Jesus-Believers would have been repaid – even when there was no expectation on the part of the lender. As Mills (1989:2) explains, in the OT teaching on lending and borrowing, “there was a strong obligation on the debtor to repay [...] Deliberate failure to repay a debt was tantamount to theft. David observes that ‘the wicked borrow and do not repay’ (Psalm 37:21)”. Interestingly, many modern microfinance loans are repaid within a twelve or even six month period; and, if the primitive church *trapeza* experienced a similar turnaround, this would theoretically allow for a significant amount of recycling of loan funds within the length of time the ‘bank’ was operating: i.e. three to three and a half years.

sect's membership, it is possible that some of this "lending" may also have taken the form of short-term trade finance. As I discuss below in Section 6, this kind of financing activity was highly lucrative and also widely attested; and, at the time under review, had been conducted at a reasonable level of sophistication throughout the Greco-Roman world for something like four centuries.

Therefore, funds raised from the sale of various pieces of property and valuable possessions, as described in Acts 4:34-35, would have been utilized over a much longer period, and also provided greater economic benefit to the community as a whole, if managed productively within the financing operations of a temple/sect banking style facility – rather than if deployed exclusively as charitable donations. And if the funds were indeed recycled in the form of loans to different borrowers at different times, this would have added considerably to the workload pressure experienced by the Hebrew apostles, as highlighted in Acts 6:1.

4.20 Beyond the tables

In any investigation of the potential economic, political and/or social impact of a *trapeza* operating within the primitive church community, we must exercise care not to confuse form and function with functionary. Nor should we be unduly influenced by the etymological origins of the word *trapeza*: a smallish, portable and therefore somewhat flimsy, foot-footed table.³³⁹

Einzig (1948:225), Homer (1963:33), Orsingher (1967:viii-ix) and Davies (2002:61-63) all state that money was first officially coined in Lydia (in modern day Anatolia) in

³³⁹ From the Greek root words *tessares*, 'four', and *pezē*, 'on foot'

the seventh century BC, during the reign of King Cyges; and the coins were reputedly made of electrum.³⁴⁰ Chachi (2005:6) informs us that banking operations emerged in Greece “because certain traders soon began to specialise in the evaluation and exchange of coins made from precious metals in various sizes and weights”.³⁴¹ As we know, this activity was conducted by men “serving at tables”, which conjures up prosaic images of low-level functionaries executing a series of mundane transactions involving foreign coins – which, again, is hardly worthy of seven men with the qualifications and attributes listed in Acts 6:3; not to mention the description of Stephen a few verses later in verses 8 and 10. But then, as Cohen (1997:20-21) explains in some detail, in the available literature of fourth century Athens, we never actually find the *trapezitai* in such pedestrian circumstances; namely, “serving at tables”. For example:

Kallippos, the representative of the Hērakleōtes in Athens, seeks out the banker Pasiōn: he finds him not ‘at the table’, but ‘in the city’ (Demosthenes 52.8). To obtain the deposit information requested by Kallippos, Pasiōn suggests that they go to the bank proper at the Piraeus harbor. In fact, when Kallippos had been ‘at the bank’ some time earlier, he found there not the banker himself, but his chief functionary, Phormiōn. Already early in the fourth century, it is the banking assistant (and alleged slave), Kittos, who is ‘seated at the table’ handling large sums of currency (Isokratēs 17.12). The bank owner is pictured in Isokratēs’ presentation as per-

³⁴⁰ The claim by Herodotus (*Histories* 94) that the Lydians were the first to coin in gold and silver has been construed as referring to coinage in electrum, a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver, with trace elements of copper and other metals. However, it could also mean that the Lydians were the first to coin the two precious metals separately. Ferguson (2008:24) mentions another attestation of these early coins, dating to around 600 BC, found in the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus (near Izmir, in modern day Turkey).

³⁴¹ Chachi cites Orsingher (1967:3).

sonally and intimately involved in trapezitic business, but on a level sharply removed from currency exchange: providing securities, negotiating claims, offering guarantees and personal advice to important customers.

He goes on to write that “We see bankers in a variety of settings – at home, at the assembly, at the harbour, in the temples, in transit between the civic centre (*agora*) and the harbour. But we never see the bank owners or operators themselves personally engaged in the changing of money” – and thus “serving at tables”. As mentioned previously, this comment provides a plausible explanation as to why, after Acts 6:5, there is no description of Stephen, the head *trapezitēs* (or Philip for that matter), actually “serving at tables”; but instead, Stephen is found out among the people working “great wonders and signs” (6:8) – among other things, I would suggest.

4.21 The time spent on ‘this business’

In the text of Acts 2 to 6, we are told how rapidly the primitive church community grew in numerical terms.³⁴² However, the question remains as to how long it took for the congregation to reach the larger numbers claimed by Luke, and thus how much time the Hebrew apostles and Hellenist *trapezitai* had to build and develop ‘this business’ (*chreia*). Such information would then assist us in determining how much of a threat this financial activity may have posed to the Sadducee elite who controlled the Temple treasury-bank and Temple-centric economy in Jerusalem.

³⁴² As mentioned previously, some commentators doubt the authenticity of Luke’s numbers and deem them overly-ambitious. However, I suggest that the presence of a *trapeza* operating successfully within the community of Jesus-Believers would have provided a powerful, economic engine for growth that could easily have helped to achieve the kind of numerical growth described in the text.

If we rely on Humphreys and Waddington's calculations (1983:744 and 1992:334-339) to determine the relevant years in which the 14th of Nisan fell on a Friday, we can fix the crucifixion of Christ and thus the original Day of Pentecost in either 30 or 33 AD.³⁴³ We may then accept that the work of the primitive church *trapeza* commenced, under the control of the apostles, in either of those years. Interestingly, Humphreys and Waddington in fact argue in some detail (1983:743 and 1992:331) that "The evidence points to Friday 3 April 33 AD as the date when Jesus died".³⁴⁴ Also, according to Fotherington (1934:160-161), Luke's reference to darkness "enveloping the whole land" (Luke 23:44-45) provides further support for fixing the crucifixion in 33 AD.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record a darkness over the whole land from the sixth hour to the ninth hour, and the best authorities for the text of St Luke add the explanation τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκλείποντος, 'the sun being eclipsed'. Ἐκλείπειν is a technical term, and when used of the sun or moon always means 'to be eclipsed'.³⁴⁵ Now the darkness was certainly not caused by an eclipse of the sun, for on the fourteenth or fifteenth day

³⁴³ Humphreys and Waddington (1992:339) argue that "there is a striking unanimity from all sources that the Crucifixion was on Nisan 14 and consequently the only two plausible years for the Crucifixion are AD 30 and AD 33".

³⁴⁴ Alongside their astronomical calculations, Humphreys and Waddington (1983:744) also use the commencement of Jesus' ministry to help fix the Crucifixion date. They argue that "The earliest possible time at which Jesus can have begun His ministry is autumn AD 28 while John's gospel records three different Passovers occurring within the ministry (including that at the Crucifixion). If this evidence is accepted, AD 30 cannot be the Crucifixion year and AD 33 is the only possibility". For support, they cite Edwards, O., *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 29 (1982). They also cite Luke 3:12 (1992:337-338), which states that John the Baptist commenced his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberias (i.e. 29 AD, according to the Julian calendar); thus implying that the baptism of Christ and commencement of His three-year or so ministry occurred some time after that – which again fixes the year of the Crucifixion as 33 AD. Likewise, Maier (1968:8) puts forward an argument that he claims "strongly supports evidence in favor of 33 AD". Also, Fotherington (1934:161) asserts that the date April 3rd in 33 AD offers fewer difficulties than any other suggestion. However, Smallwood (1970:92) is not so positive, contending that "The weight of other evidence seems to favour 33 slightly, but it is far from conclusive".

³⁴⁵ Humphreys and Waddington (1992:348) agree that τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκλείποντος is "the standard technical description of a solar eclipse".

of the lunar month the moon is at or near the full, and solar eclipses can occur only at new moon.

Interestingly, Humphreys and Waddington (1992:349) contend that τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκλείποντος, in Luke 23:45, can also be translated ‘the sun failed’, which, according to its usage in the Syballine Oracles, describes a dust storm, rather than a solar eclipse.³⁴⁶ Therefore, Luke must have been describing a lunar eclipse, and Fotherington insists that the only occurrence of a lunar eclipse, in either 30 or 33 AD “was on the evening of Friday April 3 in the year 33: i.e. on the very evening of the Crucifixion”.³⁴⁷ In addition, we find support from the NT and also historical records for fixing the crucifixion in 33 AD, based on the events and dates behind the thinly-veiled threat against Pilate in John 19:12:

Upon this, Pilate was anxious to release [Jesus], but the Jews kept shrieking, If you release this Man, *you are no friend of Caesar* [my italics].

Maier (1968:12) explains that the phrase, *amici Caesaris*, or “friend of Caesar”, was a formal designation of rank bestowed upon the governing circle of the Roman inner elite “whose membership was reserved for senators and those equestrians, high in government, who were specifically called to this status. Loss of the rank *amici Caesaris* led to political and social ostracism, even suicide”.³⁴⁸ Also, in the wake of the condemnation and execution of the all-powerful Lucius Aneius Sejanus (on 18th October, 31 AD), anyone who was not a loyal ally or “friend” of Tiberius was liable to experience a similar

³⁴⁶ See Section 2.3: “Hearing about Jesus, but thinking about Joel”.

³⁴⁷ Humphreys and Waddington (1992:350) maintain that, as well as the astronomical evidence, there are three textual references to confirm the existence of a lunar eclipse on the day of the Crucifixion (i.e. Friday, April 3rd 33 AD): the Book of Acts, the “Report of Pilate” (an NT apocryphal fragment) and the writings of Cyril of Alexandria (412 AD)

³⁴⁸ See Seutonius, *Tiberius*, xlv; also Ernst Bammel, “Philos tou Kaisaros”, in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 77 (April, 1952); pp.206-210; cited in Maier (1968:12, n. 44)

fate. Doig (1990) cites the report in Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.5.6) that Pilate was appointed by Tiberius in AD 26,³⁴⁹ and contends that he would therefore not be linked to Sejanus. But Maier (1968:8) disagrees, arguing that “It seems more than probable that in 26 AD, Pontius Pilate was nominated to succeed Valerius Gratus as *praefectus Iudaeae* by L. Aelius Sejanus”. However, the point concerning who actually appointed Pilate is perhaps not germane because, after Tiberius retired from Rome to Capri in 26 AD (in the same year as Pilate’s appointment), the power of Sejanus grew to the point where, according to Dio Cassius (*Roman History* LVIII 4:1), “the senators and the rest looked up to him as if he were actually emperor and held Tiberius in slight esteem”.

Therefore, even if Tiberius did appoint Pilate in 26 AD, it is highly unlikely that, for the ensuing five years (i.e. from Pilate’s appointment to the death of Sejanus in late 31 AD), Tiberius (who had virtually retired from public life and all responsibilities of government)³⁵⁰ would have bothered himself with the administration of a far-off and, in Roman eyes, seemingly unimportant province. As a consequence, for those first five years in office, Pilate would have reported to Sejanus. Furthermore, Maier (1968:9) argues that “Philo identifies Sejanus as a dedicated anti-Semite [who] ‘wished to do away with the nation’”.³⁵¹ He therefore speculates that Pilate’s blatantly anti-Jewish actions stemmed from his enthusiastic implementation of Sejanian policy in Palestine. Undoubtedly, this and other links to Sejanus would have increased the potency of any threat

³⁴⁹ Josephus writes that Tiberius “sent in all but two procurators to govern the nation of the Jews, Gratus, and his successor in the government, Pilate”; see Kenneth F. Doig, *New Testament Chronology* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990). His argument is also available at <http://doig.net/NTC23.htm>; accessed June 17th 2009

³⁵⁰ According to Maier (1968:10, n.29), “Tiberius retired to Campania and Capri in 26 A.D., leaving the affairs of government largely in the hands of Sejanus”. He cites Tacitus (*Annals* 4:41, 57) and Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61).

³⁵¹ See Philo, *De Legatione ad Gaium*, xxiv, 159-161; also Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, ii, 5; cited in Maier (1968:9).

based on the accusation that Pilate was “not a friend of Caesar” (i.e. Tiberius), as per John 19:12.

After the execution of Sejanus, Tiberius moved quickly against all other possible threats; and so “it was that neither Tiberius spared anyone, but employed all the citizens without exception against one another, nor, for that matter, could anybody rely upon the loyalty of any friend; but the guilty and the innocent, the timorous and the fearless, stood on the same footing when face to face with the inquiry into the charges involving the acts of Sejanus” (Dio Cassius, *Roman History* LVIII 16:4-6; also Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61-62).³⁵² And although Doig (1990) asserts that the killings stopped in 32 AD, by the 14th of Nisan or April 3rd of 33 AD, less than six months later, the extensive fear generated by Tiberius’ political purge, as described above, and threat of recrimination and retribution regarding who was or was not “a friend of Caesar” could still have carried a lot of weight throughout the empire – especially since Tiberius had returned to Rome and was still alive;³⁵³ and particularly in the case of Pilate, who had been the political underling of Sejanus for at least five years.

In support, Maier (1968:11) argues that “ever since late in 31, when news reached Palestine of the fall of his patron, Sejanus, Pilate had doubtless been living under the political sword of Damocles, wondering if the ‘Tiberian terror’ in uprooting supporters of the fallen minister and murderer of the princeps’ son Drusus would extend to the prov-

³⁵² According to the report by Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61:2), “Not a day passed without an execution, not even those that were sacred and holy; for he put some to death even on New Year's day. Many were accused and condemned with their children and even by their children. The relatives of the victims were forbidden to mourn for them. Special rewards were voted the accusers and sometimes even the witnesses. The word of no informer was doubted”.

³⁵³ Tiberius died on March 16th, 37 AD

inces". All this leads him to conclude (1968:9) that, "if Good Friday were on April 7, 30 AD, the [Jews'] threat of appealing to Tiberius would indeed have been impotent and empty; at that time, Sejanus was approaching his greatest successes in Rome". Thus, we can have some confidence in using the implied threat of John 19:12 to help fix the date of the crucifixion event within the historical context of Tiberius' engineering of the execution of Sejanus and its aftermath, which also means that the Day of Pentecost took place in 33 AD.³⁵⁴ Consequently, if it is correct that Stephen was stoned during the period when there was no Roman procurator in Jerusalem (i.e. the interregnum, after Pilate had been recalled to answer charges in front of Tiberius),³⁵⁵ this puts the execution of Stephen and the possible cessation of the primitive church banking operations (in Jerusalem) somewhere between the end of 36 and early 37 AD.

Interestingly, Doig (1990) supports this particular dating with his argument that Pilate's superior, Lucius Vitellus, the Legate of Syria, visited Jerusalem for the first time during the Passover festival on 19th April 37 AD, where, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.4.13), he was "magnificently received" by the local populace "for ridding them of the hated Pilate" – and also for cancelling taxes on the purchase and sale of fruit, no doubt. Finally, we can fix a potential end date of the banking activity by a different set of

³⁵⁴ Maier (1968:13) argues that fixing the date of the Crucifixion at April 3rd 33 AD "is the only option in the vast scholarly literature on this much altercated question which satisfies all the following requirements: (1) It allows 'the fifteen years of Tiberius' to be interpreted in its proper Roman setting and sense, rather than requiring resort to an unlikely 'co-regency' dating system; (2) At the same time, it allows also for the requisite three or four Passovers in Jesus' public ministry which are required by the Fourth Gospel; (3) It is the only date which accounts for Pilate's attitude on Good Friday and makes sense of the prosecution's threat in John 19:12; (4) It is a correct equation, astronomically and calendrically, of Friday, Nisan 14; and (5) It is the only date which integrates successfully with all appropriate chronological clues in the Gospel sources, without requiring heavy scholarly manipulation".

³⁵⁵ See Section 4.26, "The martyrdom of Stephen: killing off the competition"

calculations that determine the possible year of Paul's conversion. According to Rickard (2007):

It is known that Gallio arrived in Corinth and took up his office as pro-consul of Achaia in 51 (Acts 18:12).³⁵⁶ Working backward from this date, we deduce that Paul arrived in the same city in 49 (Acts 18:1-11), and that in 49 or 48 he defended his ministry before the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-30).³⁵⁷ The many agreements between the record of this council and Paul's reminiscences of a meeting with church leaders (Galatians 2:1-10) leave little doubt that they describe the same event. Paul sets this event fourteen years after his conversion (Galatians 2:1). Thus, his conversion was in 34, 35, or (by inclusive reckoning of the interval) 36, much too early to permit 36 as the date of the Crucifixion.

Therefore, I would suggest that the primitive church *trapeza*, controlled first by the Hebrew apostles and then by the Hellenist *trapezitai*, was operating in the area of the Temple known as Solomon's porch for a period of somewhere between three and three and one half years.³⁵⁸ This would have been plenty of time to develop 'this business' (*chreia*) into a thriving enterprise that posed a serious threat to the economic and political powerbase of the ruling class in Jerusalem; a threat that, in the minds of the Sadducee

³⁵⁶ See Moody (1989:224-225); cited in Rickard (2007)

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231, also, S. Dockx (1989:211); both cited in Rickard (2007)

³⁵⁸ However, Bruce (1970:55), for example, sets the crucifixion and Pentecost in 30 AD, and puts the conversion of Saul in 33 AD, which disagrees with the above set of dates but still provides us with a period of at least three years for the development of the primitive church's banking operation. Obviously, accepting 30 to 33 AD as the period when the primitive church *trapeza* was operating would require us to rethink – but not reject – the impact of the Roman economic crisis of 33 AD on the economic context of Acts 2 to 8, as the underlying liquidity problems in the credit market commenced in late 31 AD, when the state started selling-off the confiscated assets of the executed Sejanus.

elite, needed to be dealt with in a decisive manner. Other arguments exist to suggest that the gap between these pivotal events was five to six years (e.g. Turner, in Bruce, 1990:186).³⁵⁹ However, I believe that we may dismiss them on the basis that it is unlikely that the Sadducees would have allowed the economic threat (from the new sect's *trapeza*) to increase in scope and strength for that length of time – especially as its runaway success was taking place literally on their “front porch”, so to speak.

4.22 Banking as an economic and social catalyst

The appearance of deposit banks (in mainland Greece in the fifth century BC, and in Rome at the end of the fourth century BC) is thus an event of considerable importance. It marks a turning point in the economic and social evolution of ancient societies (Andreau, 1999:3).

Bankers have historically enjoyed high esteem and influence in both business and social circles. For evidence of the extent of this in fourth century Athens, Cohen (1997:25, n. 108) cites the incident recorded in Isokratēs 17.2, when “an individual litigating against a *trapezitēs* complains to the jurors of his disadvantage in having a banker as an adversary: the *trapezitai* had wide networks of relationships, disposed of considerable monies, and were accorded unquestionable credibility”.

However, with their traditional albeit recently tarnished reputation for conservatism and probity,³⁶⁰ bankers would rarely if ever be thought of as social catalysts, let

³⁵⁹ Bruce cites Turner's claim that the progress report in Acts 6:7 is one of six “panels” that divide Acts into periods of an average of five years each (See C. H. Turner, “Chronology of the New Testament” in *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. I, pp. 421-423); however, this does not tally with the historic record as above.

³⁶⁰ Is it fair to say that this traditional reputation of bankers has been well and truly sullied by the excesses that led to the global economic crisis of 2007/8 and beyond

alone as being capable of doing anything that could be regarded as revolutionary. Nevertheless, such attributes are claimed by Cohen (1997:7, 224) when he asserts that the *trapezitai* of ancient Athens transformed both the economy and society of their day. As mentioned previously, prior to the advent of private banks in the fourth century BC,³⁶¹ Athens is described as having an “embedded” economy in which “all financial dealings would be handled entirely through socio-political relationships (i.e. hierarchical dependencies, extended kinship arrangements, and similar connections)” (Cohen, 1997:207). However, things changed radically from the fourth century onwards when the Athenian economy started to function via “a market process in which unrelated individuals, often in the city only transiently, sometimes even operating from abroad, sought monetary profit through commercial exchange”.³⁶²

Thus, the activities of extremely powerful bankers like Pasiōn, a foreigner and former slave, helped to change the economic and social landscape of the day, as Cohen further explains (1997:7):

Beyond the exchange of currency [...] these money changers (called *trapezitai*) provided loans, accepted deposits, and served as intermediaries in facilitating commerce, becoming what we would term ‘bankers’. Since the provision of these functions originated not in traditional familial, social or political relationships, but in the isolated transactions of a business environment, *the trapeza further detached the new economy from the social fabric of traditional society* [my italics]. Because of its commercial genesis, autono-

³⁶¹ As opposed to temple banks, such as the one on the island of Delos, which operated from a much earlier period

³⁶² See Cohen (1997:4)

mous of traditional society, operation at Athens of a trapezitic business (a 'bank') was open to those who had no prior stake in the pre-existing fabric of relationships – to non-aristocrats, non-Athenians, even slaves. These activities in turn created new personal and familial relations, further transforming both society and the economy.

This information is helpful in understanding why the Seven Hellenist *trapezitai* might pose such a serious threat to the vested interests of the Sadducee elite, who controlled both traditional society and local government in Jerusalem. Cohen (1997:42) asserts that trapezitic businesses in fourth century Athens “were explicitly independent of parochial legal governance. Indeed, concerning contractual provisions, Athenian law seems to have mandated the primacy of whatever arrangements either party willingly agreed upon with the other”. He also states that “In contractual contexts there is frequent reference to Athenian law mandating absolute governmental *non*-involvement in the conditions and terms of nongovernmental dealings” (my italics).³⁶³

Consequently, the free-market operations of a *trapeza* within the primitive church in Jerusalem had the potential to divert significant funds and business activity away from the temple-centric economy – just as the Essenes had done some 185 years earlier – and so further dilute the economic powerbase of those who controlled “traditional society” in that city. Also, if the sect’s *trapeza* was organised along Greek-Hellenist lines, it was not legally required and thus would have chosen not to come under the control of the local Jewish government authority. Therefore, from a political-economic standpoint,

³⁶³ He cites Demosthenes 56.2; cf. Demosthenes 42.12 and 47.77; Hypereidēs, *Against Athēnogenēs* 13; Deinarchos 3.4, in Cohen (1997:42, n. 3).

trapezitai in general and the Seven Hellenist *trapezitai* in particular might easily have been considered “dangerous” because they owed no specific loyalty or allegiance to the existing socio-political order of the city where they were operating. Furthermore, since most of the functions performed by the *trapezitai* consisted of financial transactions generated by a supposedly impartial marketplace, which included, accepted and sometimes even promoted people who were *not* members of the traditional oligarchy, those functions and/or transactions could not therefore be controlled by that oligarchy.³⁶⁴

4.23 The basis of a trapezitic business: other people’s money

In fourth century Athens, bankers like Pasiōn were so extraordinarily wealthy, they were able to make a huge impact on local society through the power and influence derived from their personal wealth;³⁶⁵ and throughout the modern era we find similar occurrences of wealthy bankers using their largesse to exert influence.³⁶⁶ Because of this, any discussion of *trapezitai* operating in the primitive church runs the risk of being derailed by a debate over whether or not the seven Hellenists listed in Acts 6:5 were wealthy in their own right.

For reasons given previously, we can assert with some certainty that many Hellenist-Jews living in Jerusalem possessed substantial wealth; or at least enough wealth to be able to live in the capital city, where land prices and the cost of living were high. Con-

³⁶⁴ Kautsky (1982:34) explains that, in an ancient “commercialized” economy (i.e. one that depends on wealthy merchants and bankers), aristocrats and/or oligarchs “are no longer free to govern wholly in accordance with traditional aristocratic standards and to control completely the sphere formerly reserved entirely to them”.

³⁶⁵ Similarly, Andreau writes (1999:53) that, “in the second century BC and at the beginning of the first century, particularly in Delos and the rest of the Greek world, but also in Italy and in Rome itself, certain *trapezitai* and *argentarii* were in possession of considerable fortunes, which sometimes allowed them to make a great show of their generosity”.

³⁶⁶ For example, the Rothschilds in Europe, and J. P. Morgan in the United States

sequently, we can speculate that the primitive church congregation contained a number of wealthy Hellenist-Jews, but we cannot state categorically that the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*, led by Stephen, were wealthy men in their own right. However, wealthy or not, in practical terms, the point may in fact be irrelevant. According to Cohen (1997:183-184), “In the unregulated Athenian banking community, there was no requirement that bankers possess even a minimum of personal money [...] Clients’ demands and the proprietor’s skills and desires alone determined the amount of the proprietor’s funds, if any, required to operate a *trapeza*”. Cohen (1997:66-67) further claims that “The Athenian bank’s business value rested almost entirely upon its ‘human assets’ [...] Any physical items pertaining to the bank were entirely ancillary, and were immaterial in comparison to the profit-producing potential of the banker’s money-raising credibility and money-management skills,³⁶⁷ network of relationships, and high credibility, the essence of the banking ‘operation’ (*ergasia*). The banker’s own money was not essential: the banking business, in Demosthenes’ own words, produced revenues ‘from other people’s money’”.³⁶⁸

Furthermore, Ricardo (1816) argued almost two centuries ago that a bank would never prosper if it obtained no other profits but those as a business derived from the employment of its own capital. The real advantage of a bank to the community it serves, he asserted, commences only when it employs the capital of others.³⁶⁹ Thus, in order to function as *trapezitai*, the seven Hellenists listed in Acts 6:5 did not need to possess

³⁶⁷ Demosthenes 36.57 refers to the enormous sums that could be raised by bankers from third parties; cited in Cohen (1997:67, n. 25)

³⁶⁸ Demosthenes 36.11; cited in Cohen (1997:67, n. 28)

³⁶⁹ Mentioned in the entry for ‘Banks and Banking’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1911:335

wealth; they only needed to have access to it – in the form of other people’s money.³⁷⁰ Interestingly, Cohen’s reference to the banker’s network of relationships, high credibility, and his prestige as a professional, resonates to some extent with the list of personal attributes stipulated by the apostles in Acts 6:3 (i.e. “seven men of good and attested character and reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”)³⁷¹ – attributes that, as argued earlier, would be considered overkill for the supervision of what traditional exegesis suggests was essentially a first century “soup kitchen”.

4.24 A large number of the priests were obedient to the faith

[The Seven were] presented to the apostles, who after prayer laid their hands on them. And the message of God kept on spreading, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem; and [besides] a large number of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:6-7).

If we give credence to Luke’s numbers, in less than three and a half years, the primitive church community had grown from “120” (Acts 1:15)³⁷² to over “3,000 souls” (2:41), and then to “5,000” (4:4), to which “more and more there were [...] added to the Lord” (5:14), which eventually became a “multitude” (6:2).

Now, as implied above, the multitude that was already much larger than 5,000 had now increased further, and substantially so (i.e. “multiplied greatly”) – and this oc-

³⁷⁰ Bogaert (1968) makes the clear distinction between bankers, who lend other people’s money, and capitalists, who use their own capital to help finance other people’s ventures.

³⁷¹ To a certain extent, the individual attributes in Acts 6:3 also correspond with the five defining corporate characteristics of a *haute banque*, as described by English merchant banker, Siegmund Warburg: “moral standing, efficiency, connections, capital and high quality personnel”; cited in Ferguson (2010:240).

³⁷² Or “500”, if we take Paul’s figure in 1 Corinthians 15:6 describing the number of people to whom Christ revealed Himself during the 40-day, post-Calvary to pre-ascension period.

curred soon after the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* assumed day-to-day control of the *trapeza*. However, the growing threat to the Sadducees' power-base was not based on numbers alone, because Luke now reports that a large number of priests also defected to the new sect; an action that assumes greater significance when we realise that "many, though not all, Priests were Sadducees" (Barrett, 1994:317). Marshall (1980:127-128) also informs us that "The priests were presumably those attached to the temple in Jerusalem, of whom there were a great number (estimated at 18,000 priests and Levites)". Therefore, we are left to ponder how Luke's "large number of the priests" might translate into numerical terms, if viewed as a percentage of 18,000. Obviously, it was a large enough number to cause serious concern amongst the Sadducee elite.

However, this defection may have had serious economic ramifications as well because, according to Jeremias (1969:31), many of the lower orders of priests engaged in commerce; also, the priests who lived in Jerusalem all year round seemed to enjoy a life of education and some degree of wealth (1969:104). In fact, we are reminded that Josephus came from a well-to-do priestly family (*Vita* 1-6).³⁷³ I would therefore suggest that, at this point, in the minds of the Sadducee leadership, the growing economic and political threat could no longer be ignored – or tolerated. Consequently, it comes as no surprise to find that the very next passage in Luke's text describes the events leading up to the premeditated murder/execution of Stephen, leader of the Hellenist *trapezitai*.

³⁷³ Josephus claims that "I am not only sprung from a sacerdotal family in general, but from the first of the twenty-four courses; and [...] I am of the chief family of that first course also".

4.25 Freedmen and their economic importance

To understand the wider implications of the callous attack against Stephen, we need to examine the circumstances in which it began, and also the background of the main protagonists involved: i.e. as a disputation with “some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen” (Acts 6:9).³⁷⁴ It is also the freedmen who later, once they realise that they have lost their dispute with Stephen, “incite the people, as well as the elders and scribes” (6:12).

As a group, freedmen are relegated to something of a minor footnote in the NT literature; however, that is not the case within the economic history of the Roman Empire, in which, colloquially speaking, they are considered major players.³⁷⁵ The social status of the Roman elite (i.e. senators and equestrians) did not allow them to carry out any kind of professional or regular commercial activity.³⁷⁶ Consequently, it was the slaves and freedmen of these aristocrats who acted as their agents and bankers (*dispensatores* and *argentarii*), and therefore handled all the day-to-day financial activities.³⁷⁷ For an example, albeit one involving provincial aristocracy in Palestine, we have a report from Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.6.3) that, when Herod Agrippa was in Ptolemais and needed

³⁷⁴ Bruce (1990:187) explains that “A *libertinus* (the Latin word here transliterated into Greek) was either a *libertus* (‘freedman’) or the son of a *libertus* (cf. Seutonius, *Claudius* xxiv.I). According to Schürer et al (1979:248, n. 8), they were Roman freedmen, descended from Jews sent by Pompey as prisoners to Rome, and soon liberated (cf. Philo, *Leg. ad Gai.* 155).

³⁷⁵ According to Andreau (1995:157), “the role of slaves and freedmen in commerce, manufacture and financial life has increasingly been seen as one of the defining characteristics of Roman society”.

³⁷⁶ Badian (1972:50) states that senators were “forbidden by law and tradition” to engage in commerce; and Andreau (1999:23) argues that “A senator or a knight was never a professional man in the way that an *argentarius* was”.

³⁷⁷ According to Crossan (1999:181), it has been suggested that, in the first century AD, the number of freedmen (i.e. “freed citizens”) might have been as high as 80 percent of the “citizens” of the Roman Empire. Since Augustus’ census of 4 AD (*Res gestae* 8.3-4) reports that Roman citizens numbered 4,937,000 (cited in Finley, 1973:47), this would mean that the number of freedmen at the time was around 3.9 million – which does not sound plausible. However, even half that number/percentage would make them a significant economic force within the empire, as mentioned above by Andreau (1995:157).

money to sail to Italy, he instructed his freedman, Marsyas, to negotiate a loan of 20,000 drachmas from Peter, the freedman of his mother, Bernice. Furthermore, Pliny the Elder provides evidence of the extraordinary level of personal wealth it was possible for freedmen to attain. He mentions (*Natural History* 33.134) two examples of imperial freedmen, Narcissus and Pallas, who each reputedly accumulated fortunes of over 400 million *sesterces* (100 million *denarii*).³⁷⁸

Andreau (1999:47-48) informs us that, in the first century AD, many of the professional bankers and financiers were freedmen, and also that freedmen often belonged to the upper echelons of this group. He further states that, between the time of Caesar and the first half of the second century AD, “Half the *coactores* and half the *argentarii* known to us are explicitly stated to be freedmen; and half the known *coactores argentarii* and *numularii* were definitely or almost definitely freedmen”. It would appear that most of these freedmen-bankers operated in Italy, obviously making the most of business connections formed during the years they were in servitude to their former Roman masters. However, Luke’s reference shows us that they were also present and presumably operating commercially in Jerusalem during the immediate post-Pentecost period, which is supported by a possible attestation for the existence of a synagogue associated with freedmen in Jerusalem at that time.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ Roman slaves were also able to accumulate personal wealth. Andreau (1995:65) explains that an *actor* or a *dispensator* was in a position to run some personal business in parallel to his master and sometimes make money for himself by doing so. In fact, the possibilities of enrichment were so great, Pliny (*Natural History* 7.129), for example, reports that one of Nero’s *dispensatores* purchased his manumission for the sum of 13,000,000 *sesterces* (or 3,250,000 *denarii*). Also, Seutonius (*Otho* 5, 2) writes that a slave of Galba was willing to pay Otho 1,000,000 *sesterces* for assisting him in becoming assigned as a *dispensator* for the Emperor.

³⁷⁹ According to Lüdemann (1989:83), “A Greek inscription found in Jerusalem shortly before World War I indicated, among other things, that the priest and synagogue president was Theodotus, son of Vettenus, and that a guest house and water supply for pilgrims had been connected to it. Perhaps this inscription is a reference to the *Libertini* (a Latin loan word, which denotes freed Jews) mentioned in [Acts] 6:9. The father of

Having said that, the possible number and implicit level of influence of the freedmen resident and operating in the holy capital, as depicted in Acts 6:9, depends on the particular commentator's interpretation of the text. For example, according to Bruce (1990:187), "More probably one synagogue only is intended: 'the Synagogue of the Freedmen, comprising both Cyrenaeans and Alexandrians and those from Cilicia and Asia' (καὶ Κυρηναίων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας being together, not separately, epexegetic of Λιβερτίνων)".³⁸⁰ This would suggest that there were a significant number of freedmen in Jerusalem, leading to further speculation that their synagogue may have been the hub of an important network of Jewish freedmen groups throughout the Diaspora, with the obvious commercial implications. This is supported by Tacitus (*Annals* lib. 2:c. 85), who reports that there were many freedmen amongst the Jews in the Roman Empire.³⁸¹

On the other hand, Schneider (1980:435, n. 19) and Lüdemann (1989: 79) assert that the repeated article *ton* after *tines* divides the members listed into two groups. Marshall (1980:112) and Talbert (1997:76) agree, explaining that the Greek construction favours two synagogues: one for the first three groups listed (Freedmen, Cyrenians and

Theodotus has a Roman name, Vettenus, which he may have adopted after being freed, because he owed his freedom to a Roman member of the gens Vettina". However, Runesson (2008:52) challenges both the theory that Theodotus was a *libertinus* and also the possible association with the synagogue of Acts 6:9 with his argument that, "Such conjectures overlook the naming conventions of the period, which indicate that Theodotus was a free-born man who was *not* a Roman citizen (a manumitted slave of a Roman family was by law a citizen). It is thus more likely that Theodotus' father was simply named after the Vettini [or Vettieni] out of gratitude for some unspecified kindness to his family". Runesson also mentions that the original date of the inscription (i.e. Second Temple period) was challenged by Kee (1990:8), who assigned a date of two to three centuries later. In response, several scholars, particularly Reisner (1995:192-200) and Kloppenborg Verbin (2000:243-280), re-examined both the monument's paleography and the archaeological context of its recovery, which confirmed the pre-70 AD dating.

³⁸⁰ Barrett (1994:323) likewise argues that "perhaps the greatest probability" is that "Luke had only one synagogue in mind, and that all groups shared in it".

³⁸¹ Runesson et al (2008:45) also cite Philo to inform us that "During the first century BCE, many Jews had been enslaved and brought to Rome as war prisoners. Later manumitted, they became Roman citizens".

Alexandrians), and one for the remaining two (Cilicians and Asians).³⁸² If correct, this would reduce the potential number of freedmen involved, but not necessarily dilute their influence, either locally or outside Jerusalem. In fact, given the importance of the Egyptian grain trade to both the Roman Empire and the Jews of the Diaspora, I find it highly significant that this separation into two synagogues by Lüdemann and Marshall still places Roman freedmen-bankers and Alexandrian merchants within the same congregation.

Interestingly, we have other evidence from this period that links freedmen based in Italy and the grain merchants and financiers of Alexandria, in the form of the Murecine tablets found at Puteoli, which also attest that freedmen performed roles and functions normally associated with banking. These tablets date from 26 to 62 AD and belonged to the Suplicii, a group of financiers operating out of this major Roman port located near Pompeii. Andreau (1999:72) asserts that the four Caii Suplicii mentioned in the archive were in all likelihood a circle of freedmen, as suggested by their names: Faustus, Cinnamus, Eutychus and Onirus. He further argues that, “Whether the Suplicii [of Puteoli] were bankers, or moneylenders but not bankers, there can be no doubt of the commercial nature of some of the loans that they advanced”. Of greater significance is evidence from Andreau concerning the extent of the financial dealings of the Suplicii, and also the social standing of their clients. He writes (1999:74) that “the tablets of Murecine indicate that members of the entourage of the Emperor and of the entourages of a

³⁸² That said, we are told that Saul-Paul was “from Tarsus in Cilicia” (Acts 21:39), and also “consenting to [Stephen’s] death” (Acts 8:1); furthermore, according to Bruce (1970:157), he may have been a *libertinus*, if his father or remoter ancestor gained his Roman citizenship by manumission. If true, this would disagree with Marshall’s idea that Cilicians and Freedmen attended separate synagogues; and thus support the suggestion by Bruce and Barrett that there was a single synagogue (of the Freedmen) that was attended by Jews from all four national groups listed in Acts 6:9.

number of senators were investing money through the financiers of Puteoli. In the preceding century, at the end of the Republic, such investments are implied by certain remarks of Cicero's, which, however, are no more than allusive. In the Suplicii archive, in contrast, these investments are made explicit. Several imperial slaves or freedmen are cited as lending money either to the Suplicii or to traders operating in Puteoli".

Puteoli (now known as Pozzuoli), a city on the coast of Campania, just north of the Bay of Naples, was the great emporium for the grain ships from Alexandria, but is perhaps better known as the port where the apostle Paul landed in Italy,³⁸³ and from where he commenced his 170 mile journey to Rome via the Appian Way (Acts 28:13-16). During this period, Alexander the *alabarch*, the powerful Jewish merchant-financier from Alexandria, had an office in the port; and Rathbone (2007:311) informs us that it is from this office that Alexander handed over 170,000 drachmas to Herod Agrippa, which was the balance of a 200,000 drachma loan that Herod secured (with the help of his wife) in Alexandria in 35 AD.³⁸⁴ Therefore, when Luke writes that the crowd gathered to hear Peter at Pentecost contained Jews from Egypt (Acts 2:10), as well as Jewish "residents from Rome", who were perhaps Roman citizens,³⁸⁵ it is possible that this crowd may have included freedmen who were at one time bankers or financiers in either Rome or Puteoli, and who quite likely also had ongoing commercial connections with their co-religionists

³⁸³ Acts 27-28 explains that Paul's passage to Puteoli was undertaken in two different ships from Alexandria. He boarded the first ship at Myra, in Lycia (27:5-6), which Luke's text implies was a grain ship, since it ran into a storm and, to lighten the load, the crew proceeded to "throw the wheat overboard" (27:38). The Greek for 'wheat', *sitos* (σίτος), also means 'grain', which is used by The Message and NIV in this verse. Paul later took a second Alexandrian ship from Malta (28:11) where it had been forced to spend the winter.

³⁸⁴ See Section 5.8 below for more details

³⁸⁵ Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:20) argue that "Ῥωμαῖος regularly means a citizen of the Roman Empire, not an inhabitant of the city of Rome (cf. Acts 22:25ff.)".

among the wealthy merchants in Alexandria – through the international financing activity associated with the all-important Roman grain trade, among other things.

This kind of commercial background detail arouses our suspicions that the attack against Stephen was not motivated exclusively by doctrinal reasons, as we have been led to believe. An alliance between Jewish freedmen-bankers and the Sadducee elite – who, according to Jeremais (1969:96), included wealthy grain merchants – would have undoubtedly produced a joint response to what was perceived by both parties as a threat to their respective but interlocked and interdependent economic powerbases – from a rival banking facility controlled by the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*. Luke's text suggests that the situation was serious enough for the freedmen to go beyond simply "debating and disputing" with Stephen, to the point where they were willing to resort to the use of false witnesses, in order to bring him before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:11-13) and entice the crowd at the same time. Thus, we find support for asserting that the reasons for their attack against Stephen might have been driven primarily by commercial rivalry, rather than doctrinal differences.

4.26 The martyrdom of Stephen: killing off the competition

If we accept Luke's order of names as an indication of rank, Stephen was the head *trapezitēs*, "a man full of faith [and wisdom] and full of and controlled by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:3, 5), and also highly intelligent and educated (6:9-10). In fact, he exhibited so much wisdom that his opponents "were not able to resist the intelligence and the wisdom and [the inspiration of] the Spirit with which and by Whom he spoke" (6:10). Lüdemann (1989:79) links this to the promise of Christ to His followers, as mentioned in

Luke 21:15: “For I will give you a mouth and a wisdom (*sofia*), which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand (*antistēnai*) or contradict”, which is mentioned by Johnson and Harrington (1992:142) as well.

Lüdemann (1989:84-85) further speculates that the dispute arose in one of the Hellenist synagogues that Stephen attended, which again raises our suspicions; this time concerning the timing of the attack against him. According to Johnson and Harrington (1992:106), in Acts 6:3, which contains the list of personal attributes required for selection as one of the Seven, the Greek *martyroumenous* (μαρτυρουμένων), ‘approved, of honest report or good reputation’, means ‘having one’s actions or character witnessed by others’ (see Luke 4:22; Acts 10:22; 16:2; 22:12; also 1 Timothy 5:10, and 3 John 12). This implies that, prior to the point when the so-called problem of the Hellenist widows became an issue, Stephen was perhaps already acknowledged by a number of witnesses to be “full of the Holy Spirit” (6:3), “full of faith” (6:5), and also to have exhibited a superior level of intelligence and wisdom (6:10). Consequently, if Stephen did not hide his new beliefs and loyalties whilst attending this particular synagogue in the post-Pentecost period – and, based on his invective against the Sanhedrin in Acts 7, it is doubtful that he did – he would have been a growing thorn in the side of his fellow synagogue members and/or attendees for some time prior to his appointment as one of the Seven.

So what changed? What was the trigger point that prompted the freedmen, in particular, to expend time, energy and perhaps even money, and attack him in such an underhanded and nefarious way? If we consider the timing of the attack, the most obvious answer is his appointment as head *trapezitēs* of a rival banking facility, which further supports the argument that the attack was economically-motivated. Significantly, Pear-

son (1986:209-210) argues that it is possible that Stephen (and others of the Seven) came from Alexandria. Also, Lüdemann's assertion concerning Stephen's attendance (and thus potential membership) of the synagogue where the dispute occurred gives rise to speculation that Stephen himself may have been a freedman, or the son of a freedman, and thus perhaps a banker involved in financing the all-important Roman grain trade between Puteoli (i.e. Italy), Alexandria and Palestine. This takes on even greater political and economic significance if we accept Deissman's suggestion (1927:441) that the freedmen attending the synagogue in Jerusalem came from the Imperial household. Finally, Johnson and Harrington (1992:106) explain that, in Acts 6:3, the verb *episkepsasthe* (ἐπισκέψασθε) means to 'select by examination or review'; again implying that, sometime around or perhaps even before the events depicted in Acts 6:1-5, Stephen demonstrated publicly both skill and knowledge concerning the task for which he was selected by the multitude; namely, 'to serve in the bank' (*diakonein trapezais*). This too adds support to the hypothesis concerning his status as a freedman-banker, which may also help explain why he was chosen for the position of leader among the Seven.

Their defeat in the dispute with Stephen (Acts 6:9-10) led the freedmen to further action that is also relevant to the present enquiry. Acts 6:11 states that they 'suborned' men to falsely accuse the head *trapezitēs*; and, according to Thayer, the verb *hypoballō* (ὑποβάλλω) means 'to instruct privately, instigate, to bribe or induce (someone) unlawfully or secretly to perform some misdeed or commit a crime'.³⁸⁶ Then, in Acts 6:12, this same group is seen to "agitate the people". Now, because the statutory procedure for

³⁸⁶ See <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G5260&t=KJV>, accessed on May 17th 2009

stoning (the capital punishment for blasphemy) required the witnesses to "take the leading part in the execution" (Bruce, 1990:212),³⁸⁷ I would argue that these false witnesses – and also those who engaged or suborned them – were not ignorant of the consequences of their intended actions: namely, that they would personally (i.e. physically) have to kill Stephen if and when their false claims saw him convicted and sentenced.

That constitutes premeditated murder on the part of the false witnesses and also conspiracy to murder on the part of the freedmen – as well as their allies, the leaders of the Sanhedrin; although the guilt of this latter group cannot be proven, even though Johnson and Harrington (1992:142) accuse the Sanhedrin of being Stephen's killers. From this we may infer that the freedmen paid the false witnesses enough money to make it worth their while to commit both perjury and premeditated murder, which means that the removal of Stephen (as a possible commercial rival) was worth a great deal to this particular group of freedmen-bankers. However, the first Christian martyr is perhaps best remembered for the content and length of his speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1-53); and the detail surrounding this speech (and the trial itself) also offers significant insights into the economic and political motivation for the persecution of the *Hellenistae*. Without a doubt, this was a truly extraordinary trial; one that was not conducted under the correct protocols of either Roman or Jewish law.

In terms of Roman law, Foakes Jackson (1930:165) states that "a Roman procurator like Pilate would not condemn even a criminal who was not a citizen, without some show of justice or formality". This is why some scholars, such as Foakes Jackson and Lake (1922:86), and also Barrett (1994:382), believe that Stephen was arraigned before the

³⁸⁷ See *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 6:4

Sanhedrin during the period known as the interregnum, when there was no procurator governing Palestine: i.e. sometime between the recall of Pilate to Rome in either late 36 or early 37 AD, and the arrival of his successor. A possible reason why the Sanhedrin exploited this singular opportunity can be found in Luke's later account of what happened in Corinth when the Jews brought proceedings against Paul before Gallio, the Roman proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12-16). After hearing from the Jewish plaintiffs, Gallio dismissed the case because he declined to exercise his jurisdiction on matters of Jewish doctrine or law, which was obviously not helpful to the Sadducees' agenda. And if Stephen, like Saul-Paul, was a Roman citizen (which his possible status as a freedman would have granted him), then the Sadducees would not and could not have employed any kind of "lynch-law" justice while a Roman procurator was around to protect him.

On the other hand, in terms of Jewish law, it would seem that the Sanhedrin conveniently forgot about the strict protocols that we find laid down later in the rabbinical literature (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 4:1, 5:5) for cases involving a capital sentence; particularly in the pronouncement of judgement.³⁸⁸ For example, if the accused was acquitted, the result was to be pronounced on the day of the trial itself; however, a guilty sentence was not to be pronounced until the day after – which definitely does not match the haste with which Stephen was dispatched. Barrett (1994:385) comments that the proceedings are not those of a reputable court, while Bruce (1970:179) finds it difficult to decide whether Stephen's execution was indeed an instance of excess of jurisdiction on the part of the Sanhedrin or simply an example of mob violence or "lynch-law", which Penner (2004:33)

³⁸⁸ As argued previously, it is generally believed that the *Mishnah*, written between 180 and 200 AD, need not be excluded from being used to examine events in the first century AD, since Joseph the Patriarch was merely codifying the oral tradition dating back to Ezra and the fourth century BC.

argues was not illegal, but justified as appropriate “establishment violence”, according to his reading of Philo’s *Special Laws* (1:54-57).³⁸⁹ Finally, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1922:85) argue that even the way in which Stephen was stoned did not follow the rules. As mentioned above, Bruce (1990:212) reports that “It was the duty of the witnesses to take the leading part in the execution”. He also writes that “The drop from the place of stoning was twice the height of a man. One of the witnesses pushes the criminal from behind, so that he falls face downward. He is then turned over on his back. If he dies from the fall, that is sufficient. If not, he is stoned by all the congregation of Israel, as it is written (Deuteronomy 17:7): ‘The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people’ (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 6.3f.)”.

Much has been written about what was contained in Stephen’s so-called defence speech, and also what was supposedly left out. And for an analysis of the trial from a legal viewpoint, I recommend Watson (1996), a law professor, and Esler (1987:124-125, 134-135, 140, 203-204), a former barrister/lawyer turned theologian; although, I disagree with their overall conclusions, which have been reached without the benefit or consideration of a banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2. Essentially, Stephen accused the Sanhedrin of idolatry in their extreme reverence for the Temple, and also claimed that, according to scripture, God was prepared to dwell among and be worshipped by His people in various locations – not exclusively in Jerusalem. In other words, he attacked the Temple (as being made into an idol of sorts), and he attacked the

³⁸⁹ Penner also cites support from Seland (1995:224)

Sanhedrin (for their role as promoters and/or perpetrators of the idolatry),³⁹⁰ which means that his speech specifically targeted the theological and political justification for the Temple “cash cow” that, according to Sanders (1992:124), “directly or indirectly generated most of the city’s business”.

Barrett (1994:391) describes the Hellenists’ attitude to the Temple as “radical”, as we might expect from devout followers of Jesus, since He once referred to Himself, albeit obliquely, as being “greater than the Temple” (Matthew 12:6). Foakes Jackson and Lake (1920:69), Esler (1987:124-125, 134-135, 140) and also Watson (1996:38, 42, 143) all verify that Stephen, in particular, was *anti-temple*, while Cassidy (1987:34-35, n. 26) confirms that he was also anti-Sanhedrin.³⁹¹ However, I find Esler particularly instructive regarding an important aspect of Stephen’s speech; namely, when Stephen declares that “the Most High does not live in dwellings made by human hands” (Acts 7:48), Esler (1987:134) explains that, “in the Septuagint, the word here used for a dwelling ‘made by hand’ (χειροποίητος or *cheiropoiētos*) is reserved exclusively for pagan idols, and that it is reminiscent of the words Stephen has used [previously] for the golden calf (Acts 7:41)”. In support, he quotes Hatch and Redpath (1897:1467), who cite fourteen instances of *cheiropoiētos* in the LXX; all of them used of idols. Johnson (1992:133) confirms that “The phrase ‘works of hands’ is used in the LXX for idols (e.g. LXX Isaiah 16:12)”, but Foakes

³⁹⁰ Interestingly, Lüdemann (1989:88) points out that “The call to repentance which features in the other mission sermons in Acts is missing from Stephen’s speech”, from which we might infer that Stephen perhaps did not think the ruling elite capable of repenting; or worse, he had pre-judged them worthy of divine punishment.

³⁹¹ Peter’s assertion that the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon all flesh at Pentecost implies that, in the eyes of many members of the nascent sect, the incumbent religious leadership of Jerusalem no longer held claim to any kind of special spiritual status and/or authority.

Jackson and Lake (1933:81) extend that notion to cover temples as well as idols;³⁹² and further suggest that “in attributing permanent sanctity to the Temple the Jews were verging on idolatry”.

Finally, Esler argues (1987:140) that, “In Jerusalem, of course, opposition to the Temple could be expected to raise a great deal of the most profound Jewish antipathy, for the reason that the whole socio-economic well-being of the city depended on the wealth attracted to it for the continuation of the Temple cult”. Therefore, based on the above, I suggest that the Sanhedrin had no alternative but to get rid of this particularly troublesome *trapezitēs*; however, for the moment, all they could do was to “grind their teeth” at him (Acts 7:54) and his verbal attacks. But then, as we read just two verses later, his articulation of the imputed blasphemous content of his vision gave them the excuse they were looking for.

4.27 The Copper Scroll of Qumran: a possible reason for Sadducee paranoia

I submit that a major cause for concern among the Sadducee elite – regarding the threat posed by the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers – would have arisen from the economic ramifications implicit in Esler’s comments (1987:21) concerning the tension between established religious groups and new sects.

He states that the growth of a sect “raises the possibility of drawing further members out of the church and even, eventually, threatening its continued separate existence altogether”. In particular, by drawing members out of the established church, in this case the Temple cult, the new sect will also deprive the cult of income and other fi-

³⁹² They write that “χειροποιήτοις is used most frequently of idolatrous temples, and has a clearly derogatory implication”.

nancial resources that it would normally expect to receive from members of the defecting group – thus posing a significant threat to the cult's economic welfare. For example, when Acts 2:45 states that various members of the primitive church community sold their land and valuable possessions, it is possible that a significant portion of those possessions may have been deposited for safekeeping in the Temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem. Therefore, selling them would have required their owners to first withdraw them from the Temple treasury, which would have alerted and possibly alarmed those who controlled it. Also, as mentioned previously, Stegemann (1998:72) claims that the Temple in Jerusalem levied a tax on deposits; therefore, any significant withdrawal of valuable assets would have deprived the Temple of a significant portion of this income.

I further suggest that the Sadducee elite had valid and well-established reasons for their concerns of losing a substantial portion of temple-centric revenues in this manner. After all, by 36/37 AD, they had already experienced a significant negative impact on the assets and income of the Temple treasury-bank as a result of the separation of the Essene sect who, at the time of the events depicted in Acts 2 to 8, had been withholding their tithes and other financial support from the Temple for more than 180 years: i.e. since their separation from the temple during the rule of Jonathan the Hasmonean in 152 BC. Consequently, if we were able to ascertain some idea of the kind of corporate wealth possessed by the Essene community, it would provide us with an indication of the funds and assets they had withheld. And from this we could gain some appreciation of how serious, by comparison, the threat posed by the Hellenist *trapezitai* might have appeared to the Sadducees, especially since the new sect was operating its own, rival temple-banking facility in Solomon's porch – literally on their doorstep.

In the fifty or more years since its discovery in 1952, in Cave 3 at Qumran, the Copper Scroll (3Q15) has elicited a great deal of debate and controversy. The contents of the document appear to consist of a list of around sixty different treasures that were supposedly buried in separate caches in various locations around Palestine; and the initial arguments concerning the correct interpretation of the contents of the scroll centred mainly on the following questions. Firstly, are they real: i.e. “an historical record of actual treasures buried in antiquity”;³⁹³ or is the treasure “imaginary, and the scroll [...] an attempt to add documentation to an oriental fantasy”?³⁹⁴ Secondly, if the scroll does indeed contain a list of actual treasures, to whom did they belong: the Temple treasury in Jerusalem,³⁹⁵ or the Essene community at Qumran and elsewhere? Unfortunately, there is no consensus at present among scholars concerning the contents and date of this controversial document; however, at the 1996 Copper Scroll Symposium in Manchester,³⁹⁶ various papers were presented asserting that the treasures described were real and also contemporary with the date of the scroll: AD 68 to 70.

For example, Puech (2000:893) contends that the depositing of the Copper Scroll behind 40 other jars could not have occurred after the jars were put in place; therefore, the scroll predates 68 AD. Furthermore, based on the different locations described in the

³⁹³ A partial quote from Milik (1956:63) who disagrees, stating that, “It goes without saying that the document is not an historical record of actual treasures buried in antiquity”. His argument is based on the vast size and implied value of the inventory: in excess of six thousand talents, which he estimates is more than 200 tons of silver and gold – not to mention the extra gold and silver bars.

³⁹⁴ A quote from Golb (1980:21, n. 56); Milik (1956:63) describes it as “a summary of popular traditions circulating among the folk of Judea, put down by semi-literate scribes”

³⁹⁵ There was also a further question of whether the treasure – if it did in fact belong to the Temple treasury – was buried (in the locations listed) in 66-70 AD, to hide it from the Roman troops, or much earlier: say around 587 BC, to protect it from the Babylonians.

³⁹⁶ Organised by the Manchester-Sheffield Centre for Dead Sea Scrolls Research to mark the 40th Anniversary of the opening of the scroll

scroll, detailing where the various caches of treasure were hidden, he also argues convincingly (2004:83-89) that the treasure did not belong to the Temple treasury, but to the Essenes.

We must therefore give up identifying the hiding places as deposits from the treasury of the Temple administered by non-Essene high priests before the arrival of Roman troops [...] Having these goods belong to the Essenes, the Qumran community and other Essene groups in Jerusalem and elsewhere, takes into account far better the geographical distribution of these deposits and the mention of the names of priestly families in these lists; the classical sources in the distribution of the Essenes do not contradict this.³⁹⁷

On the surface, Essene ownership of such a large fortune would not seem to tally with their reputation for being what Golb (1980:5) calls a “wealth-eschewing” community. In fact, the Essenes referred to themselves as “the poor ones”, *ebyonim*; and Josephus (*War* 2.8.3) actually describes them as “despisers of riches”. Therefore, some scholars have thought it unlikely – Mowinckel (1957:261) uses the word “improbable” – that this community could have possessed treasure of this magnitude.³⁹⁸ However, while

³⁹⁷ Puech cites Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 5.17.4; Dio Chrysostom, according to his biographer Synesius, *Dio* 5; and also Philo, *Apology for the Jews* 11.1

³⁹⁸ In 1955, Roland de Vaux discovered an actual hoard of 561 silver coins (in three pots) at Qumran (L120). According to Magness (2003:188-189), “The hoard consisted almost exclusively of Tyrian tetradrachmas (sheqels)” – the type of coin used for “the annual half-sheqel tax paid by Jews to the Jerusalem during the Second Temple period”. This hoard has been interpreted as either a collection of tax receipts (which the Essenes were apparently required to pay just once in their lifetime, and not annually) or the collected wealth and private property of the members of the Qumran community. However, Magness (2003:191) argues that the “overwhelming number of Tyrian tetradrachmas” in the hoard – and the absence of any “common bronze issues of the Hasmoneans” – makes it more likely to be temple tax receipts, which would have been withheld from the temple treasury.

we know that a marked degree of asceticism was practised by individual Essenes, it would not preclude the sect from possessing great wealth at the corporate level, as we find with later monastic groups, where members took individual vows of poverty while the orders corporately held valuable assets and owned considerable wealth. That's why, even though, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.1.5), the Essenes held all goods in common, Puech (2004:87) informs us that, according to 1QpHab 12:8-9, "the 'poor' despoiled ones (the Essenes) are supposed to possess significant goods". He also states (2004:86) that "several of [the Essenes] were priests, starting with the Teacher of Righteousness, and they were therefore entitled to receive their own share of tithes, gifts and goods, whether they were consecrated or not. Such portions may have been sent to them by those who supported them from the beginning and/or who did not wish to make a donation to the wicked priests (CD 3.12) serving in the Temple, which had been defiled since the time of the high priesthood of Jonathan".

Consequently, if the Copper Scroll is perhaps a record of sixty or so deposits of hidden treasure that belonged to the Essene community of Qumran and elsewhere, logic dictates that the 200 tons of gold and silver it describes – worth in excess of 5,000 talents – was therefore *not* on deposit in the Temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem, as the Essenes regarded the temple as unclean.³⁹⁹ Furthermore, this 5,000 or so talents of gold and silver (worth more than five billion US dollars in today's value, according to my calculations)⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ Puech (2004:80) explains that the total value of the "treasure" described in the Copper Scroll is 5,260.5 or even 5,360.5 talents (i.e. 1,644 talents of silver, 404 of gold, and 3,312.5 talents unspecified), 20 minas of gold and silver, 165 ingots of gold, 19 bars of silver, plus 4 staters.

⁴⁰⁰ If, as I have argued previously, the modern value of a talent is USD \$1,012,320, the 5,260.5 or 5,360.5 talents of treasure described in the Copper Scroll would be worth between 5.3 and 5.4 billion US dollars today: i.e. in mid-2010 values. By comparison, based on the varieties and values of the 153 silver coins (of the 561-coin hoard discovered by de Vaux) that are held by the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, I estimate that the

was accumulated by a community that only appeared to grow to around 4,000 members over a 200-year period;⁴⁰¹ whereas, in less than three and a half-years, the new sect of Jesus-Believers had already grown to something approaching double that size.⁴⁰² Therefore, if members of the primitive church community also chose to withhold funds from the Temple treasury-bank, which is a distinct possibility, the Sadducees would have perceived this as a much greater and thus more serious threat to the welfare of the temple-centric economy than that posed by the Essenes. Also, since “a large number of priests were obedient to the [new] faith” (Acts 6:7), this in theory would have permitted members of the primitive church congregation to follow another Essene precedent and present their tithes and offerings directly to any priests who were fellow-members of the new sect, which would have deprived the Temple authorities of a significant portion of their personal income.

All this could explain why the Sadducees acted without compunction.⁴⁰³

total value of the L120 hoard from Qumran is around 2,000 *drachmas* or one-third of a talent: i.e. approximately 300,000 US dollars in today’s monetary value.

⁴⁰¹ The number of members for the Essene community is given by Philo in *Quod omnis probus liber*, Par. 12 (“over 4,000 according to my judgment”) and by Josephus in *Antiquities* 18.1.5 (“about 4,000 men”); cited in Golb (1980:6)

⁴⁰² Luke tells us that, within three to three and a half years, the nascent sect grew to the point where “the number of disciples had multiplied greatly” (Acts 6:7) beyond “a multitude” (6:2) that was reputedly greater than “5,000” (4:4); therefore, at the time Stephen was targeted by the freedmen and their allies, a congregation of 7,000 to 8,000 is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

⁴⁰³ Gordon (1989:99) throws some interesting light on this possible scenario with his assertion that the later separatism of early monasticism threw out a sizeable challenge to the existing social order, and therefore was seen as both *economically* and *politically* subversive: “The monks were not helping the [Roman] Empire to survive. Judged from the traditional point of view of the pagan society they were a subversive force”. His source is Momigliano (1963:12).

4.28 Why were the Hebrew apostles allowed to remain in Jerusalem?

On that day a great and severe persecution broke out against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles (Acts 8:1).

Here we have yet another exegetical conundrum, which again becomes clearer when viewed through the lens of economics. The central question is simple: who was run out of Jerusalem and who was allowed to remain? But then, any plausible answer gives rise to the further question of why.

Hengel (1979:74), Conzelmann (1987:61), Bruce (1990:215), Johnson and Harrington (1992:141), Barrett (1994:390) and Hill (1996:129) all agree that the persecution that arose following Stephen's murder affected only the Hellenist Believers; however, there is a difference of opinion concerning the underlying details. For example, Bruce interprets Acts 8:1 as implying that "the church as a whole was attacked"; whereas Conzelmann differs, claiming that "the persecution could not have affected the whole Christian community except for the 'apostles', because this community continues to exist later, both in fact and in Luke's own account". In his attempt to offer a solution to this conundrum, Esler (1987:139) highlights the language difference between the two factions in his statement that "the group or party represented by the apostles, most probably the Aramaic-speaking *Hebraioi*, were not persecuted by the Jews, while the *Hellenistae* were". In doing so, he alludes to the difference in education and attendant potential threat to the economic and other vested interests of the Sadducee elite, as argued previously.⁴⁰⁴ Likewise,

⁴⁰⁴ See Section 4.12, "Illiterate Hebrews and Learned Hellenists"

Barrett (1994:390) hints at this latter possibility in his comment that it would “probably be correct to see here the scattering of a Hellenist group *who were more obnoxious to the authorities than the Twelve*” (my italics).

So then, why were the *Hellenistae*, who would have included the six surviving Hellenist *trapezitai* and other merchant-capitalists (i.e. the economic leadership of the primitive church community)⁴⁰⁵ driven out of Jerusalem while the Hebrew apostles, the spiritual leadership, were allowed to remain?⁴⁰⁶ And what made the targeted Hellenists “more obnoxious to the authorities than the Twelve”?⁴⁰⁷ If we take into account the reasons for the attack on Stephen, and also the fact that this persecution would have resulted in the cessation of operations of the *trapeza*, the economic engine helping to drive both the economic and numerical growth of the primitive church, I would again suggest that the primary motivation behind the harassment was economic; whereas, theological or doctrinal reasons were secondary – but obviously provided an excellent excuse.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Bruce (1990:183) suggests that “The Seven were probably recognized by the Hellenists in the church as their leaders”; however, Acts 8:4 and 11:19-20 imply that more than just these six Hellenists (i.e. the surviving *trapezitai*) “were scattered abroad” as a result of the persecution.

⁴⁰⁶ I would imagine that the “large number of priests who were obedient to the [new] faith” (Acts 6:7) – many of whom were Levites, according to Barrett (1994:317) – were also exempt from this selective programme of persecution.

⁴⁰⁷ Esler (1987:139) mentions an interesting point raised by Simon (1958:27) that “governments do not rid themselves of the rank and file of seditious movements and leave the responsible leaders alone”. This conundrum is easily explained by the fact that, even though the the Hebrew apostles were the spiritual leaders of the sect, the Sanhedrin did not regard them as representing any kind of serious threat to the Temple cult.

⁴⁰⁸ Interestingly, according to Luke (Acts 5:34-40), Gamaliel had earlier convinced the council that they should leave the apostles unharmed, and also leave it to God (and time) to decide whether or not the new sect’s doctrine or purpose was of human origin or divine. From this, we may infer that doctrinal differences alone would *not* provide sufficient reason for this kind of persecution. There must have been something more.

4.29 Conclusion

For the Sadducees, who controlled the Temple, the Temple cult and the Temple bank, politics had become more important than religion;⁴⁰⁹ and a disbelief in life after death motivated their efforts to acquire and maintain as much power and wealth as possible during their earthly lifetime.⁴¹⁰ Then, as the Lukan text clearly shows, over a relatively short period of time, these priestly and lay aristocrats saw the remaining vestiges of their power and privilege seriously threatened by the dramatic growth of a new sect, along with the rapidly expanding activities of a rival banking facility that was controlled by the sect's leadership, and also operating within the very Temple precincts they thought they controlled.

The Sadducees could not possibly ignore the large numbers of converts that this new sect was attracting on a regular basis. Neither could they ignore the commercial attraction (to residents, pilgrims and perhaps even foreign merchants) of a temple-banking operation that was believed to have "the hand of God upon it", and was also managed by followers of Christ and thus men of great integrity – especially when their own financial operations were tainted by a history of greed and corruption. The threat posed by this new sect was undeniably real, and was literally staring them in the face. It was also growing at an alarming rate and, therefore, had to be dealt with swiftly and decisively. In this situation, doctrinal issues were of secondary importance; however, they provided a convenient excuse to permit naked power to supplant discussion, to use Esler's words (1987:22). Consequently, in the religious, political and economic environment of Jerusa-

⁴⁰⁹ See Schürer et al (1979:412)

⁴¹⁰ See Goldin (1955:39)

lem of that period, the success that commenced with Pentecost had only one possible outcome: the persecution recorded in Acts 7 and 8. And if we accept the full implications of having a *trapeza* operating at the heart of the primitive church, controlled by seven, well-connected Hellenist *trapezitai*, this scenario is supported in a credible way by both the detail and sequence of events depicted in Luke's text.

Furthermore, I submit that this investigation of the text in Acts 2 to 8 has achieved its secondary aim in demonstrating the potential value of using an economic perspective as part of a suite of forensic exegetical tools. Obviously, there have always been political implications, as Esler (1987:21) calls them, in the Acts narrative. However, if we adopt the alternative, banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, the true reason for the persecution instigated by the Sadducee elite (and their agents) becomes clearer, if not obvious. In addition, adoption of this alternative interpretation opens a door to possible solutions to numerous other exegetical problems or conundrums that have puzzled biblical scholars for some time.

5. JOSEPH-BARNABAS: A RE-EVALUATION OF HIS ROLE AND STATUS

5.1 Introduction

I have chosen to deal with the character of Joseph-Barnabas separately, in order to use an economic perspective to build on and hopefully expand the small amount of information we have about him, and also explore the possibility that this particular apostle deserves a higher status within the leadership of the primitive church than he has generally been assigned thus far.⁴¹¹

Kollman (2004:2) reports that Barnabas has *occasionally* received the recognition he deserves, and notes specifically Weiser (1981:138), who states that “Barnabas is one of the leading men of early Christian missionary history”. Likewise, Conzelmann (1973:158) writes that “In truth, [Barnabas] was one of the most important personalities of the primitive church”. Even so, if we accept that some form of banking facility was operating at the heart of the primitive church – which, after a time, was controlled as well as patronised by Hellenist merchants and financiers – we are then obliged to re-evaluate any and all references to Barnabas within the text of Acts and other literature, both explicit and implicit, in the light of his position as perhaps the pre-eminent Hellenist-capitalist within that community. In fact, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:52) claims that there is evidence to suggest that Joseph-Barnabas may have been considered by the apostles as a kind of spiritual descendant of the patriarch Joseph, Israel’s premier and archetypal “priest-banker”; although she neither recognises nor appreciates the important banking-financier role of either character.

⁴¹¹ For example, in the introduction to his commentary on Acts, Barrett (1994:57) refers to Peter, Paul, Stephen and even Philip as the “outstanding men” of that book, but omits Barnabas

Furthermore, by re-evaluating the role and status of Barnabas, we may also be able to cast more light on the reasons why he and Paul eventually separated, breaking up the NT's most famous and effective missionary team.

5.2 Initial reference to Barnabas in the Acts narrative

The first time we meet Joseph-Barnabas in Acts depends on the MS being examined. In the Alexandrian texts, e.g. Codex Sinaiticus (S01) and Codex Vaticanus (B03), his name first appears in Acts 4:36-37, when he is singled out as a noteworthy donor to the collective purse of the primitive church. However, according to Read-Heimerdinger (1998:34, 41ff.), in the text of Codex Bezae (D05), a MS that she asserts is more authentic in terms of both a first century and Jewish context,⁴¹² the first reference to Joseph-Barnabas appears in Acts 1:23,⁴¹³ when he – and not “Joseph called Barsabbas”, a character who, interestingly, is never mentioned again – is put forward as the most suitable candidate to fill the position of twelfth apostle left vacant by the death of Judas Iscariot.

Foakes Jackson and Lake, and also Bruce note this reference, but dismiss it as either “doubtful” (Foakes Jackson and Lake, 1933:14) or a result of “confusion” (Bruce, 1990:111). Nevertheless, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:35) adds support for this reading with her argument that “the introduction [of Barnabas in Acts 4:36] is unusually abrupt with

⁴¹² Read-Heimerdinger also asserts (1998:33) that “the text of Acts in Codex Bezae represents a tradition that is older than the tradition transmitted by the Alexandrian text”, and suggests (2002:355) that “the Bezan text dates from a time when there were people who were still familiar with the problems facing the earliest communities of the disciples of Jesus; when Jesus, Paul and other characters in the story were still alive in the memory of the people to whom the narrative was addressed; when the apostles had not become idealized figures”.

⁴¹³ Read-Heimerdinger (1998:41) writes that the reading of ‘Barnabas’ in Acts 1:23 is supported “by a few Greek miniscules and the Old Latin manuscripts as well as several other manuscripts of versions (6 pc it vg^{mss})”. She also notes (1998:50, n. 41) that this reading “is attested by the following witnesses: 1831 it Vg Or^L Boh Eth (in Boismard and Lamaouille, *Le texte occidental*, II, ad loc.)”.

no preceding ἀνὴρ τις or any other such phrase as normally accompanies the initial introduction of a character into the narrative of Acts. The absence of an introductory phrase is understandable if this is, in fact, not the first mention but the second". She also stresses (1998:47) the importance of this particular episode in the upper room, which, perhaps because the two candidates described in the Alexandrian texts are not mentioned again and therefore do not seem to play any further role in the Acts story, tends to be overshadowed by the more dramatic events that follow soon after.

The significance of replacing Judas is signalled in the Bezan text by the use of δέ, a connective in Acts which, at the start of an episode, indicates that it is being viewed as representing a new development in the story.⁴¹⁴

In the B03 text, in contrast, no δέ appears until [Acts] 2:5, suggesting that there all of the events of ch.1 are seen together as a single preparatory event leading up to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

This "new development in the story" is important because it took place in front of a gathering of "about 120" (Acts 1:15). As Read-Heimerdinger (1998:48) explains, "In later rabbinical writings, there is evidence that the presence of 120 males was the minimum legal requirement for the formation of a community large enough to elect a council for the making of formal and legal decisions".⁴¹⁵ Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:12), Marshall (1980:64)⁴¹⁶ and Conzelmann (1987:10) also note this point, but while Conzelmann

⁴¹⁴ She cites Levinsohn (1987:104-106)

⁴¹⁵ Read-Heimerdinger cites *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 1.6, cf. *Yoma Sanhedrin* 1.4, which are referenced in Wilcox (1973:438-452)

⁴¹⁶ Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:12) also remark on the fact that "*Mishna Sanhedrin* 1.6 enacts that the number of officers in a community shall be a tenth of the whole, and that 120 is the smallest number which can hold a 'small Sanhedrin'", while Marshall (1980:64) asserts that "in Jewish law a minimum of 120 Jewish men

agrees that this number of men is “necessary to constitute a local sanhedrin”, he argues that Luke did not have this in mind since there were women included in the group. However, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:11) and also Lüdemann (1989:26) assert that the Greek here for ‘certain women’ has the more likely rendering of referring to the wives of the disciples; and so they would not perhaps be counted in the 120. Bruce (1990:106) also mentions that “D has σύν ταῖς γυναῖξιν καὶ τέκνοις, ‘with their wives and children’, playing down the independent status of the women”; whereas, Lüdemann provides a fuller, more instructive explanation.

The following considerations suggest that *syn gynaixin* (1:14) is meant to denote the apostles’ wives (thus also Lake/Cadbury, *Beg.* IV, 11); for purely linguistic reasons it seems more likely that the women should be seen as the wives of the disciples. Were they female followers of Jesus, one would have expected the article before *gynaixin*.⁴¹⁷ Moreover, when the women disciples of Jesus are mentioned in the Gospel they are almost always defined more closely (*cf.* Luke 8:2f; 10:38-42; 23:49, 55; Luke 24:10 is an exception). Furthermore, in Acts Luke has no special interest in further mention of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, since they are not mentioned in the book.

was required to establish a community with its own council; in Jewish terms, the disciples were a body of sufficient size to form their own community”.

⁴¹⁷ Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:11) agree that “The absence of the article is noticeable and can scarcely be reproduced in translation. It may be an abbreviated form of the Attic phrase μετὰ γυναικῶν καὶ τέκνων, ‘with women and children’ (see Blass *ad loc.*). If so, it is practically equivalent to ‘with their wives’”.

When Peter, in his capacity as leader of the apostolic group,⁴¹⁸ puts forward the two candidates to replace Judas (Acts 1:20), his preamble includes a prophecy from David: “Let his days be few, and let another take his office and charge” (Psalm 109:8). The Greek for ‘office’ is *episkopen* (ἐπισκοπή), literally, ‘overseership’; whereas, in Psalm 109:8, the Hebrew *pēquddah* means ‘charge, office, oversight’, which together may be interpreted to cover more than just the office of apostle, and thus encompass Judas’ charge and oversight of the “purse” (i.e. finances) of Jesus and His disciples. On that basis, I would argue that whoever Peter had in mind to replace Judas was expected to fill the specific and specialist position of apostle-treasurer,⁴¹⁹ and therefore needed to possess the appropriate financial skills and experience. The evidence that Joseph-Barnabas may have had such expertise comes from the text of Acts and other sources.

5.3 A spiritual leader with financial skills and experience

Jeremias (1969:105) suggests that Barnabas belonged to the group of Levites who were “outstanding in wealth and education”.⁴²⁰ Furthermore, there is no doubt that some Levites possessed significant financial expertise and experience because, even though this priestly group are associated primarily with temple music and other cultic ritual, at one time, they were also in charge of the Temple treasury.

⁴¹⁸ Most commentators accept that the order of names in Acts 1:13 indicates Peter’s premier rank, with Barrett (1994:95) citing Acts 1:15 as “the first time Peter stands out as spokesman and leader”. This argument is supported by Metzger’s commentary on Acts 1:24 (1965:288), which states that “Here and elsewhere in the Western text, one recognizes clearly the later point of view, according to which Peter rules the church with the authority of the monarchical episcopate”.

⁴¹⁹ Judas is the only member of the original Twelve who is depicted in the gospels as having a particular position or office: i.e. treasurer (see John 12:6 and 13:29).

⁴²⁰ Kollman (2004:6) adds that “Most probably Barnabas was one of the many Diaspora Jews who, on account of prosperity gained far from the motherland, had the means to move to Jerusalem”.

For example, 1 Chronicles 9 lists four Levites named Shallum, Akkab, Talmon and Ahiman, of whom Shallum was the chief (9:17); and “these Levites, the four chief gatekeepers, were in charge of the chambers and treasuries of the house of God” (9:26). Furthermore, in 1 Chronicles 23 and beyond, we find a detailed account in which King David assigns the Levites to various positions within the temple he was planning. In particular, 26:20-26 lists the Levites who were put in place “over the treasuries of the house of God and the treasuries of the dedicated gifts”.⁴²¹ And, in this list, Shebuel (son of Gershon) is designated as “ruler over the treasuries” (26:20). Later, in post-exilic times, we read in Ezra 8:33 that, on the fourth day after his arrival in Jerusalem, Ezra and his twelve specially-chosen priests presented the “650 talents of silver, and silver vessels valued at 100 talents, and 100 talents of gold” they had transported from Babylon (8:24) to the priests, Meremoth and Eleazar, and also “Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui – the Levites”.

Furthermore, in Nehemiah 13:13, two Levites, Pedaiah and Hanan, are listed as “treasurers over the storerooms”. Schaper (1997:202) calls them “the Temple Treasury Committee”, and asserts that it is obvious from the genealogy given for Hanan that he is a Levite.⁴²² He goes on to explain (1997:204) that “the committee members oversaw not just the collection of tithes but also that of Persian imperial taxes”, thus ascribing to these particular Levites a secondary and secular fiduciary role on behalf of the state. However, by the first century AD, supervision of the Temple treasury-bank had been taken over by members of the High priest’s family. According to Jeremias (1969:198), “Along with po-

⁴²¹ These considerable gifts were dedicated by “King David, the heads of the father’s houses, the officers over thousands and hundreds, and the commanders of the army” (1 Chronicles 26:26).

⁴²² Schaper is citing Rudolph (1949)

litical power, the priestly aristocracy through family influence obtained possession of the administration of Temple finances, a circumstance of no small importance”.

From the above, it is evident that, over the centuries, particular Levites acted in a banker-like capacity: i.e. they were entrusted with the safekeeping of large amounts of public funds. Consequently, the choice of Barnabas (along with Saul) to supervise the collection of the famine relief fund at Antioch (Acts 11:29-30), which was organised on behalf of the brethren in Judea, may have been based on the traditional role of Levites as treasurers, or the fact that this particular apostle exhibited some sort of financial acumen – or perhaps both. Moreover, we know that Joseph-Barnabas was a land-owner (Acts 4:36-37)⁴²³ and that, according to Jeremias (1969:33),⁴²⁴ land in and around Jerusalem was expensive. Kollman (2004:11) is ambivalent on the question of whether the plot of land that Barnabas sold was located in Cyprus, or one purchased or inherited in Jerusalem; however, he cites Schneider (1980:367) who asserts that “Barnabas – as a Diaspora Jew resident in Jerusalem – possessed a field (in the area around the city)”.

Marshall (1980:110) also notes that the location of the field is not clear, but prefers somewhere in Palestine, “since verse 36 need not imply anything more than that Barnabas had been born in Cyprus”. Nevertheless, even if the apostle’s plot of land was located in Cyprus, funds raised from a local sale on the island would then need to be transferred to Jerusalem, which implies that Barnabas required personal experience or at least contacts with the expertise to handle this kind of “cross-border” financial arrange-

⁴²³ Luke writes that Barnabas sold “a field that belonged to him” (Acts 4:37), and the use of the indefinite article could perhaps indicate that he owned more than one plot of land; however, this cannot be substantiated from the text.

⁴²⁴ Jeremias asserts that “prices for land around Jerusalem were particularly high”, citing the *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Yoma* 4.1, 41b; cf. Levy II, 369b under *keseeph*.

ment; something usually conducted by *trapezitai*. Furthermore, as “a native (τῷ γένει) of Cyprus” (Acts 4:36),⁴²⁵ it is quite likely that Barnabas – a Jew from the Diaspora who had amassed enough wealth to live in Jerusalem where the cost of living was very high – gained a great deal of financial experience and expertise during the years spent accumulating the family fortune.⁴²⁶

In addition, in Colossians 4:10, Paul refers to John-Mark as “the cousin of Barnabas”. The Greek *anepsios* (ἀνεψιός) can also be translated as ‘niece or nephew’, leading the KJV to use the description “sister’s son” and, if correct, this would make Barnabas the brother of Mary, mother of John-Mark, and consequently a member if not the scion of what we are led to believe was a wealthy family.⁴²⁷ For instance, in Acts 12:11-16, we have the account of Peter escaping from jail and walking to Mary’s house – which Edersheim (1904:47) refers to as a better class of dwelling and Kollman (2004:6) describes as “substantial” – where “a large number (of the congregation) were assembled together and were praying” (Acts 12:11).⁴²⁸ In verse 13, we read that Peter knocked on what is described as either “the gate of the porch” (Amplified version) or “the door of the courtyard” (The Message), and a maid by the name of Rhoda came to investigate. If we consider the value of property in first century Jerusalem, the fact that Mary’s house

⁴²⁵ Conzelmann (1987:36) explains that “τῷ γένει, ‘a native of’, does not mean nationality (i.e. a Cypriot), but denotes the place of birth (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.142)”; and Kollman (2004:2, n. 5) asserts that the Early Church accepted this as self-evident.

⁴²⁶ In his consideration of the funding sources of the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul, Dods (1905:337) writes that “With what provision for their journey they were furnished, Luke does not tell us [...] In passing rapidly from place to place, Paul could scarcely have found work at his trade”. However, if we accept that Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, a member of a wealthy family, as well as a prosperous capitalist in his own right, the answer to this funding question becomes glaringly obvious, and may also provide the underlying reason why he, as an apostle (in tandem with Paul) was able to renounce the normal right of missionaries to be supported financially by the communities they served.

⁴²⁷ Kollman (2004:6) comments that “Joseph Barnabas apparently possessed not inconsiderable wealth and was in this regard not alone in his family”.

⁴²⁸ Lüdemann (1989:146) suggests that “Mary’s house in Jerusalem is probably a historical fact”.

had a porch and/or courtyard, was spacious enough to accommodate a considerable number of people,⁴²⁹ and was also manned by servants, suggests that her family, which obviously included her brother, were notably affluent.

5.4 The meaning and significance of his names

We next meet Joseph-Barnabas in Acts 4:36-37; a reference that provides us with the opportunity to examine the significance of his names and country of origin.

Joseph is his original name, and 'Barnabas', the name given to him by the apostles, is described in the Lukan text as being translated as "Son of" either 'encouragement', 'comfort' or 'consolation'; while Read-Heimerdinger (1998:35) adds 'exhortation'.⁴³⁰ She also asserts that "Various suggestions have been put forward to explain the origin of [this] name in Aramaic; that which fits best with Luke's translation is that it is a Hellenization of the Jewish name *Bar-Nahama*, a name not uncommon among first-century Palestinian Jews of which the root *nhm* signifies 'to comfort, to console'". However, Kollman (2004:13) explains that the name 'Barnabas' is "occasionally considered a version of *bar nebuah* ('son of prophecy')",⁴³¹ which might help explain his inclusion in the group of Antioch prophets listed in Acts 13:1. Read-Heimerdinger (1998:51, 53) is particularly instructive with her comparison of the different mentions of the name 'Barnabas' in Acts 1:23 and 4:36 in the Bezan text. She explains that the use of the present participle in 1:23 indicates that, in this earlier verse, we are presented with a man who is

⁴²⁹ Thayer translates *hikanos* (ἱκανός) in Acts 12:12 as 'a considerable number'.

⁴³⁰ Conzelmann (1987:36) cites Cadbury (1933:47-48) to argue that the name Barnabas means "Son of Nebo" and that "son of encouragement" is incorrect

⁴³¹ Kollman is citing Strack and Billerbeck (1922:634) and Weiser (1981:138). Barrett (1994:259) also suggests that the simplest explanation for the name Barnabas "is that *ναβας* is derived from 'son of a prophet' or 'son of prophecy, inspiration'".

in the process of establishing his role or ministry of encouragement-comfort-consolation-exhortation; whereas, the use of the aorist tense in 4:36 indicates that, by the time of the second mention, Joseph's role/ministry had become firmly established and recognised. She also suggests (1998:41, 53) that the earlier tense indicates that Joseph may have earned the name "Barnabas" as a result of his efforts to console and encourage the apostles during those critical and uncertain days immediately following the ascension of Jesus. If so, this further clarifies his elevated status within the group, and also helps us gauge the extent of the esteem with which he was held by them.

5.5 His rejection in the vote to replace Judas

As a Levite residing in Jerusalem, Barnabas obviously enjoyed a particular status within the religious and social hierarchy of the capital's temple-centric society.

On the other hand, if we accept the Codex Bezae version of Acts 1:23, which depicts him as one of the two candidates put forward to replace Judas, he would also have been a member of the core group of Christ's early followers, since Peter states (as part of the list of the candidates' qualifications) that, along with Matthias, he is one of "the men who have accompanied us [apostles] during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us – from the baptism of John at the outset until the day when He was taken up from among us" (Acts 1:21-22). In support of the Bezan reading of 'Barnabas' in Acts 1:23, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:53) notes that Clement of Alexandria "speaks of Barnabas as one of the seventy sent out by Jesus in Luke 10:1".⁴³² Nonetheless, all this evidence

⁴³² See Clement of Alexandria, *Hypotyposeis* 7 and *Stromateis* 2.20.11; Kollman (2004:9) also makes reference to this possibility, attributing the source instead to Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* I 12.1; II 1.4) and Epiphanius, *De incarnatione* 4.4 (*Panarion* XX)

concerning his suitability and status leaves us with the question as to why Barnabas was *not* selected to fill the position of apostle-treasurer left vacant by the death of Judas.

Read-Heimerdinger (1998:59) takes great pains to explain that, in Codex Bezae, the process in which Matthias was selected – and Barnabas rejected – is not depicted as being divinely orchestrated, as we are led to believe from the Alexandrian texts. According to Conzelmann (1987:12), in the ancient practice that allowed for the possibility of divine intervention, the lots were shaken in a cloth bag (Proverbs 16:33) or in a vessel (*Livy* 23.3.7) until one fell out; and Read-Heimerdinger (1998:59) writes that “the usual expression in the LXX is to ‘throw’ (βάλλω) lots for someone or something, and designates a procedure involving chance which leaves responsibility for the outcome to God”. However, she then explains that “The text of Acts, in contrast, uses ἔδωκαν κλήρους (v. 26), meaning that they ‘gave’ their lots”.⁴³³ If correct, it means that, even though those present may have prayed for divine guidance, Acts 1:26 depicts an archetypal voting procedure involving human choice. Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:15) also inform us that “The method employed by the Jews was to put the names written on stones into a vessel and shake it until one fell out. But the proper verb [here] would be ἔβαλον, and ἔδωκαν does not fit into the picture. It is possible, therefore, that the meaning may be ‘gave their votes’”.⁴³⁴ On the other hand, Bruce (1990:112) agrees that “One might have

⁴³³ Read-Heimerdinger argues that “The use of the verb δίδωμι in Acts 1, in conjunction with the possessive pronoun in the D05 text, makes it quite possible that the procedure described as followed by the community in Jerusalem was [...] a vote: each person gave his ‘lot’, and (the) κλῆρος fell on Matthias”.

⁴³⁴ According to Ruis-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger (2004:331), “The fact that «they gave their lots» and that the «lot» fell on Matthias only makes sense if it is a matter of a genuine ballot. The expression cannot be construed as the process of «casting lots» which is often mentioned in the Jewish Scriptures but using a different verb than the one used here”.

expected ἔβαλον rather than ἔδοκον", but does not agree with the interpretation of 'gave their votes'.

Interestingly, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:60) speculates that the main reason why Barnabas was rejected was because he was a Hellenist, and did not originate from Palestine like the rest of the apostles. However, I would suggest that his status as a Levite might also have been problematic, since many of those gathered may have been influenced by the fact that Jesus did not choose any member of the Levitical priesthood to be part of His original core team of twelve. Nevertheless, whatever the reason for the rejection of Barnabas by the majority of "the 120", the outcome of the vote seems to have left the Twelve with a financial skills gap that resulted in the competency or workload problem highlighted in Acts 6:1. It is also significant that he was put forward by Peter, the spiritual "ruler" of the community, as his preferred candidate, as Read-Heimerdinger (1998:57) argues: "Since Barnabas, with his qualities, is the first named, it is fair to suppose that Luke means that Peter thought that he was the most fitting candidate, that Barnabas would have been his choice".⁴³⁵

If true, this and other passages in Luke's text would suggest that Barnabas, as argued above, was eminently qualified to take up the reins of apostle-treasurer; and also that he enjoyed an extraordinarily close relationship with Peter, who obviously admired and respected him. No doubt, this respect and admiration was reciprocated, and Peter's reason for seeking refuge in the house of Mary, the sister of Barnabas, after being freed from prison (Acts 12:12), may stem from the possibility that he enjoyed not just the

⁴³⁵ Read-Heimerdinger (1998:50) states that, "In the Bezan text of [Acts 1:23], it is Peter alone (singular ἑστησεν) who puts the two names forward".

friendship but also the personal patronage of Barnabas and other members of his wealthy family.⁴³⁶ Furthermore, this speculation may help clarify Paul's reasons for rejecting Barnabas' request to have John-Mark join them on their return missionary journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor, and also the violent argument that ensued (Acts 15:36-40), as discussed below.

5.6 A power-broker with impregnable position in Jerusalem and beyond?

From Luke's text, we learn that the Hebrew apostles encountered problems and perhaps some embarrassment from their handling of the community's financial affairs, which prompted the Hellenist leaders to arrange a private meeting to discuss their concerns in this area; and I would argue that Barnabas was one of the Hellenist leaders at that meeting. Also, the fact that the affair was handled in a wise and discrete manner is compatible with what we know of the man's character from later accounts in Luke's text.

Furthermore, because of his pre-existing and close relationship with Peter, Barnabas would have been the most likely person to "broker a deal" between the Hellenists and the Hebrew apostles, in an effort to find a practical solution to the problem highlighted in Acts 6:1-2.⁴³⁷ After all, we are told that Barnabas sold an expensive piece of real

⁴³⁶ We know from Braund (1989:137) that patronage was all-pervasive in Roman society; and, according to Moxnes (1993:267 and 2004:42), wealthy members of the early Christian communities served as patrons "by opening their houses as meeting places" (e.g. Acts 12:12). Kollman (2004:11) writes that "Within the early Christian community, Barnabas' sale of [his] field represented a particularly memorable act of charity"; however, Hansen and Oakman (1998:79) describe this gesture as the act of a "patron". In fact, Bartchy (1991:315-316) describes Joseph-Barnabas as "one of the significant patrons in the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem". Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that his patronage encompassed both the institutional and the personal – in the form of Peter (and perhaps others). Interestingly, Moxnes (1993:248 and 2004:42) suggests that "there may be a spiritual attachment, however ambivalent, between patrons and clients". In addition, Sterling (1992:375) suggests that Theophilus (Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1) might have been the patron of Luke, in the same way that Epaphroditus was for Josephus.

⁴³⁷ This is in keeping with Barnabas' reputation as a "bridge builder", a characterization found in Evans (1978:248-250). Kollman (2004:13, 62) asserts that, as a Diaspora Jew with close ties to the motherland,

estate in order to provide the collective purse of the primitive church with a significant amount of funds. This would have put him in a strong position to recommend to the Hebrew apostles that, since they could not cope with the burgeoning workload of the new sect's *trapeza* (of which Barnabas was for all intents and purposes a major contributor-cum-shareholder, a position that has always carried a great deal of influence), it would be better to hand over the control and day-to-day operations to a cadre of financial professionals: i.e. the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* chosen by the multitude. If correct, this makes Barnabas something of an *éminence grise* within the primitive church community; a person of considerable behind-the-scenes influence,⁴³⁸ especially in economic matters it would seem: i.e. a power-broker in the truest sense.

This markedly more elevated status of Barnabas within the primitive church is important in itself but still, I would suggest, does not represent the full extent of his influence. Therefore, we also need to take into consideration whatever position or status he might have occupied within the wider political-economic hierarchy of Jerusalem and beyond,⁴³⁹ using a combined economic and political perspective as an exegetical tool to interpret various references to the person and his background – both explicit and implicit. For example, when the surviving *trapezitai* and other Hellenists were driven out of Jerusalem during the period of persecution that followed the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:1), Barnabas, a high profile Hellenist merchant-financier, was able to remain in the

"Barnabas straddled the line dividing Hellenist and Hebrew"; and, because he enjoyed the respect of both groups, he therefore "had an important mediating function between these two factions of the early Christian community". His sources are Schenke (1990:79) and Raisanen (1995:1468-1514).

⁴³⁸ Concerning Barnabas, Read-Heimerdinger (2002:326) states that, "For all his qualifications and qualities, his role is nevertheless always one of discreet activity in the background".

⁴³⁹ Concerning the 'Barnabas' reading in the Bezan text, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:52) writes: "That the name *iustus* is given in Latin in Acts 1 is an indication that his qualities were recognized not only by his own Jewish people but also in Roman society".

capital, seemingly unmolested. It would seem that this exemption from persecution also extended to his family; particularly his sister, Mary, whose house (mentioned in Acts 12:12-13) does not appear to be one of those that Saul entered in order to drag out the men and women and commit them to prison (Acts 8:3).⁴⁴⁰

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Barnabas was not in Jerusalem when Herod Agrippa decided to “stretch forth his hands to afflict and oppress and torment some who belonged to the church” – first killing James the brother of John with a sword, a style of execution normally reserved for political cases,⁴⁴¹ and then imprisoning Peter (Acts 12:1-3).⁴⁴² Barnabas’ absence could imply that Agrippa waited until this particular apostle was out of the way before he made his move, which raises some important questions and also fuels further speculation. Was Barnabas’ ability to escape persecution merely a matter of coincidence? Or was he perhaps so powerful economically and so well-connected politically that he was, in a word, untouchable? If so, what possible circumstances would have caused both the Sadducee elite and Herod Agrippa to leave Barnabas alone, and also avoid a confrontation with him?

⁴⁴⁰ Bruce (1970:206) comments that the action taken by Barnabas on behalf of Saul (i.e. with the church leadership) in Acts 9:27 implies that the two men were previously acquainted, which may explain why Saul appeared to leave him and his family alone while he persecuted the other *Hellenistae* in the primitive church. Also, since the persecution was authorised by the High Priest (Acts 9:1-2), it is possible that the Sadducee elite had good reason to leave a powerful Levite like Barnabas unmolested.

⁴⁴¹ Cassidy (1987:47-48) informs us that James’ execution “by the sword” indicates capital punishment for a political crime, and cites “a number of commentators” (1987:48, n.14, expanded on p. 183). His sources include Rackham (1904:176), Williams (1953:199) and Ricciotti (1959:184-185). Brandon (1968:48) and Derrett (1970:340) also argue that the use of the sword rather than any other means of execution shows that the charge against James was political, which Barrett (1994:575) interprets as meaning that Herod saw the Christian movement as a political threat.

⁴⁴² Parker (1964:169-170) states that “there is not the faintest hint elsewhere, in Acts or the epistles, that Saul and Barnabas partook of that terrible experience”. This view conflicts with Acts 12:25, which describes Barnabas and Saul returning *from* Jerusalem; thus implying their presence in the city at the time when James was executed. However, Parker argues that Luke’s text has been mistakenly altered, and that “Barnabas, Mark and Saul were at Antioch during the time [...] when Agrippa harassed the Jerusalem Church”.

5.7 The Cyprus connection

In the first instance, we can establish commercial and/or family links, both direct and indirect, between the Herodians, their court and/or the Sanhedrin on one side, and important Cypriot Jews, which may possibly include Barnabas, on the other.

From I Macabees 15, we have evidence of a Jewish community on Cyprus dating back to around 140 BC, and even possibly as early as the third century BC, according to conjecture by van der Horst (2006:28-29).⁴⁴³ From Josephus, we learn that, during the reign of Ptolemy IX Soter II (between 142 and 80 BC), the Jews living on Cyprus were “flourishing” (*Antiquities* 13.284); and that, in 12 BC, Herod the Great obtained a concession from Augustus for half the copper-mines in Cyprus (*Antiquities* 16.128-129). As a consequence, Smallwood (1976:412) argues that the commercial prospects arising from the copper trade would have encouraged Jewish immigration to the island. From Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.131), we also learn that Alexandria, granddaughter of Herod the Great, married a prominent Cypriot named Timios, who van der Horst (2006:29) describes cautiously as “probably a Jew”. Furthermore, Kollman (2004:6) reports evidence from the Talmud of the regular Palestinian import of caraway seed from Cyprus; also, that Jewish Cypriots provided the wine for use as part of the burnt offering on Yom Kippur and sent an annual gift of wine to the Temple as well,⁴⁴⁴ which means that wealthy

⁴⁴³ Van der Horst’s evidence comes from a reference in I Macabees 15:15 and 23 to “letters to kings and countries”, which included Cyprus, in which the consul of Rome sent a warning not to harm the Jews anywhere. He suggests that this implies, firstly, the presence of Jews on the island for some time before 140 BC; and, secondly, a Jewish community of significant size – comparing the situation on Cyprus to that of Delos and Crete.

⁴⁴⁴ Kollmann is citing Neubauer (1868:369) and Oberhummer (1903:23)

Cypriot merchants, some of whom would have been friends and/or associates of Barnabas, were integral to the economic activity surrounding the Temple cult.⁴⁴⁵

In addition, Luke's gospel account provides a possible link to the royal household and/or court through a notable financial supporter of Jesus and His disciples: Joanna, the wife of Chuza, who was the *epitropos* (ἐπίτροπος) or 'household manager' (i.e. *procurator*) of Herod Antipas.⁴⁴⁶ Consequently, if we accept the 'Barnabas' reading in the Bezan text of Acts 1:23, with all its implications, she – and perhaps her husband as well – would have known this particular apostle from the early days of Christ's ministry. From all this, we can speculate that, because of the all-important trade in copper, wine, dried figs and caraway seed, for example, and also the possible connection to Herod's court through Chuza (also Manean, as discussed below), as a 'native' of Cyprus and a member of a wealthy and prominent Cypriot Jewish family, there are likely to have been a number of possible links between the family and/or associates of Barnabas (in both Cyprus and Jerusalem) and the Herodians and their court, as well as the priestly and lay aristocrat members of the Sanhedrin – connections that, economically and politically speaking, may have been powerful enough in themselves to protect him and also single him out as someone who should not be antagonised.

⁴⁴⁵ Kollman cites *p. Dem.* 2:1 [22b] and *p. Yoma* 4:5 [41d]. Evidence of further commercial links between Cyprus and Jerusalem can be found in Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.51-53), who informs us that Queen Helena of Adiabene paid for a cargo of dried figs to be brought from Cyprus to alleviate the famine in Jerusalem in 45 AD.

⁴⁴⁶ Luke 8:2-3 states that Joanna (along with Mary Magdalene, Susanna and "many others") was part of a large group of female supporters of Christ's ministry who had been "cured of evil spirits and diseases" by Jesus; and this may have drawn her grateful husband into some sort of regular contact with Christ's inner circle of followers.

5.8 The Antioch-Cyprus-Cyrene network

Various scholars, such as Downey (1961), Haenchen (1976:264), Brown and Meier (1983:33), Zetterholm (2003:93, 122), Barnett (2002:264 and 2008:89) and Kollman (2004:21), have speculated that, after the martyrdom of Stephen, when the Hellenist believers were driven out of Jerusalem and “scattered abroad” (Acts 8:4), Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch – who was one of the Seven Hellenist *trapezitai* (Acts 6:5) and thus, I suggest, a close associate of both Stephen and Barnabas – would have returned to his native city.

According to Josephus (*War* 3.29), Antioch on the Orontes had been the capital of the Roman province of Syria since 64 BC, and was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria.⁴⁴⁷ Bruce (1990:224) confirms this, and explains that Antioch was an important commercial centre as well as a political capital, since “the produce of Syria and lands further east passed through it on its way to the west”. Josephus (*War* 7.41-62) also informs us that Antioch contained a substantial Jewish population, and Kollman (2004:19) estimates that, in the NT period, the city had a total population of around 500,000. In addition, Witherington (1996:203) provides an instructive summary of the major role that Antioch played in the development of the early Church, as it was, firstly, the sponsoring church for the Western mission (Acts 13:1-3); secondly, the place where the debate over Gentile membership came to a head (14:26–15:2); thirdly, where, after an extended tenure (11:25; 15:35), Barnabas and Paul finally separated; and, finally, where Paul made a separate visit (18:22) before beginning his final European tour.

⁴⁴⁷ Cited by both Kollman (2004:19) and Witherington (1996:203)

In Acts 11:19-20, Luke states that, some “men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on returning to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus”;⁴⁴⁸ and it is thought that these Cyrenians were some of the group listed among the devout Jews listening to Peter’s Pentecost sermon who came from “the parts of Libya about Cyrene” (2:10). Since Acts 6:9 implies that Cyreneans were among Stephen’s persecutors, it would therefore seem plausible that Jesus-Believers from this area would consider themselves at risk of suffering at the hands of their fellow-countrymen, and so flee with Nicolaus to Antioch after Stephen’s execution. When the rumours of what was happening in Antioch reached the apostles in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to investigate; and during the time he was there, “a large company was added to the Lord” (11:14). Witherington’s commentary on Acts 11:24 (1996:370) suggests that Luke views Barnabas as equal to Stephen: e.g. full of the Holy Spirit and faith (*cf.* Acts 6:5). He also states that Barnabas is the only man in Acts specifically described as ‘good’, *agathos* (ἀγαθός), also ‘upright, honorable’, which Luke also uses to describe Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50).⁴⁴⁹

As “a native of Cyprus”, Barnabas appears an obvious choice for this important mission; however, there is another likely rationale implicit in his relationship with Nicolaus. After all, the persecution and scattering of the Hellenist believers and *trapezitai* that occurred after the execution of Stephen would have led to the demise of the banking fa-

⁴⁴⁸ The Amplified Bible is the only ET to state that the men of Cyprus and Cyrene were ‘returning’ (*eis-erchomai*) to Antioch. The root is *erchomai*, used both of persons arriving and returning, which suggests that either they had prior links with the city (i.e. they had previously resided and/or conducted business there), or simply that they started their missionary journey in Antioch and later returned there after they visited Phoenicia and Cyprus.

⁴⁴⁹ Ste Croix (2001:426) cites a poem by Solon to suggest that *agathos* not only means ‘good’, but also indicates a member of the upper class.

cility at the heart of the congregation in Jerusalem. Therefore, it is possible that one of the reasons why Barnabas (with his known financial skills and experience) was sent to Antioch by the apostles was to help Nicolaus (one of the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*) establish a new banking operation for the Jesus-Believers' sect in this important and wealthy commercial centre – where, according to Bruce (1990:224, mentioned above) “the produce of Syria and lands further east passed through it on its way to the west” – in order to service the “large company” of both Greek and Jewish converts, who may have included numerous affluent if not wealthy merchants. If true, this strategy proved crucial when the mother church in Judea needed famine relief (Acts 11:29-30). There is also a possible connection with Cyrene through Lucius (Acts 13:1); and furthermore, Coptic tradition links Barnabas to this city in North Africa through his sister, Mary, and nephew, John-Mark.⁴⁵⁰

Finally, to establish the prominent position that Barnabas occupied within the Antioch congregation, Kollman (2004:26) argues that “The ancient list of offices and names found in Acts 13:1 reflects the structure and hierarchy of the Christian community of Antioch in that, analogous to Mark 3:16-19 and Acts 6:5, it places the most important person first. Significantly, Barnabas appears first, before Simeon Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and such a renowned person as Manaen”, who Luke describes as “a ‘milk brother’ of Herod Antipas”; and Kollman (2004:26) informs us that the description ‘milk brother’, *suntrophos* (σύντροφος), means that “he was raised alongside the princes in the court of

⁴⁵⁰ The tradition states that John-Mark was born in Cyrene, part of modern day Libya (just 485 miles west of Alexandria), and that his parents, Aristopolos and Mary, migrated to Palestine shortly after his birth, because of Berber attacks on their town and property. It is therefore possible that Aristopolos, the brother-in-law of Barnabas, may have been a *Hellenistae* merchant and thus wealthy in his own right, which provides another possible link between the apostle and powerful, commercial networks in Egypt and northern Africa.

Herod the Great".⁴⁵¹ According to Witherington (1996:367), "there were close ties between the Herodian family in Israel and [Antioch], as is shown by the fact that Herod the Great paved [the] main street and placed colonnades along both sides of it";⁴⁵² and the connection between Manaen (in Antioch) and the Herodian family leads him to speculate that Manaen was perhaps one of the royal family's retainers in that city.

5.9 Possible links with powerful groups in Alexandria

Since Jews from Egypt residing in Jerusalem are mentioned in the list of Diaspora groups that reacted to the glossolalia phenomenon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10), I find it plausible that Jews from Alexandria formed part of the "3,000 souls" who were added to the community of believers that day, as well as the various tranches of later converts mentioned in Luke's text.

We learn from Read-Heimerdinger (1998:35) that the political and trading links between Egypt, Cyprus and Palestine date back to Alexander the Great.⁴⁵³ But later, according to Homer (1963:39), after Greece had lost her empire, "Rome, not Greece dominated the history of the Mediterranean world" and, as "a consequence of Roman policy, trade shifted to Rhodes, Antioch, Selencia and especially to Alexandria". Of particular interest to the present enquiry is Edersheim's contention (1904:98-99) that Alexandria was home to the richest and most influential Jewish community of the entire Diaspora.

⁴⁵¹ Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:142) state that "The title σύντροφος is frequent and formal. It is a title of honour given at court to certain youths of the same age as a prince, and retained by adults".

⁴⁵² Witherington cites Downey (1961).

⁴⁵³ She writes that "Cyprus was the nearest island of any size to Palestine, about 60 miles off the coast of Syria. In the middle of the first century BC, it had been incorporated into the Roman Empire, but since the time of Alexander it had belonged to Egypt". Kollman (2004:4) confirms that "Cyprus, the third-largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, had been ruled by the Ptolemies since the end of the fourth century BC and had become increasingly Hellenized".

He also states that, “at the time of Philo the number of Jews in Egypt amounted to no less than one million.”⁴⁵⁴ The supervision of navigation, both by sea and river, was wholly entrusted to them. In fact, the large export trade, especially in grain – and Egypt was the granary of the world – was entirely in their hands. The provisioning of Italy and of the world was the business of the Jews”.⁴⁵⁵

Apart from Philo, perhaps the most famous Alexandrian Jews of the period were his relatives, Alexander and Demetrius. Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.159-160) explains that Alexander was “old friends” with the Roman emperor, Claudius; and since there is no evidence that Claudius ever journeyed to Egypt, Evans (1995:580) argues that Alexander probably spent time in Rome, and further suggests that the financier was a Roman citizen.⁴⁵⁶ She also states that Alexander became the procurator (*epitropos*) of the extensive land estates in Egypt belonging to the emperor’s mother, Antonia Drusus. We know that Alexander and Demetrius were *alabarchs*, a title that includes the function of “tax farmer”;⁴⁵⁷ and Josephus (*War* 5.204-205) draws our attention to a spectacular donation from Alexander, who paid for nine of the large gates of the Temple in Jerusalem to be

⁴⁵⁴ Philo (*In Flaccum* 43, 45) claims that, in 38 AD, “the Jews dwelling in Alexandria and Egypt from the Libyan slope to the borders of Aethiopia do not fall short of a million”. He also states (*In Flaccum* 6, 8) that two out of the five wards in Alexandria were Jewish.

⁴⁵⁵ Garnsey (1983:118) estimates that, during the late Republican/early Imperial period, Rome needed to import approximately 150,000 tonnes of grain annually – mostly by sea.

⁴⁵⁶ From the entry on Philo in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: the early years* (Cambridge University Press, 2000:878), we learn that Alexander’s father was a *civis romanus* or Roman citizen. For further references to Alexander, see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.5.2 (100) and 19.5.1. (276).

⁴⁵⁷ According to the Jewish Encyclopaedia reference concerning the title of *alabarch*, “The trend of modern opinion is to connect [this title] with the Greek term for ink, ἄλαβα (*alaba*), taking ink in the sense of writing (*scriptura*), which, in those days, was a token for tax (*vectigal*). Such a derivation would imply that the Alabarch was a farmer of taxes, certainly from the time of the Ptolemies [...] Strabo (quoted by Josephus, *Antiquities* xiv. 7, § 2), who was in Egypt about 24 B.C., calls the governor of the Jews ‘ethnarch’ (ἐθνάρχης), and remarks that he ruled over the Jews as over an autonomous community (Ὡς ἂν πόλιτείας ἄρχων αὐτῶτελῶς). If the term as used by Strabo is correct, then the Alabarch must have been known among the heathen as ethnarch; so that one would surmise that the term ἄλαβάρχης was used only by the Jews”.

overlaid with silver and gold. Consequently, Evans (1995:578) writes that “a gift of this magnitude would suggest that Alexander either already had or quickly made important connections with the High Priest in Jerusalem”.⁴⁵⁸

It is also interesting to note that, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.159-160), in or around 35 AD, Herod Agrippa sailed to Alexandria and begged Alexander for a loan of 200,000 drachmas.⁴⁵⁹ At the time, the king was in debt to the Imperial treasury in Rome in the amount of 300,000 pieces of silver and, according to Evans (1995:579), before he sailed to Alexandria, he was being held at Anthedon, near Gaza on the Mediterranean coast, by the procurator of the imperial estate at Jamnia with orders to collect the full amount owed. In other words, Agrippa was desperate and would therefore have been “indebted” to Alexander in more ways than one. Furthermore, Josephus (*Antiquities* 19.276-277) informs us that, sometime after 41 AD, Alexander's son Marcus married Agrippa's daughter Berenice. In addition, he mentions (*Antiquities* 20.147) that Demetrius the *alabarch* was at one time married to Mariamme, one of Agrippa's other daughters. Therefore, since Gross (1975:22) asserts that Demetrius and Alexander were both “relatives of Philo”, this would mean that the family of Alexander was linked to the

⁴⁵⁸ The remaining gate (“Gate Beautiful”) was made from Corinthian bronze, which Josephus (*War* 5.201) claims far exceeded the others in value. Gross (1975:13) informs us that it “allegedly required twenty men to open or close” and was the gift of a wealthy Egyptian Jew named Nicanor, hence it was also called “the Nicanor gate”.

⁴⁵⁹ Cited in Evans (1995:579) as well as Gross (1975:22). Josephus writes that “Alexander refused to grant this loan to [Agrippa] but he did not deny it to [Agrippa's wife] Cypros because he marvelled at her love of her husband and all her good qualities”. Rathbone (2007:311) puts the amount at 170,000 drachmas, but that could describe the balance of the loan handed over to Agrippa at Puteoli, where Alexander had an office, since, according to Evans (1995:579), he gave 5 talents (30,000 drachmas) to Agrippa in Alexandria.

Herodians through two different marriages – as well as a not inconsiderable debt obligation.⁴⁶⁰

Consequently, apart from a well-attested link with the influential and implicitly wealthy Christian community in Antioch, it is also possible that there was some sort of personal, commercial or political connection between Barnabas, his family and/or their Cypriot associates and Jews in North Africa, which may have included the circle surrounding the immensely powerful Jewish financiers of Alexandria.⁴⁶¹ If true, both the High Priest and Sadducee elite (who did not dare offend powerful benefactors like Alexander, Demetrius and/or Nicanor) and also Agrippa (who over time became related by marriage to two of the Alexandrian financiers and also heavily in debt to one of them) would have plenty of reasons for leaving Barnabas alone, and also ensuring he was not around to spoil any plans they were hatching that threatened the leadership of the primitive church. Consequently, that kind of network would have provided Barnabas with a position of economic and political power (in Jerusalem and throughout parts of the Diaspora) that would make him virtually untouchable.

Furthermore, Pseudo-Clementine suggests a direct link between the apostle himself and Alexandria, claiming that “Christianity was first preached in the streets of Alex-

⁴⁶⁰ However, even if there was no familial link between the two *alabarchs*, Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.147) alludes to the position of power and influence of Demetrius, by describing him as “a Jew of prominent birth and great wealth”. Also, since the loan was so large, it is possible that Alexander did not advance Agrippa the full amount out of his personal funds, but may have arranged for a syndicate of Jewish financiers to be involved. If so, this would mean that Agrippa was “indebted” to a circle of powerful Jewish financiers in Egypt that reached beyond the *alabarch*’s immediate family.

⁴⁶¹ According to Rathbone (2007:315), “In Egypt the Roman period saw a boom in the number of private banks”; similarly, Homoud (1985:18) asserts that, in the first century AD, banking in Egypt “attained the highest stages of development”, which resulted in the country becoming rich and prosperous.

andria by Barnabas”;⁴⁶² however, Barnard (1964:145, n. 1), who cites this reference, expresses doubt concerning the historical value of this tradition. From Barnard (1964:164), we also learn that Eusebius, Jerome and Epiphanius associate the family of Barnabas with the Alexandrian church, through his nephew, John-Mark.⁴⁶³ And even though he comments that many scholars have dismissed this as pure legend, Barnard (1964:150) concludes his article with the statement that “the connection between John-Mark and Alexandria, recorded by Eusebius in his ‘Ecclesiastical History’ [2:16], should be treated with more respect than has been usual in discussions of the origins of Christianity in Egypt”.

Also, Pearson (1986:209-210) claims that “some of the Hellenists hounded out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1) went to Alexandria; in any case, traffic between Jerusalem and Alexandria was extensive at that time”.⁴⁶⁴ On the other hand, Sangrador (1994) argues that the first Christians to evangelise Alexandria were Hellenist missionaries who made their

⁴⁶² In *Homilies* 1.8-12

⁴⁶³ According to the Catholic Encyclopaedia, the tradition representing Mark as the founder of the Church of Alexandria is attested by Eusebius (*Church History* II, xvi, xxiv), by Jerome (*De Vir. Illust.*, viii), by the Apostolic Constitutions (VII, xlvi), by Epiphanius (*Hær.*, li, 6) and by many later authorities. The date at which Mark came to Alexandria is uncertain; however, the Chronicle of Eusebius assigns it to the first years of Claudius (AD 41-4), and further states that Mark's first successor, Anianus, succeeded to the See of Alexandria in the eighth year of Nero (AD 61-2). This would make Mark Bishop of Alexandria for a period of about twenty years. On the assumption that the founder of the Church of Alexandria was identical with the companion of Paul and Barnabas, the Acts account presents possible problems, since we find him at Jerusalem and Antioch about AD 46 (Acts 12:25), in Salamis about 47 (Acts 13:5), at Antioch again about 49 or 50 (Acts 15:37-9), and when he quitted Antioch, on the separation of Paul and Barnabas, it was not to Alexandria but to Cyprus that he turned (Acts 15:39). There is nothing to prove that all this is inconsistent with his being Bishop of Alexandria at the time, but seeing that the chronology of the Apostolic age is uncertain, and that we have no earlier authority than Eusebius for the date of the foundation of the Alexandrian Church, we may perhaps conclude with more probability that it was founded somewhat later. There is abundance of time between AD 50 and 60, a period during which the New Testament is silent in regard to Mark, for his activity in Egypt. This information is available online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09672c.htm>; accessed on July 14th 2010.

⁴⁶⁴ Pearson (1986:210, n. 14) also cites a reference from Clement of Alexandria regarding John-Mark's association with Alexandria, noting that “The letter fragment of Clement of Alexandria edited by Morton Smith (1973:446/448) refers to Mark's arrival in Alexandria after Peter's death in Rome”.

journey to the city some time later, after Paul's dispute with Mark and Barnabas; and, according to Bingham (1996:567-568), "Such a southerly course is demonstrated by recounting the habits of Mediterranean sea traffic". In his review of Sangrador (1994), Bingham writes that the former "shows an ancient, regular relationship between [Cyprus] and Alexandria and argues that although not specifically recorded, it would be natural to see them also sailing to Alexandria". Furthermore, Collins (1983:10, 20) informs us that "The lively contacts between Judea and Egypt in the Ptolemaic period, and the ease with which prominent Jews engaged in Hellenistic commerce and politics, are illustrated by the Zeno papyri (*Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* 1:115-146) and the tales of the Tobiads in Josephus" (*Antiquities* 12.4.1-11 [154-234]). From these sources, we find sufficient evidence to establish the possibility of connections between leaders of the Jewish community in Alexandria,⁴⁶⁵ the most important financial and trading centre in the Roman empire, outside of Italy, and members of the primitive church community in Jerusalem; in particular, the Hellenist-capitalists – which would have included Barnabas, one of their leaders.

This could further help to explain the possible extent and power of this particular apostle's network; and, if true, these connections would have protected him (and his family) during periods of persecution, and also deterred even the most powerful groups in Jerusalem and the Diaspora from crossing swords with him. For instance, in Lystra, when the pagans saw the miracle of the cripple walking, they shouted that "the gods have come down to us in human form" (Acts 14:11). But it was Barnabas to whom they

⁴⁶⁵ Another Coptic tradition claims that Theophilus, who Luke addresses in the introductory verses of both the Gospel of Luke (1:3) and Acts (1:1), was a Jew from Alexandria; also, that Luke studied medicine at the School of Alexandria, and that he and Theophilus may have met during this time. However, neither claim can be substantiated.

gave the title of “Zeus” (14:12) who, according to Greek mythology,⁴⁶⁶ was the king of the gods and ruler of Mount Olympus; while Paul was given the title of “Hermes”, a messenger from the gods to humans.⁴⁶⁷ Kollman (2004:36) argues that “The identification of Barnabas with Zeus and Paul with Hermes, while attributable to Barnabas’ greater age, on the one hand, and Paul’s perhaps greater eloquence, on the other (*cf.* 2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:16), also expresses a hierarchical relationship”. To support this assertion, he mentions that, at this point in the Acts narrative, Luke changes the order of names back to “the apostles Barnabas and Paul” (14:14).⁴⁶⁸

Of particular interest is the fact that, in Lystra, when Paul got stoned, Barnabas did not (14:19-20). So, once again, circumstances and other factors conspired to promote Barnabas and also keep him from harm. We are told that Paul’s assailants were Lycaonians, stirred up by Jews from Antioch and Iconium (14:19); however, it is not clear in the text as to whether the stoning was carried out by the Jewish visitors, the locals in Lystra, or a combination of both.⁴⁶⁹ Therefore, we are presented with a choice of two scenarios in which either the Lycaonians were so affected by Barnabas’ physical resemblance to their god, as Dods suggests, they could not bring themselves to do him harm; or else the Jews from Antioch and Iconium had reason to fear potential retaliation from the older

⁴⁶⁶ Some ET bibles use Jupiter, the equivalent leader of the gods in Roman mythology

⁴⁶⁷ This begs the question as to why any group of people would give Barnabas such a lofty title – unless, of course, he looked, talked and behaved like the leader in that particular situation. Dods writes (1905:341) that “This belief came more readily to the mind of the inhabitants of Lystra, owing to the tradition that Jupiter [i.e. Zeus] had once before visited their city in human form. That Barnabas could possibly be identified with [this pagan god], with whose statue they were familiar, is a tribute to his appearance”.

⁴⁶⁸ Interestingly, in Acts 15:22, Luke reverses the order to “Paul and Barnabas” but then, just three verses later (15:25), he reports that the contents of the letter from the apostles to the church in Antioch list the pair as “our beloved Barnabas and Paul”.

⁴⁶⁹ Lüdemann (1989:164) writes that “The question whether Jews or Gentiles carried out the punishment of stoning on Paul is left open”.

apostle's powerful connections in Jerusalem, Antioch and elsewhere throughout the Diaspora, and so directed their attack and murderous efforts exclusively in Paul's direction.⁴⁷⁰

5.10 Possible reasons why the Paul-Barnabas partnership turned sour

Since the issue impacts directly on this re-evaluation of his status within the primitive church, it would be worthwhile at this point to attempt to shed further light on the fluctuating hierarchy implicit in the Acts record of the relationship between Barnabas and Paul,⁴⁷¹ as well as possible reasons behind the "sharp disagreement" between these two apostles (Acts 15:39) that ended in their separation: Barnabas going to Cyprus (with John-Mark), and Paul to Asia Minor (with Silas).

To date, exegetical efforts focussing on this latter episode have concentrated mainly on analysing John-Mark's imputed character flaws or other possible reasons arising from familial loyalty between uncle and nephew (e.g. Bruce, 1990:349).⁴⁷² However, I submit that the incident described as *paroxysmos*, or 'violent anger',⁴⁷³ and subsequent split between the two apostles, may in fact have been caused by Paul's well-documented apostolic ambitions. Luke writes that "Paul did not think it best to have along with them the one who had quit and deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work" (Acts 15:38). I would argue that this statement is simply a convenient ex-

⁴⁷⁰ Saul-Paul's conversion to the nascent sect (Acts 9ff.) would have been seen by the ruling elite of Jerusalem as an act of betrayal, and could have left him bereft of powerful allies and protectors; not so Barnabas, thanks to his pre-existing and interlocking networks.

⁴⁷¹ As implied in Luke's various changes in order of precedence: i.e. Barnabas and Saul (or Paul) *cf.* Paul and Barnabas.

⁴⁷² Bruce (1990:349) writes that "Probably family feeling influenced Barnabas to some extent".

⁴⁷³ It is possible that the 'sharp disagreement' mentioned in Acts 15:39 escalated beyond the verbal level, since *paroxysmos* (παροξυσμός) is used in LXX Deuteronomy 29:27 and Jeremiah 39:37 to denote 'violent anger'.

cuse rather than a definitive reason,⁴⁷⁴ since Dods (1905:339) comments that “we have no reason to suppose that it was any shrinking from danger or hardship which urged Mark homeward. In later times he showed no such shrinking, and it is quite as likely that he resented some personal slight, or that there existed in Jerusalem some attraction that determined his course”. I would suggest instead that the crux of the problem was Paul’s less-than-subtle campaign of self-aggrandisement: i.e. his overweening desire to establish himself in the eyes of the primitive church as the equal of Peter and more. In fact, there are times when Paul attempts to usurp Peter’s premier role in the church’s ministry to the Gentiles⁴⁷⁵ – perhaps because this is where the greater opportunities lay, particularly for an apostle who was also a Roman citizen.

Therefore, Barnabas, a wealthy Levite and Hellenist, with a powerful network of contacts throughout the Diaspora, might have been considered by Paul as something of a rival or perhaps even an obstacle in this pursuit.⁴⁷⁶ Thus, the “personal slight” that Mark resented, if we accept Dods’ conjecture, may have stemmed from a loyal nephew’s annoyance at Paul’s attempts to elevate his role and importance above that of his uncle, Barnabas,⁴⁷⁷ which Mark perhaps viewed as a lack of respect if not blatant disloyalty,

⁴⁷⁴ According to Read-Heimerdinger (1998:40), “the reason for the split, such as is placed by the author of Acts in Paul’s mouth, is not entirely convincing”.

⁴⁷⁵ Peter’s status in this regard would have been established after his meeting with Cornelius and subsequent account – in front of the astonished apostles and brethren – of the visitation of the Holy Spirit before and during the event (see Acts 10 and 11). Also, in Acts 15:7, Peter himself claims to have been selected (from among all the apostles and brethren) in order that “by [his] mouth, the Gentiles should hear the message of the Gospel”.

⁴⁷⁶ Referring to Barnabas’ early ministry in Antioch, Kollman (2004:24) writes that “The organized establishment of a mission to the uncircumcised Gentiles, the start of a genuine Christianity clearly distinguished from Judaism, and the beginnings of autonomy for the Christian community outside the synagogue were all closely tied to the person of Barnabas”.

⁴⁷⁷ Rius-Camps (1995:193-195) has suggested that one of the reasons why John-Mark withdrew in Perga was because “Paul [had] taken over as leader whereas Barnabas was named as leader by the Holy Spirit from the outset of the mission”, as shown by the hierarchical implications in the order of names in Acts 13:2.

since Paul would never have been accepted by the church leadership, and his ministry would thus have not got off the ground, if Barnabas had not initially sponsored and also promoted him (Acts 9:27, 11:25-26). Consequently, the close relationship between Peter and the family of Barnabas could have been an issue for Paul in his quest for recognition as something more than an apostle, even though that title alone would place him among the highest echelons of the primitive church leadership.

The extent of Paul's ambition can be seen in his letter to the Galatians (2:6-8), when he describes the outcome of his conference with the "elders" (i.e. the so-called Apostolic Council) in Jerusalem. The sense of competition is evident in Paul's comparison between his calling and ministry and that of Peter – in particular, his failure to recognise the precedence of the older apostle's calling to the Gentiles.⁴⁷⁸ And we also note the lack of any mention of Barnabas when Paul is describing the outcome of the central debate at that event. According to Kollman (2004:51), "At the time of the Apostolic Council, Barnabas unquestionably belonged among the five most important figures in early Christianity, who determined the fate of the Church", which begs the question as to why Paul omitted any reference to his fellow-apostle when giving his account of the conference. Kollman also raises this issue and explains that "The portrayal of events in Galatians 2:1-10 is focused entirely on the person of Paul [...] The role of Barnabas in the Jerusalem negotiations is inevitably forced into the background".

⁴⁷⁸ In Galatians 2:6-8: Paul boasts that it was he who Yahweh had "entrusted [to carry] the Gospel to the uncircumcised [Gentiles, just as definitely] as Peter had been entrusted [to proclaim] the Gospel to the circumcised [Jews]", which blatantly ignores the older apostle's prior calling, as indicated by his claim to have initiated that ministry; see Acts 15:7, as cited above.

In the verses that follow (Galatians 2:11-14), Paul comments on the “Gentile table-fellowship” controversy in Antioch, when he berated Peter for his hypocrisy in choosing to refrain from his usual custom of eating with Gentile Christians, after a group of Torah-observing members of the Jesus-Believers’ sect arrived from Jerusalem, sent by James.⁴⁷⁹ This episode occurs chronologically almost immediately prior to Paul’s proposal that he and Barnabas revisit the Christian communities in Cyprus and Asia Minor. Consequently, the episode with Peter, which provided unmistakable proof of the depth and strength of Barnabas’ relationship with and the extent of his loyalty to the leading apostle,⁴⁸⁰ would have been fresh in Paul’s mind. Therefore, it would now be useful to review the detail behind the Barnabas-Peter-Mark relationship to help understand why Paul thought it was problematic in terms of his personal ambition.

5.11 Paul’s problem with the Barnabas-Peter-Mark relationship

If we accept the full implications of the ‘Barnabas’ reading of Acts 1:23 in Codex Bezae, he and Peter had known each other since the early days of Jesus’ ministry. In fact, as mentioned previously, the Bezan text suggests that Peter had so much admiration and respect for the Levite, he put him forward as the most suitable candidate to fill the key position of apostle-treasurer, left vacant by the death of Judas.

⁴⁷⁹ In describing the different groups within the primitive church congregation in Jerusalem, Kollman (2004:15) writes that “to the right of James stood an influential faction of Pharisaic members of the community (Acts 15:5; 21:20-24; Galatians 2:4) characterized by an especially rigorous attitude towards the Law”, which obviously included the Jewish laws on table-fellowship, as stated, for example, in *Jubilees* 22:16 (“Separate from the nations and do not eat with them”). Fitzmeyer (1976:238) describes the Pharisees mentioned in Acts 15:5 as “Christians who insisted on the strict observance of the Mosaic law”; thus, Crossan (1999:476) writes that “God’s law was still binding on them as Jewish Christians”.

⁴⁸⁰ Paul writes, in Galatians 2:13, that “even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy”.

We must also remember that Barnabas was a major benefactor of the primitive church, so much so that Luke singled him out in the text of Acts as an exemplar of generosity. And, in his capacity as a power-broker, he was no doubt instrumental in working with Peter to resolve the leadership problem highlighted in Acts 6:1, and thus would have contributed to the subsequent “management restructuring” that resulted in seven of his fellow Hellenist-capitalists taking control of the *trapeza* (bank) at the heart of the congregation. Furthermore, the esteem with which the apostles, including Peter, their reputed leader, held Barnabas is implied by the fact that they chose him to head up the new work in Antioch. And when Peter escaped from prison, he went immediately to the house owned by Mary, the sister of Barnabas, which gives us some indication of the strength of the relationship that existed between the leading apostle and Barnabas’ wealthy family, including the possibility that Peter may have enjoyed their patronage in some form, which Paul may have found objectionable.⁴⁸¹ In addition, we know that the relationship between Peter and John-Mark was such that the gospel account attributed to Mark was supposedly written after hearing Peter preach;⁴⁸² and, finally, in his first epistle, Peter refers to Mark as his “son” (1 Peter 5:13).

Note also that it was Paul who proposed that he and Barnabas should revisit the church communities in Cyprus and Asia Minor. If my hypothesis concerning the extent

⁴⁸¹ According to Hansen and Oakman (1998:71), “patronage/clientage was a clearly defined relationship between individuals of different status for their mutual benefit”. Likewise, Moxnes (1993:242) informs us that “Patron-client relationships are social relationships between individuals based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power [...] A patron has social, economic and political resources that are needed by a client”. Of particular interest, Chow (1992:167-187) argues that some of Paul’s problems with the Corinthian church, as depicted in his letters to that group, were caused by the practice of personal patronage within the congregation. Therefore, I find it plausible that Paul may have had problems with a client-patron style of relationship between Peter and the family of Barnabas.

⁴⁸² See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III 39.15 (Papias); VI 14.3-7 (Clement of Alexandria); VI 25.4-5 (Origen), cited in Kollman, 2004:30, n. 3

of Paul's ambition is correct, then it is likely that there was a hidden agenda behind his proposal. Firstly, from Acts 16:37-38, 22:25-29 and 23:27, we know that Paul was a Roman citizen, and even though Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, I suggest that Paul's ambition may have caused him to bristle when he found himself constantly having to play "second fiddle" to the older apostle in that city; more so in Cyprus, where Barnabas was born and where he undoubtedly retained many important contacts. Consequently, I would argue that Asia Minor was perhaps where Paul's true desire and ambitions lay – at this point. In Acts 13:9-12, Luke writes that, in Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas met and impressed Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul;⁴⁸³ and Kollman (2004:33) informs us that numerous inscriptions attest to the fact that "the family of Sergius Paulus [or Paullus]⁴⁸⁴ had its *patria* in Pisidian Antioch and possessed a considerable amount of land in the province of Galatia". He also notes conjecture by Mitchell (1980:1074, n. 134)⁴⁸⁵ that "the proconsul himself advised Paul to continue his journey to Pisidian Antioch, where he could provide introductions to the upper class of the Roman colony"; and that could have fired Paul's ambition with thoughts of further possible high level introductions, this time in the city where his ultimate ambition lay: Rome.

If true, then Paul's hidden agenda and thus primary motivation for revisiting the churches in this particular area could have been to reactivate the contact with the proconsul in Cyprus and also exploit the introductions to his powerful Roman friends in

⁴⁸³ Interestingly, in Luke's text, it is precisely at the point when Saul meets the Roman proconsul that his Hebrew name is changed to the Romanized "Paul"; however, whether this change was effected to improve his ministry opportunities, as many believe, or perhaps for personal ambition, is open to debate.

⁴⁸⁴ Taylor (1995:1194) asserts that the Sergius Paulus in Luke's account was "Quintus Sergius Paullus, who is otherwise unknown, and who can be dated to the reign of Caligula: i.e. AD 37-41".

⁴⁸⁵ See also Breytenbach (1996:39-44) and Riesner (1998:39-44)

Galatia and beyond.⁴⁸⁶ In support of this theory, it is interesting to note that, after his separation from Barnabas, Paul chose to embark directly for Asia Minor with Silas who, coincidentally, was also a Roman citizen.⁴⁸⁷ Thus, it would be naïve to assume that Paul wanted Barnabas as his companion on the journey purely because of their shared apostolic calling and/or long-standing friendship, as our understanding of the way Paul's mind seems to work gives rise to speculation that there may have been other reasons involved as well. Nevertheless, as far as Paul was concerned, the possible inclusion of John-Mark was another matter; and if we discount the imputed character flaw in Acts 13:13, Paul's rejection of Barnabas' suggestion stems from two possible reasons, both of which are motivated by personal ambition.

The more obvious reason is that the inclusion of John-Mark may have represented one-too-many members of the rival Peter-faction in the group for his liking, in line with the explanation given above. On the other hand, Paul's problem with John-Mark may have been based on the possibility that, as Kollman (2004:34) suggests, the younger man's reason for "turning back" at Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13) was his disagreement with the change of plans during the original Cyprus visit: i.e. the inclusion of Asia Minor in the missionary journey – which arose from the possible suggestion of Sergius Paulus, and was thus motivated by Paul's ambition.⁴⁸⁸ So, when Barnabas argued for John-Mark's inclusion, Paul's objection may have been triggered by concerns arising from the close relationship between John-Mark and Peter, or memories of the younger

⁴⁸⁶ Thus, I regard it as no coincidence that Paul's report to the Galatian church (on the so-called apostolic conference) focuses on himself exclusively and omits any reference to Barnabas, except for the comment about the older apostle being influenced by Peter.

⁴⁸⁷ Acts 16:37 describes both Paul and Silas as Roman citizens

⁴⁸⁸ Kollman cites Breytenbach (1996:43, n. 79).

man's earlier displeasure with Paul's plans and underlying ambition – or both, since both scenarios indicate that John-Mark would not readily acquiesce to Paul's decisions concerning possible travel destinations, or any further attempts to usurp the leadership role.

Therefore, if I may be permitted to amplify Luke's text in Acts 15:38, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that "Paul did not think it best – *for what he was planning* – to have along with them the one who had quit and deserted them in Pamphylia". Either way, Barnabas obviously refused to accept Paul's objection to Mark without a fight – literally, it would appear. And the ensuing, increasingly-heated argument may perhaps have included, among other things, an emotionally-charged version of Paul's less than flattering opinion of Barnabas' and Peter's recent behaviour: namely, the Gentile table-fellowship controversy. That may have caused Barnabas to protest strongly, and perhaps counter with his own recollection of some of Paul's hot-headed, social and religious faux pas, along with his true feelings about the underlying motivation for Paul's plans – which would then have caused the situation to escalate into violent anger: i.e. *paroxysmos*.

When that level of anger erupts, it has usually been building over a period of time and involves a series of unresolved issues festering just below the surface, creating an atmosphere of escalating frustration and exasperation. And I would suggest that, at this point, an exasperated Barnabas simply ran out of patience with Paul's personal ambition, causing him reconsider the future of their partnership.⁴⁸⁹ However, even without

⁴⁸⁹ Tradition generally places the decision to divide up the missionary campaign in the hands of Paul; however, there is nothing in Luke's text to suggest that it wasn't Barnabas who took the initiative in this matter.

this kind of speculation, the background information relating to the extent of the Peter-Barnabas relationship is helpful in assessing the true status of Barnabas within the leadership of the primitive church.

5.12 Two priest-bankers: Joseph-Barnabas and Joseph, the patriarch

Finally, it would be interesting to explore the possibility of some kind of association (at least in the minds of the apostles and/or Luke) between the Joseph of this study and his namesake, the patriarch.

On the one hand, we have Joseph, who is also known as “Barnabas” (i.e. Son of Encouragement, etc.), the “Just” or “Righteous One”, who was also a Levite and Hellenist-capitalist; and on the other hand, we have Joseph, also known as the “Righteous” or “Virtuous” (in Hebrew, *tsadik*), and Israel’s original and premier priest-banker. To suggest a link, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:52) cites a rabbinic Midrash commenting on Genesis 50:21, in which the patriarch Joseph “spoke mild words to the hearts of the tribal fathers [his brothers and fellow Patriarchs] and therefore *comforted* them” (my italics); and also writes that “Mention is made of the fact in Gen. 50:15-21 where in the English translation (RSV) it is said that ‘[Joseph] reassured them and comforted them’ (50:21). The verb in the LXX text is precisely παρακάλεω. Thus, the qualities of comforter and righteousness are two of the outstanding qualities attributed to the person of Joseph in Jewish tradition”.

She further asserts that “The appropriateness of the name ‘Barnabas’ as Luke translates it, in association with the other name ‘the Just or the Righteous One’, is evidence that Barnabas is the correct reading of Acts 1:23. That they should be recorded by

Luke as being attributed to Joseph, the disciple of Jesus, points to an intentional assimilation between Barnabas and the historical figure of Joseph". As we see, Reader-Heimerdinger has based her opinion of Luke's "intentional assimilation" on Jewish historical-literary sources, but we should also consider the possible economic parallels. After all, the coincidence that Joseph-Barnabas and Joseph, the patriarch, both occupied the spiritual-economic role of "priest-banker" is so remarkable, it could not possibly have escaped the apostles when, in addition to his existing title (in Latin) of "The Just or Righteous One", they gave him the new name Barnabas, or "Son of Encouragement" or "Consolation".

5.13 Conclusion

After the separation with Paul, Barnabas disappears from the Acts narrative and, according to the pseudepigraphic "Acts of Barnabas by John Mark" and the "Laudatio" of Alexander Monarchus,⁴⁹⁰ Barnabas and John-Mark conducted their mission throughout Cyprus before Barnabas was reputedly martyred in Salamis in around AD 55.⁴⁹¹ In the "Acts of Barnabas" it is suggested that he was killed by local Jews who were encouraged by his old adversary, Elymas (*cf.* Acts 13:8-9); whereas, in the "Laudatio", his murderers are Jews who had come to Salamis from Syria.⁴⁹²

In the conclusion to his instructive monograph, Kollman (2004:63) writes of Barnabas that "His enduring significance consists in the fact that he, *like no other*, appears in a leading role in all the prominent events of early Christianity". Obviously, this state-

⁴⁹⁰ According to Kollman (2004:47), in these two documents, the "respective accounts of the second Cyprus mission and the death of Barnabas concur in outline"

⁴⁹¹ The traditional anniversary of the apostle's death is June 11th.

⁴⁹² See Acts of Barnabas 23 and Alexander Monarchus, *Laudatio* 26.479 - 29.549

ment alone would settle the true position/ranking of Joseph-Barnabas within the leadership of the primitive church. However, if we also consider the behind-the-scenes activity of this Hellenist-capitalist and power-broker, and his possible influence in the wider economic and political circles of the Jewish Diaspora in the first century AD, his status can indeed be said to correlate in many ways to that of Joseph, the patriarch: a priest-banker who used his elevated position, both economically and politically, to help open doors and smooth the way for Yahweh's people and His work on earth during a crucial period of momentous change and historical developments.

6. THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH 'TRAPEZA': A THEORETICAL MODEL

6.1 Introduction

To appreciate the full extent of the socio-economic impact of a *trapeza* operating within the primitive church community, we need to create some kind of theoretical model-cum-guide as to the possible scope of its activities. The model offered here is based on the available literature dealing with the activities of similar Greco-Roman banking operations and temple-based banks, and comes primarily from our knowledge of the private, Hellenistic style of *trapeza*, which generally, unlike its more ancient temple-based predecessors, did not owe its success entirely to any link with a religious or secular institution (e.g. temple or palace), but more specifically to the competence and business connections of the individual or individuals who controlled it.

You will notice that I often resort to the phrase “banking facility” or “banking operation”. My reasons for doing so are because, in the mind of the modern reader, the word “bank” on its own conjures up stereotypical notions that may or may not match the reality of what was taking place in the area known as Solomon’s porch during the three to three and a half years following the original Day of Pentecost. Cohen (1997) shares this concern for widespread misconceptions regarding the workings of ancient *trapezai*, and so chooses to refer to them as “trapezitic businesses” rather than banks. He informs us (1997:8) that the long standing and widely-accepted definition of a bank is “a business having an obligation to repay funds (‘deposits’) received from a multitude of sources, but with the interim right to make loans and investments for its own account”. Obviously, this applies to the specific category of a commercial (i.e. deposit and loan)

bank, and is therefore far too narrow for the purposes of this present enquiry, because a trapezitic business can be much more than this,⁴⁹³ depending, firstly, on the micro-economic environment in which it is operating; and, secondly, the skill and connections of the *trapezitai* involved, since these will often determine the kind of financing opportunities available for profitable exploitation.

According to Cohen (1997:62), the *trapezai* of ancient Greece were not institutions as we would understand them, but rather commercial enterprises that allowed the *trapezitai* to practice their *technē*, which he defines as “a craft or trade requiring personal commitment, knowledge and skill”. He states (1997:61) that the Athenian legal system did not recognise these businesses as legal (i.e. corporate) entities in their own right, but as “intensely personalized operations (*ergasia*) conducted by individuals having considerable skills in finance”, and also comments (1997:9) that they were “almost entirely free of governmental regulation”. He then goes on to make another important observation:

For modern, economic historians, this Athenian characterization has resulted in dual confusion: the assumption that since the form of organization was simple, the business conducted must have been insignificant or simplistic; and the equally enticing but incorrect conclusion that because of the complexity of the business undertaken, Athenian banks must have required an operational organization similar to that of modern enterprises. In reality, the Athenian *trapeza* was a relatively simple organization with a complex business function.

⁴⁹³ As mentioned previously, Cohen (1997:7) contends that ancient *trapezitai* (bankers) not only “provided loans [and] accepted deposits”, they also “served as intermediaries in facilitating commerce”.

This, plus his conclusion (1997:224) that the Greek *trapezitai* transformed not just the economy, but also Athenian society, implies that there was a lot more taking place than just men sitting at small tables exchanging foreign coins.

6.2 The business conducted ‘through the bank’

Given the traditional, one-dimensional (i.e. charity-focused) interpretation of the text in Acts 6:1-3, we might be excused for thinking that a *trapeza* at the heart of the primitive church rarely operated as a bank in the truly commercial sense, and then perhaps only in order to offer loans to “needy” individuals to pay for personal items or necessities they could not afford without recourse to credit, commonly referred to as “consumption loans”.

However, the point that strikes us immediately from the available sources is that Greco-Roman *trapezai* were heavily if not primarily involved in loans for business purposes, referred to as “productive loans”.⁴⁹⁴ Cohen (1997:17) mentions a notable example of trapezitic involvement with the perfume business, which he asserts was a major Athenian obsession, and one that was heavily dependent on the availability of credit. He also provides us (1997:15) with the following helpful and comprehensive list of other types of activities that attracted loans from *trapezitai*:

⁴⁹⁴ Andreau (1999:74) comments that, because productive loans are not mentioned in the Roman literary texts, “some historians have even denied their existence, wrongly concluding that in antiquity credit amounted to no more than consumption loans”. Also, Verboven (2008:10) explains that “credit mediation by businessmen – *faeneratores* – was much more professionalised and developed than is generally recognised. ‘Professional’ financial intermediation was readily available from brokers and intermediaries for small and (very) large amounts of money. The non- or minimal involvement of deposit bankers in the extension of loans to businessmen, does not imply that the Roman financial system was inherently unsuitable to provide productive loans, it is merely a feature of the historically specific organisation of Roman credit markets”.

Bankers provided loans to purchase mining concessions and processing mills (Demosthenes 37, 40.52), to establish a cloth-making operation (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.7), to purchase land (*Inscriptiones graecae* II² 2762; *Ἀρχαιολογικὸν Δελτίον* 17[1961-2]; *Khronika* 35, no. 4), to help political leaders (Demosthenes 49.17, 23), to aid military operations (Demosthenes 49.6), to ransom friends (Demosthenes 53.9), to finance the import of lumber (Demosthenes 49.35-36), to assist business clients and their associates (Isokratēs 17.12, 38), to avoid creditors' execution on a ship (Demosthenes 33). In the dominant sphere of the Athenian economy, maritime trade, the *trapezai* held an important, perhaps a prime financing role. The banks also expedited commerce – and concurrently enlarged the effective money supply – through credit-enhancement devices that utilized bank deposits in place of coins.

Since the initial group of converts to the Jesus-Believers sect were described as devout, it might be imprudent to claim that a *trapeza* operating in the primitive church was heavily involved in financing the luxury goods trade – although it did form a key component of the first century economy in Jerusalem. Even so, from the above list, we can see that, with the right skills, experience and connections, the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* of the primitive church could easily have expanded the “business” (*chreia*) they were chosen to manage into some potentially lucrative areas.

6.3 Small tables perhaps, but not small transactions

Cohen (1997:23) further attempts to correct the stereotypical view of ancient *trapezai* and their clients when he writes that “Bank loans were not limited to inconsequential sums, nor were borrowers marginal creatures who could obtain credit nowhere else”.

He goes on to inform us that, in the available literature (e.g. the speeches of Demosthenes), the smallest loan mentioned is 100 drachmas, which he calculates is equivalent to “perhaps 150 days’ earnings [of a ‘not unskilled workman’] or the better part of a year’s compensation at then-prevailing rates”.⁴⁹⁵ However, this particular amount turns out to be the smallest of a series of loans made to a single borrower that, over time, reached an aggregate total of around 4,200 drachmas.⁴⁹⁶ For evidence of loan amounts from the Roman era, we have an account from the Muziris papyrus of a maritime loan in which the principal amount is 6,926,853 sesterces (or 1,731,713 *denarii*).⁴⁹⁷ Obviously, the amount of time, effort and expense involved in legal proceedings would normally prohibit disputes over trivial or minor sums from ending up in court. Therefore, we would not expect to find the kind of small amounts we normally associate with charitable activity (i.e. donations for personal needs) mentioned in surviving legal documents of the day, which constitute our main source of information here. As a consequence, in the context of an enquiry into the possible financing activities of the primi-

⁴⁹⁵ This figure (equaling 2/3 *denarius* per day) is given for wages in Athens in the fourth century BC. In first century AD Palestine, it was a full *denarius* per day.

⁴⁹⁶ See Demosthenes 49.22

⁴⁹⁷ See Rathbone (2000, in Temin 2002:18); a single *sestertius* (plural, *sesterces*) was equal to one-quarter of a *denarius*. Rathbone considers the Muziris papyrus to be the “master contract” for a standard maritime loan of the early Roman Empire: “The careless grammar and syntax, the general sloppiness of the document, suggest a scribe copying the boilerplate of a standard contract. In other words, maritime loans were common enough in the early Roman Empire to have a standard form known to all the merchants and their clerks”.

tive church congregation, the examples provided might be considered extraordinary and therefore inappropriate by some scholars. However, they do indicate the amount and extent of credit extended by ancient *trapezitai*; and, on that basis, they are helpful.

6.4 From foreign coins to foreign trade

The abovementioned menu of banking services that were conducted by ancient *trapezitai* begs the question: how did local money-changers sitting at small tables evolve into powerful and sophisticated financiers who could raise large sums from third parties and also participate in the profits of highly lucrative, international commercial ventures?

The answer is relatively simple. In the first instance, foreign coins would have been presented at the money-changers' tables by foreign merchants who needed local currency to purchase local goods. In addition, some of those foreign merchants may have also required a loan in order to purchase the goods, along with some advice perhaps concerning local suppliers. On the other hand, local merchants would also have required foreign currency – again perhaps in the form of a loan – in order to pay for foreign goods being landed by foreign merchants who demanded payment in their own currency. Thus, over time, the humble, rather flimsy money-changer's table became an important focal point for various interlocking networks consisting of foreign and local merchants, as well as local financiers, producers, manufacturers and also ship-owners.⁴⁹⁸ To confirm this, Rathbone (2007:317) informs us that, in the Roman period, "banks developed as the

⁴⁹⁸ In a similar manner, Lloyds of London, the international shipping and cargo insurance market, started from simple beginnings, in 1688, in Edward Lloyd's coffee-house, where merchants and traders met together on a regular basis.

nodes through which other networks and individuals intersected, connecting the disparate economic corners of the Roman Empire into a global village".⁴⁹⁹

6.5 Banking in the Roman Empire

According to Homer (1963:44), the Romans were "a nation of farmers and soldiers. They left manufacture, commerce and banking mainly to foreigners".

This is a gross oversimplification of what was a complex and geographically widespread economy,⁵⁰⁰ conducted by individuals from three distinct, socio-economic strata. Firstly, wealthy and all-powerful patricians or "elites", as Andreau calls them, who were mainly to be found in Italy, and whose primary economic motivation was the maintenance and augmentation of their patrimony and/or vast estates. Secondly, entrepreneurs, who were willing to take major risks and also travel extensively in the pursuit of profit. And, finally, artisans, who practiced the various trades, including that of professional banker, and whose activities were predominantly of a local nature. Interestingly, the majority of Homer's "foreigners" would have consisted of slaves and freedmen of the Roman elite who, as mentioned previously, conducted much of the day-to-day business of their masters' financing operations.

The *trapeza* of Greek origin, which first appeared in Athens in the fourth century BC, came to Rome during the period after the Second Punic War (post-210 BC), when a

⁴⁹⁹ Rathbone (2007:310) also suggests that "networks played a crucial role in enabling the development and functioning of a commerce that was large in aggregate, but composed of small agents and transactions".

⁵⁰⁰ Andreau (1999:57) writes that he was "struck by the complexity of Roman financial life".

number of Hellenistic practices were assimilated by both individuals and the state.⁵⁰¹ As stated above, the Athenian trapezitic business was “a relatively simple organization [i.e. enterprise] with a complex business function”, which allowed an individual banker the freedom and scope to perform a range of banking and financing functions. However, in Italy, banking evolved into a range of different and distinct niche businesses that operated within separate, specialised financing categories. Thus, in the Roman fiscal system, the singular, all-encompassing Greek-Hellenist occupation of *trapezitēs* – a description that covered a wide range of financial functionaries and/or functions – was broken down into its constituent parts to produce a menu of diverse, specialist banking functions depicted by the different role-labels of *argentarius*, *coactor argentarius*, *nummularius*, *fenerator*, *negotiator*, *arcarius* and *dispensator*.⁵⁰²

The main reason for this was the domination of the Roman elite in the area of loans and other forms of financing – as an obvious result of their vast wealth. According to Countryman (1980:23-24), “Members of the upper [social] orders in Rome – senators and equestrians – were required to possess a certain minimum wealth, called the *census*”.⁵⁰³ To explain the level of wealth/assets involved, he states (1980:41, n. 53) that “Equestrians were required to possess property worth 400,000 sesterces;⁵⁰⁴ senators

⁵⁰¹ According to Rathbone (2007:315), “Roman commercial practice owed much to Greek influence”, while Chachi (2005:7) asserts that “most of the earliest bankers in Rome had Greek names and were called *trapezitēs* as well”.

⁵⁰² These specialisations are explained thus: *argentarius* (deposit banker), *coactor argentarius* (deposit banker and money-receiver), *nummularius* (money-changer and assayer), *fenerator* (specialist moneylender), *negotiator* (specialist moneylender operating in the provinces), *arcarius* (cashier) and *dispensator* (treasurer).

⁵⁰³ Hence, Ovid writes: ‘*dat census honores*’ (*Amores* III.viii.55; cited in Ste Croix, 2001:425)

⁵⁰⁴ Finley (1973:46) explains that Roman society was originally organised as just two basic groupings (patricians and plebeians) and that the equestrian order was established by Augustus to embrace the growing number of elite who were not senators, but who owned property worth more than 400,000 sesterces.

1,200,000 sesterces (sometimes the figure is given as 1,000,000).⁵⁰⁵ But for practical purposes, a senator could not manage on less than 8,000,000".⁵⁰⁶ Even though we have evidence of specialist elite financiers, known as *feneratores*, the financing operations of the vast majority of elites were conducted primarily as part of the management of the overall income derived from their patrimony, alongside say rents or leases.⁵⁰⁷ As a consequence, the day-to-day business of professional banking was opened up to numerous non-elites operating at different levels of society. However, since these lower social ranks could not compete with the economic and political power of the aristocratic *feneratores*, it meant that the professional or artisan class of bankers were restricted to operating within whatever market niches were ignored by the elites, thus forcing them to specialise. For example, Andreau (1999:56) states that, unlike their Greek predecessors, professional bankers of the Roman era (*argentarii*) were not involved as principals in the most profitable form of lending: the so-called maritime or bottomry loans, which were financed by elite *feneratores* or entrepreneurs.⁵⁰⁸ Roman *argentarii* were apparently relegated to minor roles "as the creditors' payment agents, as intermediaries, as witnesses of the agreement, or as receivers of contracts that were deposited with them for safekeeping".⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁵ These minimum amounts are confirmed by Esler (1987:71, but given in *denarii*), Crossan (1999:180) and also Stegemann and Stegemann (1999:73), who explain that many equestrians and senators accumulated wealth far in excess of the minimum: e.g. the patrimony of Pliny the Younger was "about 20 million sesterces"; also, according to Tacitus (*Annals* 13.42), Seneca apparently amassed a fortune worth 300 million sesterces.

⁵⁰⁶ Countryman cites Richard Duncan-Jones (1974).

⁵⁰⁷ Andreau (1999:24) comments that, since "the elite started off with a collection of properties already in their possession, their economic strategies were founded upon the management of those possessions. Money was thus never regarded as capital, a value introduced into the economic process in order to create new wealth, but rather was seen either as a component of their patrimony, a substitute for land, houses, and slaves, or as an income provided by the patrimony".

⁵⁰⁸ Meggitt (1998:48) confirms that, with regard to the Mediterranean sea trade, "the upper echelons of Roman Imperial society" were "both the source of its funding and its chief financial beneficiaries".

⁵⁰⁹ For support, Andreau cites Bogaert (1968:372-274, 411-413 and 1994:217-218)

In between the elite financiers and the artisans who worked as professional bankers we find the “entrepreneurs”: wealthy businessmen who Andreau (1999:52) states “did not belong either to the landowning aristocracy or the world of professions, but who would nevertheless have occupied a substantial place”. In their search for profit, these entrepreneurs were willing to take risks (in a manner not unlike their modern counterparts), and used both their own funds, as well as the funds of others, in their high-level financing activities. According to Andreau (1999:15-16, 53), the primary role of a specific group of entrepreneurs known as *negotiatores* was to act as agents of the Roman elite and deploy the investment funds of their aristocratic clients in the provinces, where they advanced loans to private individuals, to cities, to vassal rulers and foreign sovereigns.

6.6 Trapeza or argentaria?

Of possible relevance to the present study is Cohen’s statement mentioned above that a Greek-style *trapeza* was “almost entirely free of governmental regulation” – because that was definitely not the case with a Roman *argentaria*.

Andreau (1999:10) informs us that one of the differences between the elite financiers and professional bankers (namely, *argentarii* and *coactores argentarii*, later *nummularii*) was the fact that the activities of the latter were regulated, including a rule that set limits on the interest rate, which applied specifically to *argentarii*. He asserts (1999:101-102) that even though the laws were enacted to govern the entire financial profession, they did not in fact apply to the elite financiers or entrepreneurs, but “solely to professional money-changers and bankers [who] constituted the only category of financiers

that was subject to a specific set of regulations applied on a permanent basis”.⁵¹⁰ By contrast, as Andreau further explains, in normal times, “the public authorities intervened very little in the affairs of private financiers”. Consequently, if there was a banking facility operating within the primitive church community in the post-Pentecost period, I would argue that, both in terms of its description and function, it is unlikely to have been a Roman-style *argentaria*, with its legislated bureaucratic burden and government oversight, simply because the Hellenist-Believers would have desired to avoid such oversight and scrutiny in Jerusalem, for reasons implicit in the tension described in Luke’s text. Therefore, they were more likely to choose to function as a private and virtually unregulated, Hellenistic-style *trapeza*, which would have avoided any problems with the Roman authorities in Palestine, and also their local Jewish counterparts.

I appreciate that the finer points of corporate law and nomenclature might appear out of place in a discussion of the kind of unstructured if not chaotic commercial activity found in the marketplace of first century Jerusalem. Nevertheless, if some or all of the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* were wealthy businessmen (and also if they were operating at the heart of a network/consortium of wealthy merchants who regularly did business with each other), in all probability they would have been classified as “entrepreneurs”. This too, according to Andreau (1999:102), would have ensured that their financ-

⁵¹⁰ According to Andreau (1999:17, 46), this Roman law concerned the opening and holding of deposit accounts, the maintenance of professional registers, and the modes of compensation for debt-claims. It changed very little between the end of the Republic and the end of the Principate, and it appears to have been applied effectually. The production of these registers in courts of law, the service of both accepting deposits and advancing credit was linked with the notion of an account (*ratio*) and with that of a register in which the state of one’s clients’ accounts was recorded. Also, the legal requirement for a banker’s register of accounts to be produced whenever a client was involved in a law-suit could be invoked even if the case did not involve the banker personally. Rathbone (2007:317) explains that the reason for this legal obligation (regarding disclosure of accounts) was because a bank was often the only source of written records for particular transactions.

ing activities were free from regulation and bureaucratic oversight, allowing them to operate unhindered by the strict Roman banking laws of the time – and also beyond the control of the Sanhedrin. In fact, it may not be too much to suggest that one of the reasons why some or all of these particular seven individuals were selected by the multitude “to serve in the bank” was precisely because they qualified as entrepreneurs according to Roman fiscal convention.⁵¹¹ Finally, a preference for privacy and *non*-regulation could have relevance for reasons that our modern western minds might consider unethical.

I would suggest that every Diaspora Jew who conducted significant business throughout the Roman Empire, would have been well aware of the amount of regulation and lack of secrecy involved when doing business through a Roman-style *argentaria*: i.e. with a professional, artisan class of banker. Therefore, it is quite likely that many of them would have preferred to operate under circumstances in which their bank was *not* required by law to keep records that might have to be produced for public scrutiny at some later time.⁵¹² Cohen (1997:192-193) remarks that scholars now understand how critical the so-called underground economy was to the effective functioning of ancient economies. And so, at the time under review, this more clandestine commercial activity was not regarded generally as “an immoral challenge to legitimate authority”, but rather “a circumvention of governmental inefficiencies or absurdities, ranging from counter-productive or repressive systems of taxation to restrictions on the free operations of

⁵¹¹ Another possible benefit of (and reason for) selecting seven *Hellenistae* who qualified as “entrepreneurs” – to manage the primitive church *trapeza* – is implicit in Andreau’s explanation (1995:151) that entrepreneurs and merchant-financiers (along with *fenatores*) were the only categories of financiers capable of organizing the high risk, high reward maritime loans discussed above.

⁵¹² As mentioned previously, Davies (2002:73-74) informs us that Greek private bankers employed “the minimum of written accounts”.

commerce". Consequently, a *trapeza*, a private bank both in description and practice, would have been a very attractive proposition in first century Jerusalem – for both the *trapezitai* and their clients.

6.7 The question of interest

The possibility of a banking facility operating at the heart of the primitive church automatically raises certain theological questions: in particular, how did the *trapezitai* deal with the matter of interest? Obviously, there are ways of getting around the issue, as some Roman financiers did occasionally, by requiring interest even when it was not stipulated in the loan contract.⁵¹³ But then, we would not expect devout Jews who were not only "God-fearing men" (Acts 2:5) but also "of good and attested character and repute" (Acts 6:3) to resort to such tactics.

The Greek word commonly translated as 'interest' is *tokos* (τόκος);⁵¹⁴ however, Cohen (1997:45) explains that the Greek and English meanings do not correspond precisely, since *tokos* essentially conveys the idea of 'bringing forth' or 'birth',⁵¹⁵ and only metaphorically is extended in usage to cover 'the produce or usance of money lent out'. Therefore, he suggests that, "since *tokos* is not inherently time-related, it is best translated

⁵¹³ Apparently, the Romans had no moral problems concerning the charging of interest on loans. According to Verboven (2008:2), "Jean Andreau's analysis of the Latin terminology to denote interest shows that there was no negative connotation attached even to *fenus*, the oldest Latin word for interest. The further evolution of the terminology shows that interest was seen as the 'price' paid in exchange for the service provided by the lender when he allowed the debtor to use his money. If so, the condemnation of money-lending is an ideological construct, premised on old Greek 'classical' thinking, not a genuine social norm capable of affecting public behaviour or policy".

⁵¹⁴ In the KJV, *tokos* (τόκος) is translated as the more controversial word 'usury': e.g. Matthew 25:27 and Luke 19:23.

⁵¹⁵ Cohen's source is Liddell-Scott *Lexicon*, s.v. τόκος. Likewise, Thayer's *Lexicon* translates *tokos* as, firstly, 'birth', in the sense of (a) 'the act of bringing forth', or (b) 'that which has been brought forth, offspring' (from *tiktō*, 'to beget'); and, secondly, 'interest of money, usury – because it multiplies money and breeds, as it were'.

as ‘yield’ rather than ‘interest’”.⁵¹⁶ Consequently, *tokos* would be involved in loans that attract interest, in the standard, time-related sense (even though Cohen asserts that it is not *inherently* time-related), as well as loans that attract no interest, but still earn income (i.e. an amount over and above the principal sum advanced) that is not time-related. This income might include: (a) participation in the profits derived from the business activity or venture being financed, which is how, as Cohen (1997:45, n. 22) reminds us, Islamic banks have been able to sidestep the Koran’s prohibition against charging interest; or (b) a negotiated fee that represents a flat percentage of the amount advanced – both of which would *not* be considered as earning interest.

Andreau (1999:142) explains that loans could sometimes earn income through means other than the payment of interest since, for example, “in Roman Egypt, in poor and working class communities, many loans were remunerated [...] by work or service”.⁵¹⁷ On the other hand, it is worth emphasising that the OT edicts against charging interest generally applied to loans extended to “a brother in need” (*cf.* Deuteronomy 15:7-8 and 23:19-20; see also Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:36-37), which is both understandable and commendable if the loan was for personal consumption purposes. However, if it were a productive loan, in which credit was extended for business purposes, then the lender or, in our case, the trapezitic business, would be fully entitled to share (i.e. participate) in the profits from any commercial venture that was being financed.

Cohen (1997:51) goes into great detail to explain the two main categories of loans extended in ancient Greece; in particular, fourth century Athens: i.e. “landed” and

⁵¹⁶ The Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary (2nd ed.) defines “interest” as “the rate of payment for the use of money expressed as a percentage per unit of time”; cited in Cohen, 1997:45.

⁵¹⁷ Andreau cites Johnson (1936:452-454)

“maritime” – both of which remained relevant during the period under examination, since he argues that “this binary commercial categorization was so basic to Hellenic thinking that its perseverance in the Greek Mediterranean for centuries should not be surprising”. These particular terms describe two distinct types of financing, each with different levels of income or return on the capital deployed. The type entitled “landed” provided income based on “payment for the use of money expressed as a percentage per unit of time” – which is obviously time-related and therefore earned interest in the classic sense; and the other, entitled “maritime”, involved a different kind of risk-reward profile and thus provided a much higher return on capital, such as we might find today in say venture capital investing.

Since the idea of earning/charging interest would create theological problems for any devout Jewish followers of Christ, we can deal with the “landed” category of finance quickly.⁵¹⁸ Put simply, a landed loan would earn a ‘landed yield’, *tokos eggeios*, which usually amounted to one percent (of the principal amount) per month,⁵¹⁹ but sometimes less; however, the income from such loans was always described in terms of being time-based. Temin (2002:19) confirms the longevity of this practice by mentioning frequent evidence, from later Roman sources, of loans at one percent a month (or 12 percent per annum), and cites Bogaert (2000) who has catalogued dozens of loans in Roman Egypt at

⁵¹⁸ The arguments for and against charging interest on loans have been dealt with extensively within the theological literature. However, for a comprehensive and instructive discussion on the biblical and historical arguments, I recommend two non-theologians: Paul Mills (1989) and Norman Jones (1989).

⁵¹⁹ According to Ste Croix (1974:46, n. 20), “The Greeks and Romans usually calculated their interest by the month (‘1 per cent interest’ in an ordinary Greek or Roman transaction would mean 1 per cent per month unless the contrary was stated)”.

the same rate.⁵²⁰ On the other hand, so-called maritime loans earned a ‘maritime yield’, *tokos nautikos*, which could be up to twice the principal amount of the loan in extreme cases and would obviously be categorised as usury if normal criteria were applied.⁵²¹ Even so, the detail we have available concerning this form of what I would call risk-financing, rather than lending, gives rise to some interesting speculation regarding the kind of financial activity that might have been conducted by a trapezitic business that adhered to Judeo-Christian conventions.

As the name suggests, maritime loans were originally associated with the financing of the extensive sea trade that centred on the Athenian port of Pireaus; and, in contrast to the “per cent per month” notation we find with time-related interest charged on landed loans, Cohen (1997:55) informs us that “In every case where information about the amount of return on maritime creditors’ funds is preserved, yield is calculated on the same fixed basis”: i.e. a flat percentage of the capital amount advanced.⁵²² He provides

⁵²⁰ In the *Lex Uniciaria* (c. 88 BC), also referred to as the *Lex Cornelia Pompeia*, Roman law recognised an interest rate of up to 12 percent per annum (i.e. 1 percent per month, known as the *centisimae usurae*). In 50 BC, this was set by senate decree as the maximum allowed, and stood until Justinian lowered the rates in 533 AD. However, Temin (2002:20) mentions examples of Roman rates above 12 percent, and cites the statement by Livy (35, 7) that “prohibitions against higher rates were evaded in the late Republic by transferring the loans to foreigners who were not subject to rate restrictions”.

⁵²¹ In his book, *Tractates contractu quinque de centum*, John Eck (1515) defended 5 percent as an acceptable rate of interest as long as (a) borrower and lender mutually agreed to the loan; and (b) the loan was for a *bona fide* business opportunity. On the other hand, Jones (e.g. 1989:121) informs us that, in England, before 1545 and between 1552 and 1571, all loans that carried interest were categorised as usury; however, from 1545 to 1552, and then from 1571 onwards, the term only applied to an annual interest rate above 10 percent. Later, in the 18th century, according to Verboven (2008:11), the usury limit was set at first 6 percent and then 5 percent. Hence, in 1776, Adam Smith (1843: Book 2, Chapter 4.14) wrote that “In a country, such as Great Britain, where money is lent to government at three percent and to private people upon a good security at four and four and a half, the present legal rate (five percent) is as proper as any”. Smith also compared interest rates in England to those in Holland, which he describes as “a richer country than England. The government there borrow at two per cent, and private people of good credit at three” (Book 1, Chapter 9.10).

⁵²² Modern loans often attract what is called an arrangement fee, which is a fixed, albeit very small percentage of the principal amount (usually 1½ percent). But then, it is small because it is charged in addition to the agreed interest rate applied to the loan. The ancestry of this fee can be traced back to Tudor times, when brokers, scriveners and lawyers, acting as intermediaries on behalf of the borrower and/or lender, demanded a fee for their services – over and above the interest paid.

examples (1997:54-55) from Demosthenes 35, the only actual sea-finance contract surviving from fourth century Athens, in which a loan for 3,000 drachmas yielded 675 drachmas (or $22\frac{1}{2}$ percent of the capital advanced); and also Demosthenes 50.17 in which “a fixed yield of ‘one-eighth’ [or $12\frac{1}{2}$ percent] is payable on a maritime loan for a relatively short, one-way journey between Sēstos and Athens”.⁵²³ Similarly, Andreau (1999:55) argues that the “fee” for a maritime loan in Rome, in later times, may also have been a fixed percentage, and cites an even higher percentage than those given by Cohen: i.e. one third (or $33\frac{1}{3}$ percent) of the principal advanced.

Cohen (1997:53-54) explains that the profits associated with maritime loans were high because of the high risks associated with maritime commerce. Therefore, maritime yield was “determined by contractual arrangements focusing on commercial considerations, especially degree of risk and anticipated profitability”. This is why a *tokos* of $12\frac{1}{2}$, $22\frac{1}{2}$ or even $33\frac{1}{3}$ percent of the capital advanced (for a term of usually less than a month) was not considered usurious, and so did not run afoul of any anti-usury laws that were in force at the time – or even centuries later. In fact, Cohen (1997:54, n. 69) further suggests that the recognition of this risk-reward differential (when compared to landed loans) may provide a reason why “maritime finance appears to have been exempted from the frequent efforts by the Roman authorities to place limits on maximum returns on loans”. Likewise, and of particular interest to the present enquiry, Velissaropoulos (1980:302) states that “the Fathers of the Church considered [maritime loans] to

⁵²³ Maritime loans generally covered sea voyages that, according to Cohen (1997: 56, n. 83), seldom lasted more than a few weeks. As evidence, he cites the example given by Diodotos (3.34.7) that a voyage from the Crimea to Rhodes might take as little as ten days.

constitute the only acceptable form of interest-bearing loans” – perhaps for the obvious reason that they did not bear any interest, but rather *tokos*: i.e. a ‘yield’.

6.8 Depositors and lenders versus ‘participants’

At this higher level of risk-reward, the banker becomes more than just a lender; he then becomes a “participant” in the business opportunity, sharing in the profits derived from the venture.

The Greek word is *koinōnos* (κοινωνός), which can be interpreted as ‘partner’, but which Cohen (1997:76, n. 71) advises is difficult to translate and rather takes on a connotation closer to ‘participant’; hence, these collective investment undertakings were known as *koinōniai* (κοινωνία).⁵²⁴ However, as a “participant”, the banker also participated/shared in the risks.⁵²⁵ In fact, it is one of the peculiarities of ancient maritime finance that, in return for a hefty fee/yield, the lender sometimes accepted most if not all of the risk. For example, as Cohen writes (1997:56): “under the contract at Demosthenes 35, certain variations in yield were provided, but were solely conditional upon marine contingencies, unrelated to mere passage of time. Thus, if jettison of cargo were required, repayment was reduced relative to the proportion of cargo surviving. If the entire cargo

⁵²⁴ *Koinōnia* (κοινωνία), singular, appears approximately 20 times in the NT, used predominantly as ‘fellowship’ (12) and ‘communion’ (4), including ‘Holy communion’; also ‘distribution’ (1) and ‘contribution’ of alms (1). However, Fitzmeyer (1976:241) reminds us that “the precise meaning of *koinōnia* is a matter of debate [...] what the word immediately indicates is the corporate character of the Christian group, as it expressed itself in various ways” (1976:254 n. 9). In Liddell (1940), *κοινωνία* is defined as ‘communion, association, partnership’ (e.g. Thessalonians 3:10; Plato, *Georgias* 507e, *Laws* 861e, *Symposium* 182c and 188c, and *Republic* 343d); and also ‘joint-ownership’ (*PLond.* 2.311.2). From this, we can again see where, in the Greek language, the line between spiritual, social and economic activity and/or concepts can sometimes be blurred.

⁵²⁵ Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* II-II, Question 78, Article 2) allowed that it was legitimate to make money from a loan (i.e. an amount over and above the principal advanced) if the lender shared in the borrower’s risk: “he that entrusts his money to a merchant or craftsman so as to form a kind of society, does not transfer the ownership of his money to them, for it remains his, so that at his risk the merchant speculates with it, or the craftsman uses it for his craft, and consequently he may lawfully demand as something belonging to him, part of the profits derived from his money”.

were lost as a result of any of these contingencies, no repayment on the loan would be required".⁵²⁶ In the Roman era, according to Andreau (1999:54-55),⁵²⁷ maritime loans were described as *pecunia traiecticia*, 'money that travelled', or sometimes as *pecunia nautica*. He also confirms the acceptance of most if not all risk by the lender, but makes a potentially confusing reference to *pretium periculi* (literally, 'the price of the risk') as a "very high rate of interest"; whereas a more appropriate interpretation is 'yield'.

The money would be repaid, along with very high interest rates, only if the ship reached its destination safely. If the vessel or cargo was lost through no fault of the borrower, the latter remained under no obligation to his creditor. The moneylender alone bore all the risks attendant upon sea-voyages. Those risks justified the very high rate of interest (*pretium periculi*).

However, not only did the *trapezitēs* become a "participant" (*koinōnos*) in the risks and rewards of maritime loans, Gernet (1981:350, n. 14) suggests that the so-called depositors of a *trapeza* were also able to participate in the profits from the funds invested, even to the point of splitting them "fifty-fifty" with the banker. This is obviously not commercial banking as we might understand it today, but more like the US-style of "limited partnership" investment in which the profit is shared between the general or managing partner and the various limited partners who provide the capital but are not in-

⁵²⁶ Andreau (1995:17) confirms that maritime loans attracted a far higher rate of interest than other loans, and that "the financial risk fell to the creditor".

⁵²⁷ Andreau states that no-one knows precisely when maritime loans were introduced into Rome; however, they are first attested at the time of Cato the Elder, between 234 and 149 BC.

volved in the actual management of the investments.⁵²⁸ In legal parlance, “limited partner” does not carry the same meaning as “partner” does on its own, since a limited partner’s potential losses are, as the nomenclature suggests, limited strictly to the funds they invested in the particular venture.

The Roman equivalent of the Greek *koinōnia* would have been the *societas*, which, according to Rathbone (2007:314), was “the standard Roman legal form for a ‘partnership’ in any enterprise, which by the first century AD had developed very flexible rules – for instance, permitting unequal inputs of labour and resources by *socii*, and unequal shares of profit”.⁵²⁹ Andreau (1999:152) refers to the *societas* as a kind of sleeping partnership “in which one of the associates provided the capital for another who was responsible for all the work and the management”. Or, as Garnsey (1998:35) explains, “a partner might contribute *operae* (work) rather than *pecunia* (money) and nonetheless share the profits (and sometimes not even losses)”.⁵³⁰ In other words, as with the earlier Greek *koinōnia*, in a Roman *societas*, the lender (or rather, investor) was also a “participant” in the business venture being financed.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ According to Chachi (2005:5), the limited partnership was invented by the Babylonians. Of interest, Ferguson (2008:314) reports that most modern US hedge funds have been established as Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs).

⁵²⁹ Rathbone cites Crook (1967)

⁵³⁰ Garnsey (1998:35) is citing a rule established by the juror Servius Sulpicius Rufus.

⁵³¹ Mills (1989:9) states that the equivalent partnership form in Jewish law was (and still is) known as *heter iska*, which “enables the partner providing money capital to enjoy a fixed share of the profits (or losses) from the joint venture, as well as share in the risks of losing all the capital”. According to Chachi (2005:11), the Islamic equivalents are the *mudarabah* (passive partnership) and *musharakah* (active partnership).

6.9 Conclusion

From the above, as well as earlier evidence and arguments, we may reach certain hypothetical conclusions as to the possible scope and impact of the primitive church's *trapeza*, and also the activities of the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*.

In the first instance, I would argue that any implied success the apostles may have enjoyed as bankers would have been driven *reactively* by the demands of their particular marketplace and its constituents (i.e. the banking and financial activity/needs of the members of the Jesus-Believers sect numbering in the thousands, boosted substantially by the public attention generated as a result of compelling evidence that this particular banking operation had "the hand of God on it")⁵³² rather than any *proactive* effort on the part of the Twelve. After all, the *trapeza* did not represent the main focus of their calling, as evidenced by their complaint about it being a distraction (Acts 6:2). Nevertheless, whether they wanted to or not, because of the obvious and pressing need to provide their followers with a replacement for the temple-banking service controlled by the corrupt Sadducee elite, the apostles found themselves in control of a powerful, commercial vehicle that drove the economic growth of their community; and also, I would suggest, contributed significantly to its numerical growth. Then, at some point, the day-to-day management of the primitive church's *trapeza* proved to be too much of a burden, and was taken out of the hands of these "illiterate" apostles and handed over to experienced professionals: i.e. the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*.

⁵³² As provided by the "supernatural" deaths of Ananias and Sapphira depicted in Acts 5:1-11

Luke's text implies that the financial activity of the primitive church commenced as a series of individual, ad hoc transactions that were processed initially in a haphazard and apparently less than professional manner – which eventually elicited some “murmuring” from a key leadership group within the community. However, these activities would soon have become better organised, and also more effective, as a result of the establishment of a dedicated, centralised facility through which the various transactions could be processed in a more efficient, professional and, no doubt, more profitable manner – by people with a more appropriate skill set. Consequently, it is not surprising to read in Acts 6:7 that, after the Seven were appointed, the primitive church went through a further phase of significant growth. From this, we may infer that the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* built on the perhaps unexpected and therefore unplanned for success of the apostles' temple-banking operation via their deliberate exploitation of the even more powerful Greco-Roman private banking model,⁵³³ which would have included an appetite for substantial risk and equally substantial reward that dated back over four centuries. And in doing so, they turned an already flourishing banking facility into something even more economically potent.

Also, we may surmise from Acts 4:32 that the members of the nascent sect who sold their assets and “placed” them at the feet of the apostles (and later into the hands of the Hellenist *trapezitai*) did not see themselves as “depositors” in the strict legal sense: i.e. retaining full rights of ownership of their funds or assets *after* they had been handed over

⁵³³ By the first century AD, private banking already had a long and prosperous history dating back to the fourth century BC. As mentioned previously, according to Armstrong (1997:106), “the high finance of the Hellenes” was introduced into Jerusalem during the reign of Ptolemy II (282-246 BC). Therefore, we may infer from the fact that all seven *trapezitai* were *Hellenistae*, they may have possessed the appropriate experience to upgrade an existing, but perhaps conservative temple-based form of banking operation into a Greek-style trapezitic business model that was more aggressive, and no doubt more profitable.

to the apostles or seven *trapezitai*. Hence, there would have been no legal requirement to keep client records (e.g. bank accounts); thus ensuring that the Hellenistic-style *trapeza* could avoid the bureaucratic and regulatory burden of a Roman-style *argentaria*. As a consequence, the primitive church's banking facility would have operated outside the control of the Jerusalem Temple authorities, even though it was operating within the temple precincts. Under those circumstances, and taking into account the implied success of the operation, it would indeed have been capable of detaching a significant portion of the local economy from the social fabric of Jerusalem's traditional society, to use Cohen's words – just like its more ancient Athenian predecessors. Finally, since operation of a "trapezitic business" also carried no legal requirement to institutionalise its activities, there was no need to form an elaborate administrative organisation. Therefore, it could have operated quite successfully as a simple commercial enterprise (*ergasia*) that nonetheless allowed the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* full rein to practice their 'craft' – enhanced no doubt by their spiritual gifts.

Obviously, we cannot claim with any certainty that all seven Hellenists were professional bankers in the style of Pasiōn et al, although there is a strong possibility that Stephen was a freedman, giving rise to speculation that he might also have been an experienced banker (e.g. an "entrepreneur" or perhaps *negotiatore*) with powerful contacts in Roman and/or Alexandrian mercantile and financial circles. Nevertheless, it was a requirement of their selection by the multitude that the Seven possessed certain attributes: e.g. "good and attested character and repute, full of the [Holy] Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3); as well as the *proven* ability to take care of the sort of 'business' (*chreia*) that involved the distribution of funds, from which we may infer that they possessed the appropriate

skills 'to serve in the bank' (*diakonein trapezais*).⁵³⁴ In fact, as we find in the example of the bank owned by Pasiōn, in practical terms, all that was required to establish and build a thriving trapezitic business within the primitive church was the presence of just one or two experienced *trapezitai* among the seven Hellenists: e.g. Stephen and/or Philip.⁵³⁵

Furthermore, it is likely that all seven would have put their heart and soul into the task of managing the *trapeza*; not only because they were doing it "as unto the Lord", but also because their appointment was necessitated by problems arising from the apostles' inability to cope with the task. This in itself would have been a powerful source of motivation for the Seven to ensure that their trapezitic business became a success. As to the full scope of the business activities of the primitive church *trapeza*, we can only speculate. We know that a significant number of the congregation consisted of Jews from the Diaspora. Therefore, just as both the city of Jerusalem and its temple benefited greatly from foreign trade, it is also possible that the primitive church may have benefited from similar mercantile activities conducted by Jewish Jesus-Believers who originated "from every country where there were Jews". If true, the most appropriate clearing house and financing vehicle for all these transactions would have been the community's *trapeza*, especially if any of the Seven had experience in the area of foreign trade, which is a distinct possibility.

⁵³⁴ Barrett (1994:313) explains that, for Luke, the phrase, "full of the Holy Spirit" is not exclusively a theological term: "the men appointed had to excel in spiritual and in *natural* gifts" (my italics). Also, as mentioned previously, according to Johnson and Harrington (1992:106), the verb *episkeptein* means to 'select by examination or review'. Taken together, there is the implication that the practical skills and/or experience required 'to serve in the bank' were evident in the Seven sometime before they were put forward by the multitude.

⁵³⁵ According to our understanding of the operations of a *trapeza*, it seems likely that Stephen and perhaps also Philip were senior bankers in the style of the famous Pasiōn; whereas, the other five (who we never hear of again after Acts 6:5) may have operated as lower level functionaries, like Phormiōn and Kittos. See Section 4.20, "Beyond the tables".

For these reasons, it is plausible that the numerous activities of the *trapezitai* included the extension of productive loans (i.e. for commercial purposes), which had the potential to earn high fees: e.g. up to 20 percent or more of the transaction value – and toward which, we are told by Cohen (1997:54), the authorities exhibited a particular level of flexibility that was “in sharp contrast to the inflexibility of other Roman business arrangements”. However, the *trapezitai* would have done so as “participants” in any potentially lucrative venture (namely, partners in a Greek-style *koinōnia*, Roman *societas* or Jewish *heter iska*), and not in the capacity of lenders as we would understand the term; thus avoiding any theological problems arising from the prohibition against charging interest.⁵³⁶ Therefore, if there was indeed a *trapeza* operating at the heart of the primitive church community (that was controlled by seven Hellenist *trapezitai*), the information gleaned from the historical banking literature, as outlined above, suggests that it enjoyed the obvious benefits of operating inside the temple precincts – but beyond the control of the temple authorities; and also had the potential to be extremely successful and thus highly profitable. In fact, the excessive level of persecution targeted specifically against the Hellenist *trapezitai*, as depicted both implicitly and explicitly in the Lukan text, suggests quite strongly that this is precisely what occurred.

However, since I have expended a certain amount of effort in criticising traditional exegetical efforts for divorcing Peter’s Pentecost sermon from its economic context, it would be remiss of me if I did not at some point ensure that the above historical economic discussion is fixed firmly within its proper spiritual context. For instance, if the

⁵³⁶ Mills (1989:16) writes that, “The earliest scholastic writings consistently regard the profiting from a partnership as not contradicting the [biblical] prohibition against interest, and the partnership contract was widely used in business from the twelfth century onwards”. He cites Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Question 78, Article 2, as quoted previously.

trapeza contributed significantly to the prosperity of the primitive church community, we could speculate that it would have been seen by many, both within the congregation and without, as a channel for the divine outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine”: viz., an integral component of the fulfilment of the promise of material blessing within the OT salvation-restoration model – and so helped to confirm what Peter was alluding to in his reference to the prophet Joel at the beginning of his Pentecost sermon. As a consequence, the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* would quite likely have been regarded by their fellow Jesus-Believers as first century equivalents of the ancient Levites who were the gatekeepers of the temple treasury: i.e. they performed the role of priest-bankers within the primitive church. And I would argue that the notion of this hybrid, sacred-secular role is supported in part by the list of prerequisites and qualifications set down in Acts 6:3 (e.g. being “full of the Holy Spirit”),⁵³⁷ and also substantiated in the text by reference to the signs and wonders performed by Stephen (Acts 6:8),⁵³⁸ who also exhibited a level of *sofia*, ‘wisdom’ (6:10) that his adversaries could not withstand, and by Philip in Samaria (8:6).

In that sense, the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* could indeed be described as *diakonoι*, although obviously not in the narrow sense in which traditional exegesis has portrayed them, but rather as priest-bankers who served Yahweh on behalf of His people – in human partnership with the divine – to help bring about the fulfilment of the economic promises within the Mosaic-Sinai covenant and OT salvation-restoration oracles. After all, if we accept that *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 means ‘to serve in the bank’, we would

⁵³⁷ There is a precedent for this particular sacred-secular qualification implicit in Pharaoh’s rhetorical question regarding Joseph’s suitability as a priest-banker: i.e. “Can we find this man’s equal, a man in whom is the spirit of God?” (Genesis 41:38)

⁵³⁸ Barrett (1994:322) argues that, with respect to “the working of signs and portents”, Stephen was not inferior to the apostles.

then expect that the overarching ethos behind the *trapeza* demanded that the *trapezitai* should *serve* both Yahweh and their community – as opposed to being *self-serving*, as evident in their temple-based contemporaries, and also among many of their modern secular counterparts. Unfortunately, the rampant success of the *trapeza* meant that it soon became a serious threat to the economic (and also the political) powerbase of the ruling class in Jerusalem. So much so, the Sadducee elite had no compunction in dealing with the threat in a distinctly brutal manner. Consequently, this particular outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine” (i.e. economic prosperity) appears to have only lasted some three to three and a half years – although, it is possible that it continued for some time after Stephen’s death, albeit in a new location, as suggested by the potential partnering of Nicolaus and Barnabas in the large and prosperous Antioch congregation.

7. A SURVEY OF SPIRITUAL AND ECONOMIC 'OUTPOURINGS' IN THE MODERN ERA

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries [exhibited] periodic awakenings and recessions of revivalistic religion that tended to resemble the ups and down of the business cycle (Synan, 1997:14).

7.1 Introduction: the methodology and problems encountered

If, as I have argued above, the primitive church community did indeed experience the kind of economic benefits promised in the OT salvation-restoration oracles, we are then left with an intriguing question. Was the outpouring of "grain, oil and new wine" (i.e. economic blessing) intended as a one-off event, to perhaps help finance the launch of the Christian church at Pentecost? Or was it also meant to benefit future generations of Yahweh's people? The methodology for determining the answer to these questions appears deceptively simple: just compare the dates of episodes or periods of "revival" and/or spiritual renewal against the dates of "economic cycles"⁵³⁹ in the modern era, over a substantial length of time (e.g. for longer than a century) – to see whether these spiritual events coincide with periods of economic regeneration or "material blessing" (i.e. periods of economic recovery or prosperity). However, in practice it has proved somewhat problematic.

Since there are copious historical accounts of spiritual phenomena and/or events, some of which reach back to before the eighth century AD,⁵⁴⁰ the spiritual component of

⁵³⁹ According to van Duijn (1983:3), the phrase "economic cycles" has connotations of regularity and suggests a self-repeating type of fluctuation of fixed length and amplitude around some trend; features that do not occur in economic life. He therefore prefers to use the term "cyclical fluctuations".

⁵⁴⁰ For example, according to the entry in the Revival Library website, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of England*, completed c. 731 AD, which records the arrival and infancy of the Christian Church in Great Britain, "un-

the survey appeared to offer an abundance of suitable data. However, I soon discovered that there was no central resource/database or comprehensive timeline of spiritual activity in published form; and so, initially, information had to be gleaned rather painstakingly from a myriad of individual, scattered and frustratingly disparate sources. Fortunately, things have improved in that area with the publication of Vinson Synan's "The Century of the Holy Spirit", which contains a comprehensive timeline of spiritual outpourings, dating from 1517 to 2000, compiled by David Barrett (2001:415-452). In more recent times, the internet has also become a helpful source of material on the subject of revival; in particular, a website entitled "The Revival Library" has provided extra data to augment the information in Barrett's timeline and my own initial research.⁵⁴¹

Similarly, the research into economic cycles produced its own peculiar set of problems, to the point where I was forced to reduce the focus of the survey to the period between 1782 and 1973. On the advice of Johann Millendorfer and his colleagues at STUDIA, I chose to work with a set of dates based on economic long waves originally identified in 1925 by Nikolai Kondratieff,⁵⁴² a Russian economist who was Director of the Conjunction Institute in Moscow from 1920 to 1928.⁵⁴³ Kondratieff identified three full "long wave" economic cycles, lasting for 54 to 60 year periods, which provided data sets of 1782-1845, 1845-1892, and 1892-1948; and each of these cycles were subsequently sub-

ashamedly includes many references to supernatural happenings, healings, visions and divine encounters". See "Bede" at <http://www.revival-library.org/catalogues/pre1700/indexpre1700.html>; accessed on July 19th 2009.

⁵⁴¹ See <http://www.revival-library.org/catalogues/indexcat.html>

⁵⁴² In English economic literature, his name appears predominantly as Kondratieff, but also occasionally as Kondrat'ev, Kondratiev or Kondratyev

⁵⁴³ For an instructive article on the work of Kondrat'ev and the political problems he faced at the Conjunction Institute, see Barnett (1995). In Continental Europe, the word "conjunction" is used rather than "economic cycles". It comes from the Latin *coniungere* and describes the interplay of movements that together make up the direction in which the economy is moving.

divided into a sequence of four phases of prosperity, recession, depression and recovery.⁵⁴⁴ Based on Kondratieff's original work, van Duijn (1983) has been able to extrapolate additional single phases of prosperity (1948-1966) and recession (1967-1973). And, even though this extra period represents ostensibly just half of one cycle, because it consists of both a positive and a negative phase of economic activity, I felt confident that its inclusion in the survey would not skew the results in any significant way.

So-called "long wave" economic cycles are not immune to controversy; for example, Ball (2004:234) argues that "there is simply not a long enough historical record to permit the identification of such a long period cycle with any statistical conviction". On the other hand, van Duijn (1983:18) asserts that their lack of widespread acceptance may be the result of academic indifference, rather than any problems with the theory itself. Apparently, the earliest known work on the possible existence of long-term economic cycles by Hyde Clarke (1847) and Jevons (1884) was motivated by the occurrence of famine in 1793 and 1847. However, the seeming evenness and durability of economic growth experienced after World War II caused the study of economic long waves to fall out of fashion with many economists, whose intellectual hubris apparently created an atmosphere of denial concerning the possible reoccurrence of a "depression" – particularly in Britain and the United States.⁵⁴⁵ Also, there is a lack of consensus as to the exact dates of Kondratieff's three long waves, for the basic reason that there are some difficulties in fix-

⁵⁴⁴ Kondratieff was essentially an agricultural economist, and referred to the different economic phases as "Spring" (Recovery), "Summer" (Prosperity), "Autumn" (Recession) and "Winter" (Depression); however, for the sake of simplicity, I have used the standard nomenclature.

⁵⁴⁵ Hence the reason why most of the more recent literature on "long waves" comes out of Continental Europe; in particular, Holland, where three major Dutch textbooks give the topic considerable attention: e.g. Delfgaauw (1973:169-171), Korteweg and Keesing (1978:139-139, 155-156), and Andriesson (1980:129-130); whereas, the equivalent US texts ignore it or treat it merely as a footnote, as in Samuelson (1980:241), or as a passing remark, as in Lipsey and Steiner (1981:537); all cited in van Duijn (1983:18).

ing the precise dates of “turning points”: e.g. when depression turned to recovery, or when prosperity turned to recession.⁵⁴⁶ Nevertheless, despite these issues, Kondratieff cycles represent the only credible source of economic long waves available – and thus suitable for my purposes.

In 1930, Kondratieff was arrested and deported to Siberia without trial;⁵⁴⁷ and, even though economic long wave dates have been extrapolated by others up until the present time and even beyond (e.g. 2020), my decision to stop at 1973 was determined by two factors. Firstly, Kondratieff’s theories experienced a resurgence of interest during the global economic crisis of 1973, and various interpretations of his work since then have produced not just a “Fourth Kondratieff” (cycle) but also a fifth and even a possible sixth. This variance in opinions and/or dates is not only puzzling but also created further problems to the point where using Kondratieff-style long waves after 1973 appeared unworkable. Also, since that time, his work and theories have been hijacked, to put it bluntly, by groups and individuals bent on exploiting them to push different theories of impending economic doom, often for overtly commercial reasons: e.g. to sell expensive subscriptions to investment newsletters.

⁵⁴⁶ For example, Schumpeter (1939: xvi, 448; ix, 647), who was instrumental in bringing Kondratieff’s work to the attention of western academia in the 1930s, determined the overall dates for the three cycles as 1787 to 1948, and his assignment of the dates for the four phases within each cycle also differs from those of van Duijn (1983:143).

⁵⁴⁷ According to van Duijn (1983:64-65), Kondratieff’s work on long wave economic cycles predicted that the post-WW I economic downswing would be followed by an upswing, which disagreed with the official view held by the Soviet leaders who believed that The Great Depression, which commenced in 1929, signalled the total disintegration of the capitalist system. Kondratieff also recommended that certain Soviet economic policies and government financing options should be decided on the basis of whatever *profits* were made by the particular agricultural or industrial enterprise, a politically-dangerous view that clashed with Stalin’s directive concerning centralised government control and the collectivization of farms. His economic theories were officially labelled “wrong and reactionary” and, sadly, the last mention of Kondratieff comes from Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s book, *Gulag Archipelago* (1974), in which it is simply reported that the economist was sentenced to solitary confinement, became mentally ill and then died – at some unknown date.

Secondly, perhaps because of the post-1970's growth of mass media and cheap airline travel, the data available for so-called spiritual or spiritually-inspired events from 1973 onwards seemed to be full of references to large-scale conferences (e.g. the 11th Pentecostal World Conference held in London in 1976) as opposed to spontaneous outbreaks of revival. Granted, these gatherings attracted delegates and/or visitors that regularly numbered between 20,000 and 50,000 "souls"; all of whom were vitally interested in the work of the Holy Spirit in some form. However, the question of how to determine whether there was an authentic outpouring of the Holy Spirit at these organised (i.e. man-made) events proved far too problematic. Consequently, for all the above reasons, 1973 again looked like a good end point for the survey.

Using the abovementioned sources, I was able to identify a total of 227 instances of a possible outpouring of the Holy Spirit or revival-like activity that occurred between 1781 and 1973. This list, whilst not exhaustive, appears in full in the appendices at the end of this dissertation; however, for illustration purposes, I have reproduced below complete data from the "Prosperity" phase (1782-1815), of the First Kondratieff Cycle (1782-1845), as per van Duijn's calculations. Since the purpose of the survey was limited to a simple comparison of the dates of different spiritual events and economic cycles, as you will see, each set of data consists of rather basic information: (a) start date; (b) end date; (c) leader of the revival work, if known; (d) country; and also (e) a brief explanatory comment, where appropriate.

Table 1: Spiritual activity during the Summer/Prosperity phase (1782 to 1815) of the First Kondratieff Cycle (1782 to 1845)

Start	End	Leader	Country	Comment
1782		Jonathan Edwards	Britain	Concerts of Prayer movement
1783		George Lisle	Jamaica	Native Baptist Church founded
1784	1808		United States	American Methodist movement
1785			Wales	Brynengan
1786			Wales	Trecastle
1787	1805		United States	"Great Revival" in Southern states
1788		Johann Sailer	Allgauer, Bavaria	Revival among Bavarian Catholics
1790			Britain	Religious Tract Society founded
1790		Jonathan Edwards	United States	Concerts of Prayer movement
1790			United States	Pennsylvania and Virginia
1791			Britain	Yorkshire
1791			Wales	Bala
1793	1834	William Carey	India	
1795			Britain	London Missionary Society founded
1796			Britain	Scottish missionary societies founded
1796		Hans Hauge	Norway	
1797	1805		United States	Second Great Awakening begins
1798	1803	William Bramwell	Britain	Nottingham, Wetherby
1798	1799		Canada	Nova Scotia
1798	1799		United States	New England
1799			Britain	Church Missionary Society founded
1800			Scotland	Lewis, Harris, Perthshire
1800		James McGready	United States	Camp-meeting revivals in Kentucky
1801		Barton Stone	United States	Cane Ridge, Kentucky
1803			Scotland	Breadalbane, Perthshire
1804			Britain	British & Foreign Bible Soc. Founded
1805			Wales	Aberystwyth
1806			Britain	Revivalists secede from Methodism
1810			Britain	Camp Meeting Methodists formed
1810			Russia	Revival in Russian Orthodox Church
1810		Robert Haldane	Switzerland	Revival in France and Germany
1810		Christmas Evans	Wales	
1812			Britain	primitive Methodists formed
1813			Russia	Russian Bible Society founded
1815	1818		United States	Northern states

The data was entered into a spreadsheet file and then sorted by date. At that point, I reduced the total number of events from 227 to 219, having decided that the de-

leted events did not constitute an episode of authentic spiritual outpouring, as in the case of the conferences referred to above, as well as instances where, for example, missionaries travelled around Britain to recruit workers for foreign mission fields: e.g. Hudson Taylor's meetings during the depression of 1872-1883, when he recruited young people to join the China Inland Mission. Also, data involving substantial and ongoing periods of spiritual activity had to be re-classified when the particular period was of sufficient duration to overlap different economic phases: e.g. the revival in Finland that commenced in 1835 and lasted 15 years. On the basis of an 1835 start date alone, this event would fall within the Depression of 1825 to 1835; however, the duration of this activity meant that it took place predominantly within the Recovery and Prosperity phases of 1836-1845 and 1845-1866 respectively.⁵⁴⁸ Consequently, this and similar examples were re-classified where appropriate.

Furthermore, since Kondratieff's theories were based on his observations of nineteenth century price and value series in Britain, France and the United States, I also checked for possible skewing of the results (as a consequence of any geographical bias in the choice of source data) by recalculating the results, stripping out all so-called spiritual events that occurred in the Global South. Interestingly, the change in results was minimal (i.e. a difference of less than 1.0%), as shown in Table 2 below.

⁵⁴⁸ These particular examples of spiritual outpourings, which commenced in the last final year of an economic depression and lasted 15 or 30 years, are good illustrations of the OT salvation-restoration oracle model: i.e. the pressure of lack/crisis results in repentance, which is then rewarded by an outpouring of "grain, oil and new wine" – as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

7.2 A discussion of the results

Table 2: Results of survey comparing coincidence of spiritual and economic ‘outpourings’ between 1781 and 1973

Data sources	Revivals during economic upturns		Revivals during economic downturns		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
World-wide data	166	75.80	53	24.20	219	100.00
Global North data only	114	75.00	38	25.00	152	100.00

Obviously, the 75.8 and/or 75.0 percent results shown here can be considered conclusive, and provide sufficient evidence to argue that, between 1781 and 1973, the majority of surveyed episodes or periods of spiritual activity coincided with periods of economic regeneration and growth. In fact, based on this result, orthodox economists would say that, during this period, episodes of spiritual and economic regeneration/revival were “significantly correlated”. Therefore, we find support for a positive answer to the question of whether there is a relationship/correlation between spiritual and economic “revival” (as portrayed in the OT salvation-restoration oracles) during the modern era.

Nevertheless, there still remains the question of the residual 24.2 or 25.0 percent of spiritual episodes or periods that apparently occurred during times of economic downturn; and I find that there is no simple answer here. It is possible that anomalies of localised economic blessing coincided with local spiritual revivals while the wider economy was experiencing either recession or depression, in the same way conceivably that our sample of modern Israeli farmers who observed the OT law of *shmita* were “blessed” while those around them were not, as discussed above. After all, if our central thesis is correct, it is possible that such an anomaly occurred in the first century AD, since the repentant “remnant” (the primitive church) may have experienced both economic and

spiritual transformation/regeneration, while the rest of the Palestinian economy (particularly the “wicked generation” in Jerusalem) continued to suffer the ill effects of the economic crisis of 33 AD. In fact, this kind of anomaly would have undoubtedly increased the attractiveness of the nascent sect to potential converts, and simultaneously added to the tension between sect and temple.

Also, there may have been instances where, in the midst of a spiritual revival, Christians failed to exploit opportunities for economic growth – or, if they did, the results were so short-term and localized as to not make any significant impact, statistically speaking.⁵⁴⁹ However, we have no way of determining either possibility with any precision. Furthermore, one could argue that a spiritual event, such as the Pentecostal experience that occurred among C. T. Studd’s African workers in 1925 (which fell within the recession of 1920-29), is not an example of true revival, but merely a small, extremely isolated version of what old-time Pentecostals referred to as “a time of refreshing”. But then, I have no doubt that those African workers believed that they did indeed experience an authentic outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, devoid of any satisfactory explanation for such anomalies, we are forced to resort to the kind of equivocation often used by economists.

On the one hand, the results of this simple survey strongly suggest that, in the modern era, there has been and therefore continues to be a relationship between spiritual and economic “revival” – in accord with the OT salvation-restoration oracles. On that

⁵⁴⁹ For instance, hypothetically speaking, if economic long wave cycles were measured in the first century AD, a highly localized period of economic “revival” that lasted for only three to three and a half years (as we suggest occurred in Jerusalem from 33 to 37 AD) may not have registered within a 54-60 year cycle covering the entire Roman Empire.

basis, evangelists and mission workers (plus other interested parties) should, firstly, expect it to happen; secondly, perhaps promise or even promote the fact that it will happen (as implicit in the example of Peter's sermon, when he made reference to the prophet Joel); and, thirdly, plan for it to happen by providing the appropriate financial services and organisational infrastructure to ensure that any material economic "blessing" is maximised for the benefit of the individual converts and their local church communities. On the other hand, the results of this survey also suggest that, during the modern era, Yahweh appears to have poured out His Spirit on certain groups and locations without any apparent attendant (widespread and therefore noteworthy) economic blessing. And, apart from the explanations given above, the only suggestion we may offer to account for this is the sovereignty of a deity who is not bound by human experience or conditions, which I am sure that some readers would find explanation enough.

Now, the ultimate question that remains unanswered by this survey, perhaps because it is in fact unanswerable, is whether Yahweh *proactively* poured out economic prosperity in conjunction with spiritual regeneration, or whether His people *reactively* took advantage of the periodic/cyclical availability of man-made economic surplus in order to finance and promote successful evangelistic campaigns that resulted in large numbers of revival-style conversions. However, in the end, this survey was meant to do nothing more than explore the *possibility* that there is a correlation between spiritual and economic "revival" in the modern era; and, on that basis, I believe it has achieved its limited but important objective.

8. SUMMATION

The promise of economic prosperity that we encounter within the OT salvation-restoration model (which invariably contains the “grain, oil and new wine” motif) is a major component of ancient Jewish tradition in general and the Mosaic-Sinai covenant in particular. And the fact that the academic literature contains so much scholarly argument concerning the involvement of “later hands” in the chronicling of the salvation-restoration theme in no way detracts from its importance. On the contrary, the amount of possible editorial activity only serves to confirm just how important it was considered at the time.

Unfortunately, the way in which our new covenant theology has evolved over the centuries has resulted in a form of over-spiritualisation that ignores certain important externalities of the old covenant: its economic component in particular. As a result, the powerful OT salvation-restoration model has been demoted to one of salvation-only and thus stripped of something akin to half of its potency and potential for good. However, even though our theology may have changed, I would argue that, in some ways, the people of Yahweh have not; and so, much of the content of the tirades delivered by prophets like Hosea, Jeremiah, Joel and Ezekiel remains relevant for Judeo-Christian audiences in the twenty-first century. For example, I suggest that Hosea’s description of Yahweh’s displeasure that Israel “has not noticed, understood, or realized that it was [the Lord God] Who gave [them] the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and Who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Baal” (Hosea 2:8) would be suitable for use as a sermon text today.

In fact, I would further suggest that the modern Christian church (and modern Jewry too, no doubt) is as guilty today of a schizophrenic religion as the people of Judah were in the time of Jeremiah, all those centuries ago. Without a proper appreciation of Yahweh's involvement in their "daily provision",⁵⁵⁰ it is only natural that modern Jews and Christians should turn, whether knowingly or not, to a contemporary, secularised version of Ba'al Hadad in order to secure the non-agrarian version of good harvests, whatever that might look like. Thus, in place of what the ancients called "Baal" and Christ referred to as "mammon", the people of Yahweh now look to say "the market-place" or "the markets" – and, in some cases, even "the government" – for their economic well-being. And so the Baal-Yahweh polemic can never be totally consigned to history, since the fundamental reasons for its original existence continue to confront us even today; and, because of human nature, may never cease to do so.

Also of interest is the fact that the OT salvation-restoration oracle was often proclaimed at a time when the people of Yahweh were being oppressed by a foreign power: e.g. the Assyrians during the time of Isaiah, and the Babylonians during the time of Jeremiah. Likewise, Peter's Pentecost sermon – with its reference to the prophet Joel, and implicit promise of economic prosperity for those who repented – was preached when Palestine was occupied by the Romans, which also coincided with a period of local rule by a corrupt oligarchy consisting of the Herodian monarchy and the Sadducee elite. Thus, prosperity was proclaimed and also understood not only as a solution to the endemic economic problem of lack or scarcity, but also as part of a divinely-orchestrated

⁵⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 8:18 alludes to the fact that it is Yahweh Who provides "the power to get wealth"; and, according to Genesius' Lexicon, 'to get' is the Hebrew *'asah*, meaning 'to acquire by labour', as in Latin, *pecuniam facere*, and Greek, ποιεῖν βίον, 'to make a living': e.g. riches; and elsewhere, in Isaiah 19:10, has the meaning of 'those who make wages': i.e. hired servants.

antidote to various forms of socio-political oppression. For example, in Isaiah 10:27, the promise of 'fatness' (Hebrew: *shemen*, meaning 'anointing' and also 'fruitfulness of the earth'; thus implying a combination of spiritual empowerment *and* economic regeneration) is intended not only as a reward for repentance and renewed obedience to Yahweh's law but also as a method of destroying "the yoke" of oppression;⁵⁵¹ in this instance, by the Assyrians.

On that basis, the OT salvation-restoration oracles remain significant for the people of Yahweh in the present era for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of church growth is currently occurring in countries where much of the population is living below the poverty line, on less than one US dollar per day. And secondly, according to a 2002 report submitted by the World Evangelical Alliance to the United Nations Commission for Human Rights, Christians are now the largest religious group in the world suffering oppression and persecution for their faith; an estimated 200 million in number.⁵⁵² However, in stark contrast to the current state of affairs is the enticing possibility that the Christian church started life as a community that demonstrated significant power in both the economic *and* spiritual realms. In other words, they experienced first-hand the fulfilment of

⁵⁵¹ Of relevance here is a reference by Easterly (2006:109) to different modern, cross-country studies that show how oligarchies depend on economic inequality to maintain their power. He also discovered a negative correlation between economic growth and oppression, since "the incidence of democracy [is found] to be higher in more societies with a higher share of income going to the middle class". Consequently, I find Isaiah's promise to be plausible; namely, that 'fatness' (i.e. a combination of spiritual empowerment and economic regeneration) has the potential to destroy the "yoke" of oppression.

⁵⁵² In 1997, the World Evangelical Alliance was accorded NGO status with the UN Commission on Human Rights. In 2002, the WEA submitted a report to the UNCHR in which they estimated that "there are more than 200 million Christians in the world today who do not have full human rights as defined by the UN Declaration of Human Rights, simply because they are Christians. They are victims of disinformation, discrimination, and persecution. [The WEA] believe that this is the largest group in the world without full human rights because of their beliefs". Available online (and accessed on May 17th 2009) at http://www.membercare.org/images/growingedge/wea_geneva_report2002.pdf

Yahweh's promise to pour out "grain, oil and new wine" alongside the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The theological motivation/justification for the thriving commercial activity conducted by the new sect was supplied by the Mosaic-Sinai covenant and OT salvation-restoration oracles, while its business model would have been fashioned out of robust economic traditions that date back to the management practices of ancient temple estates, and augmented using the "best practices" of more contemporary Greco-Roman *trapezai*. Therefore, despite what we have been led to believe by traditional exegesis, their core economic model was based primarily on growth and not redistribution, although charity would have been evident. Sadly, the only place where we might find even part of this scenario in evidence today is among Pentecostal-Charismatic adherents of the modern prosperity gospel who, I contend, practice an aberrant mutation of the ancient salvation-restoration model that has grown out of a misguided and unsound mix of OT theology and modern social context.⁵⁵³ As you might expect, this mutation is taking hold in earnest in churches in less developed countries, particularly in Africa. But then, any gospel that promises to help alleviate poverty, even one that is based on a misapplication of theology, represents the kind of "good news" that the *ptōchoi* of the world find impossible to resist.

As argued extensively above, when Peter preached his Pentecost sermon, it is highly likely that his Jewish audience would have been thinking about Joel while they were hearing about Jesus. But was the promise of economic regeneration actually fulfilled in tandem with the spiritual transformation that commenced on the Day of Pente-

⁵⁵³ See Appendix Section 9.2, "The modern prosperity gospel: theology and social context in conflict"

cost? Granted, the majority of evidence presented in this dissertation might be considered circumstantial, but the implications are most decidedly in the affirmative. Moreover, when viewed through an economic lens, Luke's text presents us with the tantalizing prospect, academically-speaking, that the persecution experienced by the primitive church (in particular, the Hellenist members of the congregation and more specifically the Hellenist *trapezitai*) was motivated primarily by the Sadducee's fear concerning the erosion of their economic and political powerbase – as a direct consequence of the socio-economic ramifications of the promised outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine”. Unfortunately, this particular harvest/bounty only lasted for a period of approximately three to three and a half years. Nevertheless, it would appear that the validity and potency of the OT salvation-restoration model did not cease with the closure of the *trapeza* and the departure from Jerusalem of the surviving *trapezitai*.

In fact, the results of the simple survey in Section 7 suggest that the OT promises linking economic restoration and spiritual regeneration were still being fulfilled in some fashion between 1782 and 1973 – even though it is doubtful that Christians living during this period had the microeconomic genius to take full advantage of Yahweh's macroeconomic stratagems. But then, we could not expect them to take advantage of stratagems they knew nothing about, and which their theological traditions had not prepared them to recognise, let alone expect. The present enquiry has also shown that an economic lens applied to the text of Acts provides answers to a number of previously unresolved exegetical issues and/or questions. However, those answers demand that we continue our quest and learn how to leverage biblically-based, faith-driven economic principles and practices, in order to apply them to the problems that currently plague many of the peo-

ple of Yahweh around the world. Thus, more research is called for in this nascent area of study. But, having said that, such research holds the promise of being quite fruitful, both from an intellectual and a practical perspective.

Finally, I have spent a lot of time and effort considering the part that some form of banking facility or “trapezitic business” played in Yahweh’s plans down through the ages because, as Easterly (2002:19) comments: “A well functioning banking system is crucial for economic growth”.⁵⁵⁴ Therefore, I would recommend that any further research into the practical application of biblically-based economic principles should always include some sort of banking component. After all, many ancient religions included a banking function (as we find, for example, in the temples of Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome and also Jerusalem); and so, I argue, did the primitive church.⁵⁵⁵ But, for some reason, bankers have been excluded from any significant participation in the leadership of the new temple made of living stones. Thus, somewhat perversely, it is secular economic institutions and “fundamentally atheistic” professionals who have expressed the greatest

⁵⁵⁴ Put simply, economic growth has to be financed, and that requires the involvement of banks and bankers. However, banking is merely a tool, and can be used for both good and not-so-good purposes. For example, according to Ferguson (2008:13), “poverty is not the result of financiers exploiting the poor. It has more to do with a lack of financial institutions, with the absence of banks, not their presence. Only when borrowers [the poor, in particular] have access to efficient credit networks can they escape from the clutches of loan sharks, and only when savers can deposit their money in reliable banks can it be channelled from the idle rich to the industrious poor”. On the other hand, in the debates in the English Parliament (between 1571 and 1624) concerning the contentious issue of usury, the growing economic needs of the nation won out over 1,500 years of theological argument and tradition. Consequently, as Jones (1989:203) explains, “Theology, law and economic reality chased one another around usury creating a compound that greased England’s entry into the capitalist world of borrowing and lending within socially acceptable limits”.

⁵⁵⁵ Because of my focus on the alternative interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, the Jerusalem congregation’s non-commercial economic activities, or what Hock refers to as “the nonmonetary exchange of value” within that community, fall outside the scope of this enquiry. He writes (2005:22) – and I am fully in agreement with the idea – that “the essence of community, its very heart and soul, is the nonmonetary exchange of value. The things we do and the things we share because we care for others”. However, in the spirit of Adam Smith, he goes on to explain that “The nonmonetary exchange of value does not arise solely from altruistic motives. It arises from deep, intuitive understanding that self-interest is inseparably connected with community interest; that the individual good is inseparable from the good of the whole” (see also pp. 26-27; 152-153).

interest in the marriage of faith and economic activity today. Understandably, their interest is thinly-veiled self-interest and also of a secular nature: i.e. an attempt to find a more efficient and less corrupt model for deploying aid and development funding. Nevertheless, it is a starting point.

In the end, however, bankers prefer to talk to bankers rather than clerics. Therefore, in order to move the dialogue forward in the most productive manner, Judeo-Christian groups in general and faith-based aid/development organisations in particular need to learn more about the modern role of priest-bankers like Joseph, Barnabas, Stephen, Philip and the other Hellenist *trapezitai*. Likewise, if the people of Yahweh ever hope to experience the full range of benefits promised within the new covenant, and also replicate the idealised conditions of the primitive church within the modern era, they will need not only to redefine and rethink the economic activities of that first century community, but also select from among the present, global multitude, “men [and women] of good and attested character and repute, full of the [Holy] Spirit and wisdom, whom we may assign to look after this business” – or at least train up a new generation to do so.

But more importantly, in order to actually have any ‘business’ (*chreia*) to look after, clergy, evangelists, mission workers et al will need to reinstate the full salvation-restoration model within the current message of salvation-only.

9. APPENDICES

9.1 Luke: historian or theologian?

The art of ancient historiography, biblical or otherwise, falls somewhere between von Rad's "history" and Barr's "story" as the culmination of a process of imbuing factual data with significance for the manufacture of truth (Rothschild, 2004:11).⁵⁵⁶

[The author of Luke-Acts]⁵⁵⁷ aims not so much at letting the readers know what really happened as at helping them understand what all this means, this invasion of the Hellenistic world by the Christian church (Dibelius, 1956:133).

9.1.1 An overview of the debate

The biblical scholar, Kirsopp Lake, is reported as saying to a class that, "if Acts is not a sound historical document, we know nothing of the origins of Christianity".⁵⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the scholarly debate concerning whether to treat Luke as either "The First Christian Historian" (Dibelius, 1976:133) or a theologian who "historicized" his message (von Un-

⁵⁵⁶ See Gerhard von Rad, "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel", in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. by E. W. Trueman Dicken (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1966), pp. 166-204; also, James Barr, "Story and History in Biblical Theology", *JR* 56 (1976), p. 6. For this section of the enquiry, I am particularly indebted to Sterling (1992) and Rothschild (2004) for devoting their doctoral dissertations to the debate over the historicity of Luke-Acts. For further reading on the history of and arguments involved, see specifically Rothschild (2004:24-59); also Keck and Martyn (1976); in particular, the chapters by van Unnik (pp. 15-32), Goodenough (pp. 51-59), Klijn (pp. 103-110) and Haenchen (pp. 258-278).

⁵⁵⁷ According to Sterling (1992:321), "The third Gospel and the book of Acts are both anonymous [...] It is not until the latter half of the second century that we have any testimony about the authorship of Luke-Acts". However, Talbert (1997:1) informs us that "The early tradition speaks of Luke as the author [of Acts]: for example, the Muratorian Canon; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.14.1; Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 5.12; Eusebius, *Church History* 3.4; Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 3.6, *Epistle* 53.9; *Lives of Illustrious Men* 7. Consequently, I have accepted the presupposition that a single author wrote both works, and have no problem in referring to that author as Luke (without any quotation marks).

⁵⁵⁸ Cited in Goodenough (1976:51)

nik, 1976:25) has been raging since the eighteenth century, when members of the Tübingen school started to challenge the historical accuracy of Acts.⁵⁵⁹

The arguments against Luke writing “pure history” (Moxnes, 1993:250) are many.⁵⁶⁰ The presence of a “high frequency of supernatural and miraculous events” and “confessional language” is said to put him squarely in the theologian mould.⁵⁶¹ Other critics point to the amount of “hyperbole” in Acts (e.g. “fanciful” numbers and the reputed exaggeration of sizes of audience and the importance of eyewitnesses and/or protagonists); also, the presence of “historical errors”, as well as certain accounts of events that look implausible, along with certain “discrepancies” in Luke’s reports concerning Paul (when compared to Paul’s own account of the same event in his epistles) – not to mention particular problems associated with the various speeches.⁵⁶²

On the other side of the debate, the promoters of “Luke as historian” argue that the historicists have judged Luke wrongly, as a result of their “rather narrow understandings of ancient historiography” (Rothschild, 2004:24). They accuse historicists of going too far in trying to reduce history to facts and facts alone. In doing so, these historicists have tended to relegate anything that cannot be categorised as “factual” to “theology”, “ideology”, “literary licence” – or worse, “myth”. Consequently, Luke is viewed

⁵⁵⁹ van Unnik (1976:15) refers to Acts as a “Storm Center in Contemporary Scholarship”. According to Horton Harris (1975:255; cited in Barrett, 1996:52), the chief characteristic of the Tübingen school was “their objection to the supernatural”, which constituted “the first comprehensive and consequent attempt to interpret the New Testament and the history of the early Church from a non-supernatural (indeed anti-supernatural) and non-miraculous standpoint”.

⁵⁶⁰ According to Green (1996:285-286), “Acts has too often and unfortunately continues in some quarters to be evaluated as historiography on the basis of modernist, positivistic canons: [that is], on the basis of criteria that have themselves become problematic”.

⁵⁶¹ Rothschild (2004:8) defines “religious confession” in the pejorative sense: as “a relaxation of critical reasoning and succumbing to the theocentric climate of the day”.

⁵⁶² I am not concerned here with the so-called “we-passages” in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1 – 28:16, which fall outside the focus of this enquiry.

as *either* historian *or* theologian; a hybrid solution is rarely countenanced.⁵⁶³ The crux of the problem is explained succinctly by Watson (1996:2): “For the very early history of Christian Church from just after the death of Jesus the only direct evidence we have is in the Book of Acts. How far the history is authentic is not easy to judge, but it does represent the Christian tradition or, at least, the only strand of it we know”. Because of this, our dilemma is even more acute for the primary NT focus of this enquiry: Acts 2 to 8.

To start, it would be helpful to discuss the generally accepted theory as to *why* Luke wrote Luke-Acts. At the time the work was written (between 75 and 90 AD),⁵⁶⁴ the Christian church faced serious credibility problems, both from within and without. As van Unnik (1976:24-25) explains, “By the time Luke wrote, the expectation of an imminent return of Christ [the *parousia*] had been proven wrong by the turn of events”. Thus, people began to wonder whether the entire message of Christ might be wrong, which obviously created a crisis among the Christian communities of that time.⁵⁶⁵ In terms of external reactions, Rothschild (2004:91) explains that “By the end of the first century, legends surrounding Christian origins had multiplied so rapidly that the entire debate was mired in complexity and doubt”. As an example, she cites Pliny’s description of the early

⁵⁶³ Klaus Berger (1984:359-360) provides such a hybrid view, describing Acts as “apologetic history”, which Sterling (1992:320) contends is “in the style of Josephos”. Sterling further informs us (1992:1, n. 1) that the first important early monograph analysing Acts from the “apologetic history” perspective was written by Matthias Schneckenburger in 1841 (see Matthias Schneckenburger, *Über den Zweck der Apostelgeschichte*, Bern: Christian Fischer, 1841). He also provides us with a helpful definition of “apologetic historiography” (1992:17) as “the story of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group which follows the group’s own traditions but Hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world”.

⁵⁶⁴ According to van Unnik (1976:19), “There is a fairly strong consensus that [Luke] wrote after the fall of Jerusalem to which he refers in Luke 21:20ff.” Sterling (1992:329-330) notes that “the third gospel uses the gospel of Mark, which was composed c. 65-75 AD”, and so tightens the date/s of writing Luke-Acts to “between 80-90 CE”.

⁵⁶⁵ Rothschild (2004:41) calls it a “theological dilemma”.

Jewish Christian movement as “nothing more than a degenerate and extravagant superstition”.⁵⁶⁶

It is against this background that Luke chose to write Luke-Acts, so “that [not just the ‘most excellent Theophilus’, but the followers of Jesus everywhere] may know the full truth and understand with certainty and security against error the accounts (histories) and doctrines of faith which [they had] been orally instructed” (Luke 1:4). Equally as important perhaps is that Luke did so, “after having searched out diligently and followed all things closely and traced accurately the course from the highest to the minutest detail from the very first, to write an orderly account” (Luke 1:3). In other words, as Rothschild remarks (2004:94), Luke “claims that his investigation has been thorough [...] and has produced a *plausible* version of the events” (my italics).⁵⁶⁷ Nevertheless, along with his fellow ancient historians, Luke understands that facts alone will not convince his educated audience;⁵⁶⁸ consequently, like his contemporaries, he employs what Rothschild (2004:2004:3) refers to as “techniques of persuasion”.⁵⁶⁹ However, his use of these techniques should not be confused with the view mentioned by van Unnik (1976:27) that,

⁵⁶⁶ See Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 10.96.8. The correspondence was written while he was imperial governor (*legatus Augusti*) of Bithynia-Pontus. His opinion is shared by Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44) who, in his account of Christian persecution under Nero, describes the sect as practitioners of an *exitiabilis superstitio*; likewise, Suetonius (in *Nero* 6.16.2) refers to Christians as *genus hominum superstitionis novae*.

⁵⁶⁷ Rothschild (2004:94, n.122) explains that “ἀσφάλεια in Luke 1:4 can incorporate the ideals of impartiality and plausibility”. In Strong’s Concordance, *asphaleia* (G803) is defined as ‘certainty, undoubted truth’; from the root *asphalēs* (G804), ‘firm (that which can be relied on), certain, true’. According to Green (1996:285), Luke was something of a pioneer and faced a major hurdle in the writing of Acts: “It was unheard of in antiquity to write the history of a religious movement, since history was political history, dealing with significant events [...] a newly formed sect was no suitable subject for a historian”.

⁵⁶⁸ As mentioned previously, Dibelius (1956:53) calls them “a higher circle of readers”.

⁵⁶⁹ Rothschild is using Aristotle’s definition of ‘rhetoric’ (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1): i.e. “available means of persuasion”. She also contends (2004:291) that such techniques “do not undermine generic understandings of the work as historiography in favour of theological readings, rather they support the designation of Luke-Acts as Hellenist historiography”.

as an “historian in antiquity [Luke allowed] himself certain liberties”: i.e. creative or literary licence.

9.1.2 Techniques of persuasion

Moxnes (1993:250) admits that “Luke does not write ‘pure’ history”, but argues that “In line with the tradition of his time, there was no conflict between the ideal of true historical rendering and of telling the story with the purpose of influencing one’s readers”.⁵⁷⁰ As a result, these ancient “techniques of persuasion” do not diminish his credibility as an historian, they in fact enhance it – *within the context of ancient historiographic practices*.⁵⁷¹ Therefore, it would be helpful to discuss some of these techniques and, in doing so, illustrate how an economic perspective adds to the credibility of Luke’s version of events – and thus provides a worthwhile contribution to the Luke-Acts debate.

First among the arguments *contra* Luke as historian (and *pro* Luke as theologian) is the “high frequency of supernatural and miraculous events” presented in his accounts, along with a considerable amount of “confessional language”. In reply, Rothschild (2004:21) offers the example of Plutarch’s report that “Caesar prevaricates about going to the Senate on the Ides of March on the basis of omens”.⁵⁷² She correctly reminds us that “Although theological in nature, appeals to omens represents an accurate depiction of a *bona fide* historical individual. Theology must, thus, be integrated into our understanding of the events at the core level of fact”. Similarly, Talbert (1997:3) contends that, “In antiq-

⁵⁷⁰ He is quoting David Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), pp. 77-115

⁵⁷¹ van Unnik (1979:37-60) argues that the preface, speeches, and emphasis on autopsy demonstrate the ties of Acts to Hellenistic historiography, and considers Acts an historical work. Likewise, Sterling (1992:320) finds the arguments for locating Acts within the stream of historiography to be “persuasive”. Finally, Hans Conzelmann (1987:xl) regards Acts as a “historical monograph”.

⁵⁷² Plutarch, *Caesar* 63.3 – 67.1

uity it was widely believed that a divine necessity controlled human history, shaping the course of its events. Polybius, for example, believed a divine providence ruled the world. This belief he expounded in his *Histories*".⁵⁷³

Granted, the "miraculous" occupies a significant role (and enjoys a higher than average usage) within Acts.⁵⁷⁴ However, since this text is reputedly the historical account of the birth and early expansion of a religious movement whose central doctrine (also its credibility and attraction) depends on divine intervention in the human experience, this is only to be expected.⁵⁷⁵ Rothschild (2004:91) further argues that "Jewish and Greek historiography alike emerge from literary contexts that make divine-human relationships explicit where such relationships are necessary for the truth". However, truth in this case is more than mere fact; it is a kind of "higher truth" – one that is imbued with significance. For example, in his commentary on the passage describing the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10), Dibelius (1956:122) writes that "Here as elsewhere Luke has abandoned an exact reproduction of history for the sake of a higher, historical truth": namely, that "Incorporating Gentiles into the church without subjecting them to the law originated not with Paul, nor with Peter, but with God".

The second issue/problem that historicists have with Luke-Acts is the author's use of hyperbole or, put bluntly, Luke's frequent "exaggeration" of either the number of

⁵⁷³ To these two examples, we might also add Eusebius' "historical account" of Constantine at the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 AD. In his *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius reports that Constantine looked up to the sun before the battle and saw a cross of light above it, and with it the Greek words *Εν Τούτῳ Νικά* ('by this, win!'). Following this "vision", Constantine commanded his troops to adorn their shields with the *Chi-Rho*, and thereafter they were victorious.

⁵⁷⁴ Rothschild (2004:142) informs us that "Interest in divine intervention in Luke-Acts exceeds that of other canonical gospels".

⁵⁷⁵ Interestingly, Jesus apparently appealed to the evidence of miracles in His ministry in order to authenticate His authority: "The very works that I do by the power of My Father and in My Father's Name bear witness to Me – they are My credentials and evidence in support of Me" (John 10:25).

people in attendance at key events or the importance of the people involved: e.g. his recurrent references to the social/religious elite as eyewitnesses or protagonists. As mentioned previously, the numbers given by Luke to describe various stages of primitive church growth (e.g. “3,000”, “5,000”) are usually disputed as overly-ambitious, if not fanciful, causing Lüdemann (1989:47), for example, to suggest that “The number 3000 comes from Luke’s imagination”. However, as I have argued, it is possible that the presence of a *trapeza* (‘bank’) operating at the heart of the primitive church community would have provided an economic engine capable of driving the kind of economic growth that simultaneously delivered numerical growth.⁵⁷⁶

Similarly, Rothschild (2004:277) contends that “it is *implausible* that [Peter’s] brief sermon [at Pentecost] elicited wholesale commitment on the part of so many” (my italics). However, we may infer from the economic context of the event that Peter’s “brief sermon” tapped into a kind of psychological *tsunami* created by over eight centuries of Jewish tradition (specifically, the OT salvation-restoration oracles) with all the attendant levels of hope and expectations for simultaneous economic restoration. And since the sermon was delivered during an empire-wide financial crisis (in 33 AD), any offer of relief from the economic problems of the day would have every chance of eliciting “wholesale commitment from so many”. Thus, the economic context of the event makes the seemingly implausible become eminently plausible.

Beyond the actual numbers claimed by Luke, he is also said to frequently “exaggerate” audience/eyewitness numbers by his use of “all”: e.g. “the high priest and *all* those with him” (Acts 5:17), and “*all* the elders from among Israel” (5:21). Another way

⁵⁷⁶ See Section 6.9, “Conclusion”

Luke uses “all” is to emphasise the high status of key participants in different events. For instance, in Acts 5:34, Luke refers to Gamaliel as “a teacher of the law, respected by *all* the people”. In another example, Luke emphasises the importance of the Council members before whom Peter and John appeared, by documenting names and titles: “It happened on the next day their rulers, elders and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander, and *all* those who were of high priestly descent” (Acts 4:5-6). Finally, in Acts 4:21, Luke suggests that the Council felt unable to punish Peter and John because of their fear of the support the apostles enjoyed from the people, since “*all* of them praised God for what had happened”.⁵⁷⁷

9.1.3 Luke’s errors? Or our ignorance of the context?

The third problem with Luke as historian is the reputed existence of historical errors in his text. However, some of these can be explained: e.g. Watson (1996:111) notes Luke’s reference to Annas as high priest after he no longer held that position. In reply, Smallwood (1970:91) asserts, as mentioned previously, that “The high priesthood tended to be confined to a small group of families, and the current holder together with ex-High Priests were known collectively as ‘the High Priests’”. Thus, the only mistake here (concerning knowledge of Jewish history) is on the part of Watson, not Luke.

Furthermore, sections of the text that look like possible errors can sometimes be explained by use of an economic perspective. For instance, according to Rothschild (2004:278), “Acts 6 records the apostles’ decision that they not ‘neglect the word of God in order to serve tables’ (v.2). Because Stephen and Philip immediately take up roles as

⁵⁷⁷ All cited in Rothschild (2004:269-270); my italics

‘ministers of the word’ (v.4) following their appointment to serve tables, *the historical plausibility of the decision is vulnerable*” (my italics).⁵⁷⁸ On the other hand, our knowledge of the day-to-day operations of ancient, Hellenist *trapezai* – in particular, the fact that senior bankers (*trapezitai*) are usually *not* found “serving at tables”⁵⁷⁹ – confirms the historical plausibility of Luke’s account.

To these so-called “errors” can be added certain interpretation problems that exegetes have thus far failed to resolve within Luke’s narrative – often arising from the idealisation and/or over-spiritualisation of pericopes that I contend describe or imply more mundane (i.e. everyday, commercial) events. For example, Luke’s contention that the primitive church had “all things in common” (Acts 2:44) has been described as an idealised depiction of the facts (although the “all” here is disputed). But if interpreted within a commercial context – specifically, the existence of a “trapezitic business” patronised by merchant-financiers and other participants who operated various types of investment vehicles in a form that we would recognise today as a “limited partnership” (Greek: *koinōnia*) – then, once more, the “more mundane” explanation provides the kind of historical plausibility missing from existing idealised version of events.⁵⁸⁰

Furthermore, by utilising an economic perspective, the exegetical angst over the so-called problem of the Greek widows (Acts 6:1) can be dismissed as *not* being a “theological problem” (Horrell, 2000:138); *nor* a “Gentile God-fearer table fellowship problem”

⁵⁷⁸ For the same reason, Johnson and Harrington (1992:111) and Esler (1987:141) also have “suspicions as to the accuracy” of Luke’s account of the event.

⁵⁷⁹ See Section 4.20, “Beyond the tables”

⁵⁸⁰ Likewise, the author’s claim that there were “no ‘needy’ (*endēes*, not *ptōchos*) among them” (Acts 4:34-35). Here again, idealisation and/or over-spiritualisation has obscured the more plausible, albeit mundane explanation.

(Esler, 1987:159); *nor* a sign of a growing schism between the Hebrew and Hellenist factions (Baur, c. 1850); *nor* because the two groups practiced different liturgies arising from their different languages (Hengel, 1983:14, 25-29). Instead, as mentioned previously, when viewed through the lens of ancient economic practices, the episode highlights nothing more than a competency or workload problem.⁵⁸¹

Finally, another argument against historical accuracy focuses on the speeches in Acts. It will suffice here to say that, because “Greek and Roman authors habitually made up speeches” (Watson, 1996:34),⁵⁸² it could be said that the speeches in fact verify Luke’s status as a historian – *within the context of ancient historiographic practices*.⁵⁸³ In addition, Luke’s authenticity/accuracy is disputed on the basis of certain “inconsistencies” between the depiction of Paul in Acts and the Paul we read about in his epistles.⁵⁸⁴ The issue here is simply this: what (and therefore who) do you use as the benchmark for accuracy – the account in Acts or the rendering in Paul’s epistles? As shown earlier, I am suspicious of Paul’s account, for example, reporting on the Apostolic Council (as found in Galatians 2:1-10; cf. Acts 15) – which omits both the important contribution of Barnabas, and also tries to usurp Peter’s priority concerning the apostolic calling to the ministry to the Gentiles. Likewise, my argument that most of the problems in the Peter-Barnabas-

⁵⁸¹ See Section 4.17, “The problem of the Greek widows re-examined”.

⁵⁸² For example, Lucian’s advice to ancient speech writers is that, “If you have to introduce a character making a speech, let the content of it be, first, suitable to the speaker and the situation [...] though indeed you have the license to be rhetorical here and to demonstrate your stylistic ingenuity” (*On the Art of Writing History* 58, cited in Talbert, 1997:46)

⁵⁸³ Sterling (1992:372) writes that “Speeches were a common trademark of Greek historiography”. He further argues that the speeches of Acts (with the exception of the so-called missionary speeches), “stood in the line of Greek historiography”. For more on the issue of the speeches in Luke-Acts, see Schweizer (1976:208-216) and, concerning Stephen’s speech in particular, Watson (1996:34-60).

⁵⁸⁴ See Watson (1996:112) and Knox (1976:284, 308).

Paul relationship should be attributed to Paul's personal ambition shows that I believe the traditional bias in favour of Paul should be challenged.⁵⁸⁵

In addition, in the view of the historicists, there is a seemingly insurmountable hurdle to overcome in any attempt to secure Luke's status/legacy as an historian: namely, if Barr's "story" is to be elevated to the status von Rad's "history", we must move beyond "plausible" to "authentic". And one of the ways to accomplish this is by subjecting "story" to the tyranny of dates. Put simply, a good "story" merely requires a beginning and an end; however, an "authentic historical account" *demands* both a beginning-date and an end-date. And here again, an economic perspective (when used as an exegetical tool) can make a significant contribution to the debate.⁵⁸⁶ In terms of this enquiry, the key start-date is 33 AD,⁵⁸⁷ which coincides with a well-documented economic crisis throughout the Roman Empire, adding to the authenticity and plausibility – and potency of the appeal – of Peter's sermon. Thus, it is indeed plausible that "3,000 souls" (out of 55,000 residents in Jerusalem, remember) responded to the combination of spiritual and economic promises being held out to them.

As also argued previously, the post-Pentecost growth in intensity of the tension between Sadducee elite and the leadership of the Jesus-Believer sect follows the same trajectory as the numerical growth (and implicit economic growth) of the community. But, eventually, the threat to the elite's economic and political powerbase grew to the

⁵⁸⁵ See Section 5.10, "Possible reasons why the Paul-Barnabas relationship turned sour". Of interest, Joseph Lightfoot's commentary on Galatians (written in 1865) offers four examples where the so-called "discrepancies" between Luke's account of the Apostolic Council in Acts 15 and Paul's account in Galatians 2 can be explained. These are discussed briefly by Barrett (1996:45-46), who writes that, according to Lightfoot, "The narratives are in fact harmonious".

⁵⁸⁶ Granted, a "perspective" is not evidence in the strict sense; therefore, it cannot authenticate anything. However, it can certainly help us move in the direction of authentication.

⁵⁸⁷ See Section 4.21, "The time spent on 'this business'".

point where it could no longer be tolerated. And the rare opportunity for action (even illegal action, if it proved necessary) afforded by the interregnum was too good to pass up – which provides an equally plausible end-date for Stephen’s persecution/execution: 36/37 AD.

9.1.4 Conclusion

The question of whether Luke should be categorised as *either* an historian *or* theologian is overly-simplistic and also tends to polarize opinion. It would therefore be better to frame the question in terms of whether Luke is:

- a) an historian who, in the tradition of ancient historiography, has combined theological components within his historical account – for the benefit of an audience used to omens, visions and other examples of divine intervention – in order to imbue facts with meaning and thus communicate a “higher truth”; or
- b) a theologian who has “historicized” his message in an attempt to make it more attractive and plausible?

As often happens, this kind of “big picture” question is best addressed by an amalgamation of smaller answers. For example, Luke’s utilisation of the supernatural does not preclude him from being accepted as an historian – *if we accept that he was writing in the tradition of ancient historiography*. Likewise, Luke is not “exaggerating” in his supposed use of hyperbole (and thus losing his right to claim that he is writing history) – *if we appreciate the potential interest in (and antipathy towards) a banking operation that offered*

*a viable and honest alternative to the corrupt Temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem.*⁵⁸⁸ Furthermore, there is no need to be “suspicious of the accuracy” of Luke’s account of certain events – *if we ignore the traditional “idealisation” and “over-spiritualisation” of sections of his text, and accept “more mundane” interpretations* (since the psychological power and motivation created by the promise/offer of economic restoration implicit in the Acts narrative are so potent, they almost make “literary techniques of persuasion” redundant). And finally, Luke’s “history” can be considered a lot more than mere “story” – *because the possible plausibility and/or authenticity of his account can be supported by the dates of contemporary secular historical events, as found in other, acceptable sources.*

Therefore, after taking all the above into consideration – and also since I find most of the arguments of the “Luke as theologian” school to be unconvincing, and the rebuttals of their arguments, as given here, highly plausible – I find myself in agreement with Martin Dibelius that Luke deserves the title of “The First Christian Historian”.

⁵⁸⁸ If, as I contend, the apostles and, later, the Seven Hellenist *trapezitai* controlled a “trapezitic business” in Jerusalem that would have been considered by many as a serious rival/threat to the existing (but corrupt) Temple treasury-bank, then the activities and pronouncements of these “bankers” would undoubtedly have attracted both widespread and high level interest among the populace of Jerusalem – especially in the midst of an empire-wide economic crisis. This inordinate level of interest can be seen in the attention granted to the leaders of major banks (e.g. Goldman Sachs in New York and Barclays in the UK) during the 2007/8 global financial crisis and its aftermath: for instance, appearances before Senate and Parliamentary committees, millions of “column inches” in newspapers and magazines, plus immeasurable airtime on all forms of broadcast media. The so-called problem of Luke’s credibility – as an historian – only exists if you do not understand the economic context of Acts and all of its ramifications.

9.2 The modern prosperity gospel: theology and social context in conflict

Any argument in support of a relationship between spiritual and economic transformation is in danger of being dismissed arbitrarily as an attempt to legitimise the much maligned, so-called prosperity gospel, as promoted in various Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. This issue obviously needed to be addressed at some point within this thesis; hence this excursus.

I will concede that the promoters of the prosperity gospel are disseminating an OT message that is in line with the basic tenets of the present enquiry and with which I find significant agreement. However, if you trawl through the literary and media output of this movement's better known leaders,⁵⁸⁹ you will eventually be confronted by a particular theological problem with major ramifications, particularly for their lay followers. As mentioned previously, the relevant OT oracles contain promises of *collective* blessing and/or curses because, in keeping with what was a national religion, the Hebrew prophets proclaimed their "word" for the benefit/correction of the entire populace of either Israel or Judah. As a consequence, Skinner (1963:7-8), for example, writes that the prophets were "conscious of being intermediaries between Yahweh and the nation of Israel [...] and the message they deliver in His name [was] addressed not to themselves personally, nor to each Israelite individually, but to the nation in its corporate capacity, conceived as an organic unity". In other words, in terms of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant and other similar OT promises of divine provision and protection, "the primary subject or 'unit' of religion [was] the nation"; and because those ancient communications were designed for

⁵⁸⁹ For example, E. W. Kenyon, Kenneth Hagin, Sr., Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Jerry Savelle and Joel Osteen

and delivered to a collective audience, they demanded a collective response – albeit one made up of a critical mass of individual decisions that, when coordinated in some way (e.g. a royal decree) created a collective will to do the right thing.

In particular, at the heart of each OT salvation-restoration oracle lies the notion that Yahweh will “restore the fortunes” of His people. As mentioned previously, the Hebrew phrase is *šūb šebūt* and, according to Westermann (1991:258-259) this expression occurs 27 times in 24 OT passages. He further explains that, “In almost every instance it is a restoration of Israel’s fortunes, but in a few passages that of another people. Only once, Job 42:10, is it a restoration of the fortunes of an individual, *a clearly secondary meaning*” (my italics). From this statement, it is evident that the appropriate macroeconomic environment for both a proper understanding and application of the OT salvation-restoration oracles and blessing model is one that occurs within a “tribal” or at least community-wide context. On this point, I find that the modern prosperity gospel runs into trouble on both theological and practical grounds because, firstly, the message is usually preached or promoted in a way that is designed to appeal to individuals;⁵⁹⁰ secondly, its content is absorbed and processed by individuals who have been heavily influenced by the prevailing western *zeitgeist* to believe that individualism and its attendant trait of personal ambition are permissible if not laudable;⁵⁹¹ and, thirdly, any instructions or principles contained in the message are implemented by individuals almost

⁵⁹⁰ For example, in Bruce Wilkerson’s book, “The Prayer of Jabez” (2000), which has sold over 9 million copies, readers are urged to repeat a prayer every day, based on 1 Chronicles 4:10, that contains “me” or “my” (the personal pronoun, first person singular) five times in a single sentence. In a similar (i.e. individualistic) vein, the theme for Joel Osteen’s weekly television programme is “Discover the Champion in You”.

⁵⁹¹ Interestingly, the dominance of individualism over community within the religious life of North America may have its seeds in the region’s Puritan theological heritage, which, according to Jones (1989:174), demands “that the individual be as free as possible to follow the dictates of God”. In fact, MacCulloch (2010:765) goes so far as to describe the individualism of the Pilgrim Fathers as “obstinate”.

exclusively on behalf of themselves or at best a small group with whom they are immediately associated: e.g. their family and/or employees.

Not only is this approach and underlying cultural ethos riddled with all the well-known pitfalls of individualism, they are also in conflict with one of the basic principles of the new covenant, as Carroll's comment (1983:98-99) on Jeremiah 31 illustrates:

The spirituality of the individual is cradled in the religion of the community. No religious urge or spirit can survive without a superstructure of communal rituals patterned by time and place. Nor can the piety of the individual have any influence without a community to nourish it or provide a foil for it to develop against.⁵⁹²

Obviously, the principles governing (and also benefits arising from) nourishment and development within a community setting apply equally if not more so to economic activity.⁵⁹³ However, even though the modern prosperity gospel message contains numerous examples of authentic OT promises of collective blessing, it is invariably communicated in a way that appeals to individuals and therefore elicits overtly individualistic responses. In fact, ever since this particular message began to be communicated via

⁵⁹² Carroll (1981:221) also explains that "Christian commentators have tended to stress the individualism of the new covenant and to see the singling out of the individual as a major advance in religion initiated by Jeremiah. Individualism combined with inwardness of religion are the essential features of the new covenant in this interpretation of the matter. It needs to be emphasized, however, that the new covenant is made 'with the house of Israel and the house of Judah' (v. 31) and not with individuals. It may internalize the covenant within the minds of the individuals constituting the two communities, but this is not individualism".

⁵⁹³ The new covenant message preached by Peter at Pentecost was explicitly sectarian and therefore may not be perceived by some scholars as having the aim of eliciting a *collective* response in the strict sense. However, as mentioned earlier, it promised economic benefits to the repentant individual via their entry into a community of fellow-penitents.

the so-called mass media,⁵⁹⁴ the cocktail of OT theology and modern social context has become even more toxic, thanks in part to the media's own efforts in promoting the stereotypical and problematic aspects associated with individualism.

As a consequence, the results of the modern prosperity gospel message are usually fragmentary and also mixed, as one would expect from outcomes that depend on disparate individuals exhibiting a range of levels of spiritual maturity, wisdom, intellect and other human traits. Were we to measure a significant number of those outcomes or results, I would predict with some confidence that the efforts of the prosperity gospel movement would invariably produce a small number of very good results at the top end of the audience spectrum, along with a similarly small number of bad results at the bottom end. Thus, the vast majority of results would be of an average or average-ish quality that, if depicted in graph form, would produce a large bulge in the middle, giving rise to the inverted curve or bell-like shape of the ubiquitous "bell curve" graph.

Now, you invariably end up with some version of the bell curve when you measure and collate a range of individual results that are derived from any reasonable size group in virtually any area of human endeavour.⁵⁹⁵ However, this is the kind of result to be expected from normal human effort or circumstances, and obviously not what we would hope for from a religious movement that constantly promises divine intervention in the human experience. And if the majority of the prosperity gospel movement's results are indeed occurring within the range of natural or human (or even super-

⁵⁹⁴ In my opinion, the phrase "mass media" should never be interpreted in the *collective* sense, since the message is transmitted via television sets, radios or computers located in *individual* homes and/or offices.

⁵⁹⁵ The bell curve is also known as the Gaussian function, named after Carl Friedrich Gauss (1777-1855), and is associated with the "normal distribution" of statistical results: e.g. the measurement of human height. See Ball (2004:49-50).

human) possibilities rather than the “supernatural” or divine, I would argue that this situation stems either directly or indirectly from the counterproductive impact of the widespread individualism inherent within the movement’s ethos and/or methodology, and also the cultural environment in which its message is being preached – which may also help explain why this particular movement attracts such widespread criticism for promising more than it actually delivers.⁵⁹⁶

Anecdotal confirmation of the prosperity movement’s less than impressive results (collectively speaking) was provided for me some time ago, when I was alerted to an unpublished and to date unverified statistic reputed to occur across the range of modern Christian ministry groups who preach a message calling on the audience to have faith for physical and/or financial miracles.⁵⁹⁷ Apparently, as admitted to me off-the-record by senior officials within different ministry organisations, it is believed that less than 10 percent of the hearers of a “Word of Faith” type message manage to internalise and process that message to the point where it creates a marked positive change in the hearer’s physical or economic circumstances.⁵⁹⁸ Granted, many more see some kind of improvement; however, the level of change that occurs in most cases could easily be dismissed as being derived from human (e.g. psychological or psychosomatic) rather than divine efforts. This may help explain the oft-recorded occurrences in scripture of

⁵⁹⁶ However, I wish to stress here that I think it is a good thing when people combine the ideas of faith and economic growth – even if they are doing so in ways that are not 100 percent theologically correct.

⁵⁹⁷ In the summer of 1993, I attended a rally in Birmingham (England), organised by US tele-evangelist, Benny Hinn. Interestingly, when Hinn asked people who had come hoping for a financial miracle to stand, the number who responded was around double those who had stood a few minutes earlier when he asked the same question regarding people hoping for a physical miracle.

⁵⁹⁸ This loosely correlates with the secular findings of the psychologist, Abraham Maslow (1943): namely, that only a very small number of people (i.e. 1½ percent) achieve the highest level of human need-fulfilment, which he called “self-actualization”. Again, this kind of result is achieved via human effort rather than divine intervention.

Yahweh executing unusual and extraordinary miracles in order to secure recognition and praise for His intervention. Finally, some hearers of the faith/prosperity message see no discernable change and some even find that things get worse.

In a nutshell, even though it is by and large based on scripture, the modern prosperity gospel message is invariably preached in the pulpit and also processed in the pew (i.e. internalised) within the wrong psychological and social context: one that is manifestly individualistic rather than community-oriented. Against this, Thompson (1981:222) writes that “covenant as a community mode of living cannot be structured in terms of what individuals do; the important thing is what the community as a whole does”. Unfortunately, the prosperity movement’s attempts to operate within a larger (e.g. national) context have also been misguided, and have created a further layer of problems in the form of the Religious Right. However, in grasping the greasy pole of politics, particularly national politics, this younger sibling of the prosperity movement has exacerbated its older relative’s theological error. After all, this kind of activity essentially mirrors the OT prophets’ attempts to *reform* the so-called “national religion” (since the Religious Right, for example, argues consistently that the United States is a “Christian nation”) and ignores the obvious *sectarian* strategy underpinning the new covenant – which is based on the long and well-established tradition of a devout “remnant” (*šē’ērîṭ*) being blessed by Yahweh, while the rump of the “wicked generation” is left to face some kind of divine judgement.

Furthermore, one particular aspect of the confusion emanating from the modern prosperity gospel originates with the preachers themselves. They are constantly putting their personal success and affluent lifestyles forward as examples-cum-proof of covenan-

tal blessings, and stating in essence that, if God can bless them in this way, He can bless anyone else in a similar manner: i.e. for similar reasons and by means of a similar methodology. This feature of the movement's message could be described as an exegetical half-truth, if such a thing exists. According to the terms of the OT blessing formula, if the conditions of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant are met, Yahweh will indeed pour out material blessings upon His people – at all levels and in all (ethical) occupations. However, scripture shows that He will not bless the congregation in exactly the same way as He blesses His serving priesthood, which obviously includes members of the modern clergy.

Put simply, the ancient priesthood (Levites) derived personal benefit from the Mosaic-Sinai covenant in a manner that differed markedly from the general members of the congregation, as we may infer from the following texts:

And, behold, I have given the Levites all the tithes in Israel for an inheritance in return for their service which they serve, the service of the Tent of Meeting (Numbers 18: 21).

All the best of the oil, and all the best of the [fresh] wine and of the grain, the firstfruits of what they give to the Lord, to you have I given them (Numbers 18:12).

Thus, according to the Torah, the priesthood were to be rewarded/compensated for their service via donations (i.e. tithes and offerings) furnished by the congregation;⁵⁹⁹ and this is patently different to the way in which the vast majority of the people of Yah-

⁵⁹⁹ There were four other groups who were designated to receive donations, in the form of charity, as opposed to offerings to Yahweh: the poor, widows, orphans and transients or sojourners ("the strangers in your midst"). See Deuteronomy 10:18-19; 14:28-29; 16:11-14; 24:17-21; 26:12-13. There is even a curse involved for people who "pervert justice" concerning these groups (Deuteronomy 27:19).

weh are supposed to receive His economic/material blessing.⁶⁰⁰ Until the eighteenth century, which brought widespread industrialisation and increasing urbanisation, that blessing came chiefly from Yahweh's involvement in the agro-economic process, since He was reputed, for example, to "provide seed to the sower and bread to the eater" (Isaiah 55:10; cf. 2 Corinthians 9:10). Today, in the majority of developed nations, less than two percent of the workforce is involved directly in agriculture; and so the primary channel for Yahweh's material blessing has for all intents and purposes shifted to the innumerable enterprises in which His people now earn their living as participants in the local, regional and increasingly globalised economy.⁶⁰¹

It is also worth noting that, generally speaking, the circumstances of the other OT-designated recipients of donations/charity can be subject to change to the point where they no longer require charity. For example, the poor once worked and could work again; the widows were once married and could get remarried; and the strangers could leave the town in which they were strangers and go somewhere where they were not. On the other hand, gifts and/or offerings (i.e. donations) were designated as the *permanent* source of income for the priesthood. On the basis of this key differential alone, prosperity preachers should exercise a lot more care and perhaps even refrain from using their own experience as a testimonial of the potential benefits that the laity may derive from the OT covenant. Thus, the overall message of the prosperity gospel movement is, at best, confusing and, at worst, socially and economically dangerous. Left unre-

⁶⁰⁰ Agrell (1976:18-19) confirms the demarcation of both work and method of compensation between the ancient priests and laity: "The levitical priests are to live on what is offered [i.e. donations]. These men administer the cult on behalf of all the other Israelites, *who are occupied with ordinary work*" (my italics).

⁶⁰¹ As mentioned previously, Deuteronomy 8:18 can be interpreted/paraphrased to say that it is Yahweh Who provides His people with the power to "make money" or "make a living"

solved, this conflict between ancient theology and modern social context has the potential for grave and wide-ranging consequences, which is exactly what has happened during the movement's relatively short history. In their misguided attempts to put the OT covenant into practice in their day-to-day lives – in the way that they have been instructed by their misguided clergy – Christian business people go bankrupt, get divorced, and the sick get sicker. And not only does Yahweh usually get the blame, but many of the disappointed recipients of the message and/or ministry are left drowning in guilt, which is not entirely self-administered.

According to Thompson (1981:221), the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 is not a rationale for individualism, “nor is it the essence of religion which the philosopher, A. N. Whitehead defined as ‘what a man does with his own solitariness’.”⁶⁰² What is envisaged in the text remains essentially the core of the Deuteronomic view of *community* religion” (my italics). Obviously, what needs to be done is that millions of individuals must somehow be formed and fashioned into a modern, *collective* people of Yahweh, the original “unit of religion” that is relevant to both old and new covenants, as occurred in Palestine in the days of the prophets and also in the primitive church. However, as Skinner (1963:72) writes in his commentary on Jeremiah 31, this idea “is unfamiliar to our [modern] individualistic manner of thinking”. Also, knowing what needs to be done is not the same as knowing how to do it.

⁶⁰² See Whitehead (1927:6)

9.3 Table of spiritual events and economic cycles: 1781-1973

Note: The table below contains 219 episodes of “spiritual revival” discovered during my survey (See Section 7), but does not include the 8 rejected episodes – as explained in the discussion concerning the methodology and problems involved (Section 7.1).

Start	End	Leadership	Location	Comment
1781			Britain	Cornwall
1782	1845	Kondratieff Long Wave No.1		
1782	1815	Prosperity		
1782		Jonathan Edwards	Britain	Concerts of Prayer movement
1783		George Lyle	Jamaica	Afro-Christian movement
1784	1808		United States	American Methodist movement
1785			Wales	Brynengan
1786			Wales	Trecastle
1787	1805		United States	"Great Revival" in Southern states
1788		Johann Sailer et al	Allgauer, Bavaria	Revival among Bavarian Catholics
1790			Britain	Religious Tract Society founded
1791			Britain	Yorkshire
1791			Wales	Bala
1793	1834	William Carey	India	
1795			Britain	London Missionary Society founded
1796			Britain	Scottish and Glasgow missionary societies founded
1796		Hans Nielsen Hauge	Norway	
1797	1805		United States	Second Great Awakening begins in Kentucky
1798	1803	William Bramwell	Britain	Nottingham, Wetherby
1798	1799		Canada	Nova Scotia
1798	1799		United States	New England
1799			Britain	Church Missionary Society founded
1800			Scotland	Lewis, Harris, Perthshire
1800		James McGready	United States	Campmeeting revivals in Kentucky spread also to Tennessee and the Carolinas
1801		Barton Stone	United States	Cane Ridge, Kentucky
1803			Scotland	Breadalbane, Perthshire
1804			Britain	British and Foreign Bible Society founded
1805			Wales	Aberystwyth
1806			Britain	Revivals secede from Methodism: Independent Methodists formed
1810			Britain	Camp Meeting Methodists formed
1810			Russia	Revival in Russian Orthodox Church

Start	End	Leadership	Location	Comment
1810		Robert Haldane	Switzerland	Revival spreads to France, the Low Countries and Germany
1810		Christmas Evans	Wales	
1812			Britain	primitive Methodists formed
1813			Russia	Russian Bible Society founded
1815	1818		United States	Northern states
1815	1825	Recession		
1816	1819	James Haldane	Scotland	Breadalbane, Perthshire
1816			Western Germany	First Eberfeld revival
1817			Wales	Beddgelert
1820			Germany	Revival in Pomerania
1820			Western Germany	Second Eberfeld revival
1821		Charles Finney	United States	Adams
1821			Wales	Denbighshire
1822			Wales	Anglesey
1825	1836	Depression		
1825		Charles Finney	United States	New York
1826		Eugene Kazancev	Western Siberia	Russian Orthodox missions begins
1827			Western Germany	Siegen-Dillkreis revival
1828			Wales	Carmarthenshire
1830		F & A Monod	France	
1830		Robert Haldane	Switzerland	
1832		Edward Irving	Britain	Catholic Apostolic Church founded in London
1832			Wales	Caernarvonshire
1835	1850	L Laestadius	Finland	Revival-evangelical awakening in the Osterbottenvackelse (lasted 15 years)
1836	1845	Recovery		
1837	1843		United States	Great Awakening in Hawaii: 27,000 Protestant adult conversions
1837	1875	Charles Finney	United States	Oberlin College, which influenced 20,000 students
1838			Turkey	Small-scale revivals among Armenians in Nicomedia
1839			Britain	Wycliffe Chapel
1840			Wales	Merionethshire
1841			Turkey	Small-scale revivals among Armenians in Adabazar, and later in Aintab and Aleppo
1842			Norway	Revival spreads through State Church of Norway; Norwegian Mission Society started
1842			United States	Boston
1843			Western Germany	Revival in Hermannsburg
1844			Persia	Revival among Nestorians

Start	End	Leadership	Location	Comment
1845	1892	Kondratieff Long Wave No.2		
1845	1866	Prosperity		
1849			Persia	Revival among Nestorians
1849			Wales	South Wales
1850			Persia	Revival among Nestorians
1854		Hudson Taylor	China	
1855		William Booth	Britain	Starts ministry; 2000 converted in 5 months
1857	1858	Charles Finney	United States	"Great Awakening"; Finney reports 50,000 conversions in single week
1857		Phoebe Palmer	Canada	Hamilton
1858		Jeremiah Lanphier	United States	New York
1859			Britain	
1859		James McQuilkin	Ireland	Ulster
1859		David Morgan	Wales	50,000 conversions
1860		Andrew Murray	South Africa	Revival in Afrikaaner Churches (Dutch Reform)
1860		G van Prinsterer	The Netherlands	
1860			Ukraine	
1861	1863		Britain	Cornwall
1861		William Booth	Britain	Cornwall
1861			Jamaica	Great Awakening
1863		H Geyer	Germany	Universal Catholic Church formed as breakaway from UK Catholic Apostolic Church
1865		William Booth	Britain	Salvation Army founded (known originally as Christian Revival Association)
1866	1872	Recession		
1870	1912		India	Mass revival in Punjab: 50% of Hindu Chuhars converted in Sialkot
1871			Japan	
1872	1883	Depression		
1876			French Guinea	First mission of French Holy Ghost Priests
1880	1910		Germany	Thirty Years' Revival: several hundred thousand converted in state churches
1883	1884	William Taylor	Australia	Sydney
1883	1884	Moody & Sankey	Britain	
1883	1892	Recovery		
1883			Japan	
1885		C T Studd	Britain	University students >> China Inland Mission
1886	1887		Britain	Skinningrove Methodist Church
1886			United States	United Holy Church founded in Method, North Carolina

Start	End	Leadership	Location	Comment
1890		Samuel Chadwick	Britain	Start of ministry
1892	1948	Kondratieff Long Wave No.3		
1892	1920	Prosperity		
1893	1900		Various	Twenty-three new denominations grew out of different revivals
1893		Pilkington	Uganda	
1894			Madagascar	Soatana revival begins among Lutheran and LMS churches
1895	1897	R J Ward	India	Madras
1895		B H Irwin	United States	Fire-Baptized Holiness Church teaches a third blessing
1895			United States	Association of Pentecostal Churches formed
1895			United States	Church of God in Christ formed
1897		Pope Leo XIII	Global impact	Encyclical letter 'On the Holy Spirit' influences millions
1897			United States	Association of Pentecostal Churches begins foreign missions
1900			Japan	Church membership doubles
1900	1906	C T Studd	Southern India	
1900			Various	Revival among captured Boer soldiers, who were transported to various British colonies.
1901		Charles Parham	United States	Bethel Bible School opened
1902		Torrey and Alexander	Australia	8,000 converts in meetings held in Melbourne
1903	1905	Torrey and Alexander	Britain	
1903			United States	Revival spreads through Kansas
1904		Evan Roberts	Wales	Revival in Glamorganshire, Anglesy and Caernavonshire
1905			Germany	
1905		Pandita Ramabai	India	Pentecostal revival in Mukti Mission, Poona
1905			Switzerland	
1905			United States	Revival in Houston
1906	1909	William Seymour	United States	Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles
1906		T B Barratt	Norway	Christiana (Oslo)
1907	1908		Italy	
1907		A A Body	Britain	Sunderland: First pentecostal movement within Anglican Church
1907		Jeffrey Brothers	Britain	Pentecostal revivals
1907			Chile	
1907			Korea	Revival begins in Pyongyang
1907			Norway	
1907			United States	Dunn, North Carolina
1908			China	

Start	End	Leadership	Location	Comment
1908		Jonathan Goforth	Manchuria	Revival in Changte
1909	1912	John G Lake	South Africa	Founded two Pentecostal denominations
1909		W C Hoover	Chile	Inglesia Methodista Pentecostal church formed
1909		J A Paul	Germany	First charismatic prayer groups form within mainline state churches of Europe
1909			Korea	
1910		Charles Inwood	Africa	Nyasaland
1910			Brazil	
1910			Italy	
1911			Finland	Helsinki
1914		C T Studd	Africa	Belgian Congo
1914			Russia	St Petersburg
1914			Uganda	Mass revival
1914			United States	Assembly of God church formed
1915		G Jeffreys	Britain	Elim Foursquare Gospel Church founded
1915			Russia	Moscow
1917			China	True Jesus Church begun in Peking
1918		Aimee Semple McPherson	United States	Worldwide Evangelism association formed
1920	1929	Recession		
1920		Samuel Chadwick	Britain	Cliff College
1921		Douglas Brown	Britain	Lowestoft
1921		Simon Kimbangu	Congo	Charismatic revival and mass conversions
1921			The Netherlands	International Pentecostal Conference convened in Amsterdam
1921			United States	First radio broadcast of worship service (Pittsburgh), also first Baptist broadcast
1922		Aimee Semple McPherson	United States	Broadcasts first radio sermon
1922		Ivan Voronaev	USSR	Pentecostalism introduced in USSR
1923		Aimee Semple McPherson	United States	International Church of the Four-square Gospel is formed (Angelus Temple, Los Angeles)
1924			United States	Pentecostal Church Incorporated formed
1925	1926	Charles Greenwood	Australia	The Sunshine Revival in Victoria
1925		C T Studd	Africa	Pentecostal experience amongst Africa Mission workers
1925		Smith Wigglesworth	Global impact	Commences era of large evangelistic healing campaigns in Europe and USA
1925			Nigeria	Charismatic revivals within Anglican church leads to formation of new

Start	End	Leadership	Location	Comment
				denominations
1927		Watchman Nee	China	
1927			Ruanda	East African revivals: spreading to Uganda, Zaire and later to Sudan and Malawi
1929	1937	Depression		
1930			Germany	
1931		L Dalliere	France	Charismatic renewal begins in Reformed churches
1932		Johane Maranke	Rhodesia	
1933			Germany	Catholic biblical renewal results in founding of Catholic Bible Association, Stuttgart
1936	1943		Rwanda	East Africa revival in Gahini → Kenya, Sudan, Tanganyika, Uganda + Congo
1937	1948	Recovery		
1937			Ethiopia	Widespread revival erupts after expulsion of missionaries by Italian invaders
1937			Japan	Spirit of Jesus church formed as split from Assemblies of God
1939		Donald Gee	Sweden	European Pentecostal Conference organized
1941			USSR	Mass revival in Orthodox churches in German-occupied territories
1943		Juliana Mnao	Timor	Intense adventist spirit movement while under repressive Japanese occupation
1944			United States	Assemblies of God begin radio broadcasts
1944		Billy Graham	United States	Launches radio ministry
1945			United States	United Pentecostal Church International begun
1946	1949		Belgian Congo	
1947	1952		India	Revival in Nagaland
1947			Japan	World Revival Prayer League founded
1947			United States	Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association founded in Tulsa, Oklahoma
1948	????	Kondratieff Long Wave No.4		
1948	1966	Prosperity		
1948			Canada	Latter rain revival erupts among classical Pentecostals in Saskatchewan
1949		Duncan Campbell	Scotland	Hebrides Islands
1950		Demos Shakarian	United States	Full Gospel Men's Fellowship International founded
1951		Ed Miller	Argentina	City Bell
1952		Brazil	Edwin Orr	First general "awakening"
1952		W E Allen	Ireland	Worldwide Revival Movement

Start	End	Leadership	Location	Comment
				founded
1953			India	Massive growth of Pentecostalism, especially in south India
1953			United States	Southern Baptists implement first nationwide simultaneous revival campaign
1954		Tommy Hicks	Argentina	Biggest single evangelistic crusade in that country
1955			Europe	Pentecostalism spreads through Gypsy population in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal
1956		Oswald Smith	Argentina	Evangelistic crusade
1956		Bishop L J Suenens	Global impact	Publishes 'The Gospel to Every Creature' which has considerable impact on Vatican II
1956			Nigeria	Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria inaugurated
1956			United States	Charismatic renewal begins among Episcopal and Protestant churches (Wheaton, IL)
1957		G S Ingram	Britain	Nights of Prayer for World-Wide Revival launched in London
1958			Brazil	Charismatic renewal (Renovation movement) among Baptist pastors
1958			Latin America	Renovation charismatic movement spreads to several other Protestant denominations
1960		David Bennett	United States	Charismatic renewal spreads in Episcopal Church
1960			United States	YWAM (Youth With A Mission) founded
1961			Kenya	Charismatic movement Maria Lego of Africa splits from Catholic church
1961		Morris Cerullo	United States	World Evangelism association founded
1961		Pat Robertson	United States	CBN commences broadcasting
1962		Billy Graham	Argentina	Holds meetings in three cities
1962			Britain	Charismatic renewal in Church of England recommences
1964		L Christenson	Germany	Neo-pentecostal revival sparked in German Protestant churches
1964			Indonesia	Mass revival after Communist Party plan to massacre Christians is thwarted by the army
1965		Mel Tari	Timor	
1966			Italy	European Pentecostal Fellowship formed in Rome
1966			United States	Denominational charismatic bodies emerge
1966			United States	Duquesne students become inter-

Start	End	Leadership	Location	Comment
				ested in charismatic renewal
1967	1973	Recession		
1967			Korea	Massive evangelistic campaigns held
1967			United States	Catholic charismatic renewal in USA suddenly erupts
1967			United States	Logos Ministry for Orthodox Renewal founded in Indiana
1968		Alan Walker	Australia	First conference on "Rediscovering the Holy Spirit"; charismatic renewal breaks out
1968		Jimmy Swaggart	United States	Begins radio ministry
1970		Muri Thompson	Solomon Islands	
1970			United States	Asbury College. Kentucky
1971		Bill McLeod	Canada	Revival in Saskatoon
1971			United States	Rise of Jesus People in California, nationwide youth revival
1972		Morris Cerullo	Sri Lanka	Charismatic campaign amongst Buddhists
1972			United States	International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office founded in Ann Arbor, Michigan
1973		Todd Burke	Cambodia	Phnom Penh
1973			Papua New Guinea	Enga District
1973		Paul Crouch	United States	Trinity Broadcasting Network launched in southern California

10. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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