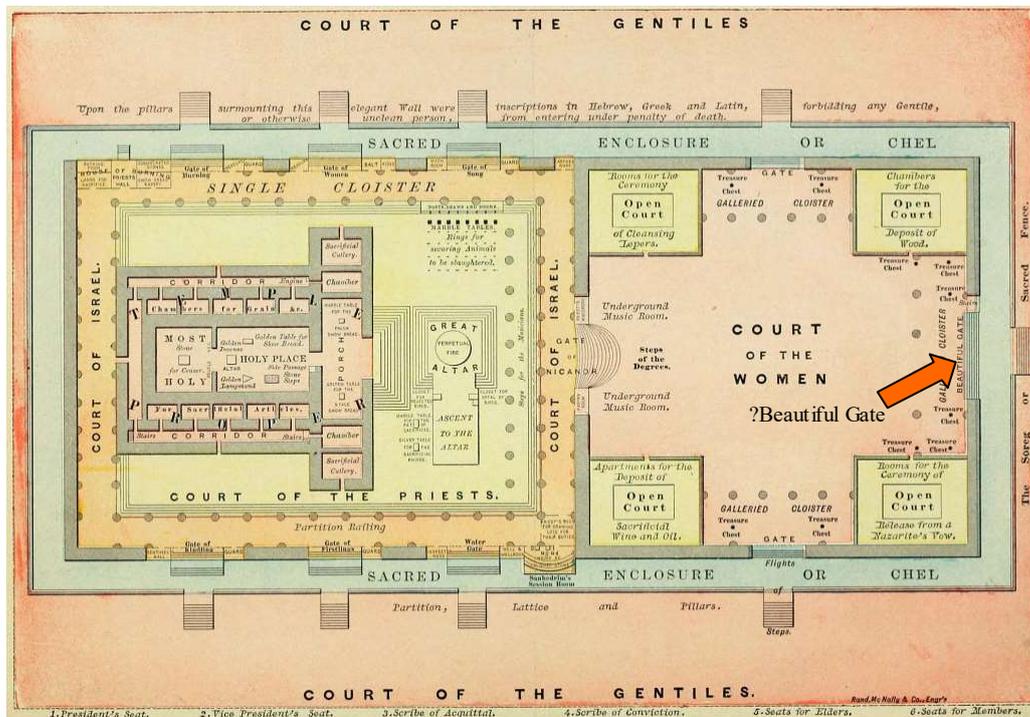


- 1 -

The Beautiful Gate



Plan of Herod's Temple and its Courtyards with Possible Location of the Beautiful Gate (arrowed)

Acts chapter 3 contains several references to time. We are told (v. 1) that Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour (*hora*) of prayer, the ninth. Then, in his sermon, Peter speaks of “times (*kairos*) of refreshing” (v. 20), of “times (*chronos*) of restoring all things” (v. 21) and of “these days (*hemera*)” (v. 23). These references are clearly important for the exegesis of Peter’s sermon! However, there is another word, occurring twice in Acts Ch. 3, which, at least etymologically, has reference to time and that is *horaios*—the word translated as “beautiful” in verses 2 and 10 where it refers to the “Beautiful Gate” at which the healing of the lame man took place.

Well, we can reasonably ask, “What is going on?” How can the word *horaios* - which is the adjective derived from the noun *hora* meaning a hour, a time or a season - be translated as “beautiful”?! Indeed, C. K. Barrett, (admittedly commenting on the non-biblical use of *horaios*) says, “. . .

it is well to remember that ὥραϊος [*horaios*] does not normally mean *beautiful*! Perhaps then, the Beautiful Gate should really be the “Timely Gate” or the “Seasonal Gate”!

In this chapter, I would like to offer some very incomplete reflections on the translation of *horaios* when applied to this particular gate, and also on why we have been given in Scripture this particular detail of the name of the gate when we are not told other details— for example, we do not know the healed man’s name. Although many of the commentaries concern themselves primarily, sometimes exclusively, with identifying the gate and other historical and geographical details, Joseph Fitzmeyer, in his Acts commentary (p. 278) notes, “*Perhaps the name of the gate is more important to the Lucan account than one normally realises*”. It would certainly be reasonable to see the name, “Beautiful” as perhaps having some significance with regard to the healing miracle (as J. Fitzmeyer also notes) and also with regard to the subsequent sermon. Indeed, Luke specifically tells us (vs. 9-10) that “all the people” who saw the healed man walking and leaping and praising God recognised him *as the one who had been sitting for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple*, and these were (presumably) largely the same “all the people” in v. 11 who heard Peter’s sermon in vs. 11-26: if then the Beautiful Gate is a significant factor in the context and interpretation of Peter’s sermon, we should ask, what is that significance?

The Translation of horaios

Well, let’s start by looking at the translation question.

I am not really equipped to study this question fully, but it does seem to me that the translation “beautiful” is partly correct, but also incomplete and somewhat misleading—at least to us modern Westerners whose understanding of beauty has been strongly culturally conditioned (whether acknowledged or not!) by the aesthetic, classical tradition of Western art.

I think that there are two main ideas, albeit related, of beauty in Greek thought, and these are exemplified by two of the Greek words for beauty—*kalos* and *horaios*. *Kalos* I think corresponds more with our conventional idea of beauty which we associate with ideas like attractive, proportioned, symmetrical and pleasing to the senses or to the mind. However, whilst *horaios* beauty can, and often does, overlap with *kalos* beauty, it arrives at that area of overlap by a different route. Here are a couple of quotations. The first is from Paul Mainwaring:

“The ancient Greeks connected beauty to time. One of their words con-

nected to the concept of beautiful was *horaioi*, which meant 'to be in one's finest hour.' Beauty is attached to time because there are seasons and timings involved for something or someone to be in their finest hour. For example, if you pick a piece of fruit at the right time in its finest hour then its beauty is shown in the fact that it is perfectly ripe. But pick it a week earlier or a week later and the moment of beauty is not there – it won't be fully ripe because it has been prematurely picked or it will be decaying because its time has passed. For the Greeks, beauty was more about moments."

The second is from R. C. Trench's *New Testament Synonyms*:

"*Horaioi* is used frequently in the Septuagint, where it represents a large variety of Hebrew words. In the New Testament, *horaioi* is only used four times. The steps by which it came to mean "the beautiful" in all of these passages are few and easy to trace. In this world everything that is subject to the laws of growth and decay has its "hour," or *hora*, that period when it attains its greatest grace or beauty. This *hora*, or turning point of its existence and the time when it is at its loveliest and best, produces *horaioi*, which first referred to that which is timely. In Xenophon, *horaioi thanatos* is timely death because it is honourable. Next, *horaioi* came to refer to the beautiful. . .

Although all things that belong to the passing world eventually perish, along with their grace, they still have their "hour," however brief, that season of their highest perfection. This last concept is part of *horaioi*.

Although the higher moral aspects and uses of *kalos* are interesting to note, especially the way the term can be used to refer to beauty and to goodness, we will not deal with this aspect of the word. Only when *kalos* refers to physical aspects of beauty can it be compared with *horaioi*. Initially, *kalos* referred to beauty, especially from the Greek viewpoint of that which is harmonious and complete, of something in which all the parts are balanced and proportionate. [Note the word "initially" above I think is used to allow for the subsequent development of the word where it can also refer to moral goodness. S.F.] Basil the Great did an excellent job of distinguishing *kalos* and *horaioi*:

"To *horaion*" differs from "to *kalon*" ["To" means "the" in Greek. S.F.]; that which is developed at the suitable time to its fitting prime is called *horaion*, as the fruit of the vine, which has fulfilled its own mission toward its fruition through the season of the year and is ready for enjoyment; *kalon* is that which is harmonious in the composition of its parts, possessing a grace blooming in it."

An example of the difference then might be that a bride on her wedding day will very often have beauty in the conventional sense and be truly *kala*—but she will *always* on that special day have the beauty called *horaia*: her beauty as a bride reaches its highest and most complete form on that day.

Finally, here is the entry for *horaios* in Strong's concordance:

“beautiful. From *hora*; belonging to the right hour or season (timely), i.e. (by implication) flourishing (beauteous (figuratively)) -- beautiful.”

It does seem to me that this “time connection” is not always all that apparent in every usage of *horaios*—particularly in the many places where it occurs in the Septuagint, and it is not clear, certainly to me why *horaios* has been chosen instead of *kalos* or some other Greek word for beauty in some of these instances. It seems to me that, in some of the uses in the Septuagint, (though this is not so evident in classical Greek usage) there may be an “as if” quality in the “time element”. Thus an object having beauty *as if* in the timely season of beauty or having *the same sort of “blooming” beauty* that one associates with timely beauty could I suggest also be described as *horaios*. I think we will see an example of something equivalent to this later in the chapter when we consider the Septuagint translation of Is. 52:7. However, before we see whether the concept of beauty in the strict “*horaios*” sense might help us better understand Luke’s two references to the Beautiful Door or Gate in Acts 3 verses 2 and 10, I would like to look briefly at the two other places in the New Testament where the word occurs, and where I suggest the “strict” meaning of *horaios* is likely present.

In Matthew 23:27-28, Jesus, in describing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees speaks of “whitewashed tombs” which outwardly appear beautiful (*horaios*) and He compares these with the Pharisees who outwardly appear righteous. Thus, *horaios* beauty is here linked with righteousness. In v. 29 also, Jesus goes on to speak of the Pharisees as those who “build the tombs of the prophets and adorn (using the Greek word from which we get the English word cosmetics) the tombs/monuments of the righteous”.

The detailed exegesis of these verses is complicated, but it seems reasonably clear that Christ’s apparent use of irony in the passage “works” because of the normative assumption that when a tomb or monument has *horaios* beauty, it *should* do so as a fitting tribute, in the season of death, to the person’s righteousness in life. Some of the monuments erected on tombs

no doubt had architectural, *kalos*, beauty too, but their *horaios* beauty would be, not so much their own intrinsic beauty, but the way in which their beauty was to reflect, during the season of death as it were, the “good life”, or even the “good death” (some of these righteous would have been martyrs—Matt. 23:30-31) of the righteous ones, and perhaps also to point forwards, in their *horaios* beauty, to the season of the resurrection of the just. It would perhaps even be reasonable to suggest that the beautiful monument was “standing in” for, or representing, the righteous person during the interim between death and resurrection.

Thus it seems that the “season of beauty” of an object having *horaios* beauty may be, or may reflect, the season of beauty, not of itself, but that of something or somebody with which that object is associated and from which it derives its significance. Thus the apple or vine in the earlier examples has its own season of *horaios* beauty in its “ripeness”, but it also has that *horaios* beauty of being at its “finest hour” in fulfilling its purpose in respect of the fortunate person who will enjoy it.

This “double application” of the season of *horaios* beauty is, I suggest a feature of the second passage in the NT outside of Acts Ch. 3 where *horaios* occurs, and that is Paul’s OT quotation in Romans 10:15, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

In Scripture, and generally, feet are not usually considered to be particularly beautiful parts of the human body in the *kalos* sense, but they are here clearly possessors of *horaios* beauty! From where does this beauty come, and to what season is that beauty linked?

Before we investigate the possible “season” associated with this use of *horaios*, I note that, whilst bible translators almost unanimously translate *horaios* in this verse as “beautiful”, the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament known as BDAG offers the translation, “how timely is the arrival of those who proclaim good news”, and this translation has been followed in the NET bible. I think this is insightful, but probably “incomplete” because the idea of “actual beauty” is indeed present in the OT passage which Paul quotes, Is. 52:7.

Here is Is. 52:7, first in the Hebrew word order of the MT and secondly in the Greek word order of the LXX version which, although rather divergent, is nevertheless instructive.

“How beautiful [Heb: *naah* to be comely, befitting or lovely] upon the

mountains are the feet of him who brings good news . . .”.

“I [the Lord] am present as a season (i.e. as a season of beauty) [Gk: *hora*] upon the mountains, as the feet of one preaching glad tidings of peace . . .”

(We note in the LXX translation above the use of the “as if” quality of the beauty described—cf. the earlier discussion).

There are a number of things to be said here!

First, the context of Is. 52:7 is the prophesied announcement of a glorious reversal of Zion’s fortunes: foreign oppression and captivity have ended and the time of salvation and of knowing God’s Name has arrived. The messenger is pictured as running (perhaps from the scene of battle) across the hills to Zion to announce the good news that God reigns. The feet of the messenger are beautiful with *horaios* beauty because, as feet of a messenger running with such a momentous message, this is their finest hour—the hour, one could say for, which they were created.

Both the translator of the LXX version and Paul himself have incorporated this “time element” of the beauty of the messenger’s feet by the use of *hora* and *horaios* respectively in their translation of Is. 52:7—a prophecy which Paul in Romans sees as fulfilled in the preaching of the good news of the gospel. In both translations, the “ripe time” of the dramatic reversal of Zion’s fortunes is poetically extended to the feet of the messenger (although this is presented, as already noted) as a simile in the LXX)—hence their *horaios* beauty. In a modern context, the hand of the postman who delivers a welcome and desperately longed for letter might similarly be described poetically as having *horaios* beauty.

Let us now see whether there might be a similar time element in the *horaios* beauty of the temple gate in Acts 3:2 and 10.

The wording in Acts 3:2 is quite specific: the lame man was placed at the gate of the temple being called Beautiful. This gate then is thus called beautiful, not just as a gate, but *as a gate of the temple*. (In v. 10 the more compact expression “the beautiful gate of the temple” is used).

Following his healing, the man enters the temple with Peter and John, walking and leaping and praising God (v. 8). It is not known for sure whether, as a lame man, he would have been allowed into the temple precincts, though there was surely at least a symbolic aspect to his initial “external” location at the door or gate of the temple. Following his healing

he “entered the Lord’s gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise” (Ps. 100:4) demonstrating his full restoration and participation in the worship of God.

The Significance of the Beautiful Gate

If, as already suggested, the Beautiful Gate is a significant factor in the context and interpretation of Peter’s sermon, we should ask, what is that significance?

To begin to attempt to answer this interesting question, we remember, as already noted that the Greek word that Luke has given us for beautiful is *horaios* and not *kalos*. Now a gate, considered “in itself”, could be described as *kalos* provided it met the criteria (e.g. as given earlier by R. C. Trench). Indeed, this approach to, or view of, beauty has led to the proposed identification of the very attractively (and expensively) decorated Bronze or Corinthian Gate in Jerusalem described by Josephus as a likely candidate for the location of the healing miracle (and this may well be a correct identification as we will see later.) In Luke 21:5, the wonderful stones of the temple (please see Mark 13:1) are described as *kalos* i.e. beautiful.

But here, in Acts 3 verses 2 and 10, *horaios* is used, without further explanation or justification, for this particular temple gate.

We are fortunate that Josephus in his *Jewish Wars* provides us with many details of the splendour of Herod’s temple. In one place, he tells us that one gate of the temple—the one noted above— in particular was more splendid than all the others. He says (Josephus, J. W. 5.5.3):

“Now nine of these gates were on every side covered over with gold and silver, as were the jambs of their doors and their lintels; but there was one gate that was without the [inward court of the] holy house, which was of Corinthian brass, and greatly excelled those that were only covered over with silver and gold. Each gate had two doors, whose height was severally thirty cubits, and their breadth fifteen. However, they had large spaces within of thirty cubits, and had on each side rooms, and those, both in breadth and in length, built like towers, and their height was above forty cubits. Two pillars did also support these rooms, and were in circumference twelve cubits. Now the magnitudes of the other gates were equal one to another; but that over the Corinthian gate, which opened on the east over against the gate of the holy house itself, was much larger; for its height was fifty cubits; and its doors were forty cubits; and it was adorned after a most costly manner, as

having much richer and thicker plates of silver and gold upon them than the other. These nine gates had that silver and gold poured upon them by Alexander, the father of Tiberius. Now there were fifteen steps, which led away from the wall of the court of the women to this greater gate; whereas those that led thither from the other gates were five steps shorter.”

Later, (in Book 6), Josephus describes a strange and interesting event concerning this gate during the siege of Jerusalem:

Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner [court of the] temple, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night. Now those that kept watch in the temple came hereupon running to the captain of the temple, and told him of it; who then came up thither, and not without great difficulty was able to shut the gate again. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open them the gate of happiness. But the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies. So these publicly declared that the signal foreshowed the desolation that was coming upon them.

This gate then, called Corinthian or Bronze Gate (which may be the gate which in Rabbinic sources is called the Nicanor Gate) is the one, of all the temple gates, that one would naturally think of as *The Beautiful Gate* if *kalos* beauty were in view. In what sense though might this Beautiful Gate of the Temple have the *horaios* beauty that Luke describes—that ripe beauty of its “finest hour” - so unlike the hour described by Josephus in Book 6 (as already noted) in which it was a harbinger of destruction?

There is some scholarly and archaeological debate about the precise location of this gate. It was on the eastern side of the temple, but whether it was the inner (more westerly) or the outer (more easterly) of the two gates so situated is debated. Now, all the gates of the temple were surely beautiful, and all in one sense functioned equally as gates. However, if, as seems likely, the Corinthian Gate described so admiringly by Josephus was the outer of these two gates, then its description as *horaios* might well have arisen because of its “borrowed” timely beauty as being the first temple gate which pilgrims approaching from the east - from the Mount of Olives - would see between them and the actual temple itself. This approach to Jerusalem from the east - one of five main roads into and out of Jerusalem - is the route that pilgrims from the north of Israel would use if they

wished to avoid going through Samaria. These weary but excited pilgrims would surely see the gate as having for them the association of timely beauty of rest and spiritual refreshment at the end of a long pilgrimage - the sort of pilgrimage associated with the Songs of Ascent (i.e. Ps. 120-134- a major part of the Great Hallel Psalms):

*“I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”
Our feet have been standing
within your gates O Jerusalem!”
(Ps. 122:1-2)*

These gates symbolically represented, (and in a sense, under the Old Covenant, actually were) the “gates of righteousness” guarding the presence of the Lord spoken of in Ps. 118:

*“Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord
This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it”
(Ps. 118:19-20)*

The above suggestion is only a suggestion! There are many possible ways in which the gate might have obtained its name, and, as we know from our own experience, names, including “nicknames”, are sometimes acquired in odd ways! Another possibility might be that the “timely beauty” of this gate might be connected with its role in enhancing the main work on the temple itself, or some aspect of that work, during Herod’s building programme which had been going on for many years, and would continue almost up to the time of the temple’s destruction in AD 70.

As we noted earlier, the gate’s beauty was not simply that of a gate “in itself”, but as a gate of the temple where, at least symbolically under the Old Covenant, the holy God—the God of the whole universe—dwelt amongst His people. So then, of all the gates to which were entrusted this sacred duty of admitting and excluding, this most magnificent gate most appropriately guarded the magnificent temple and the presence of God. Even without the suggested timeliness aspect of *horaios* with regard to pilgrims mentioned above, it could be said to have had the sort of “as if in its finest hour” quality that we earlier suggested could be allowed for *horaios* beauty.

On a typological note, the tabernacle, and after it the temple, were “glorified” versions of the Garden of Eden, and also of Mt. Sinai. (Please see for example, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A biblical theology of the book of Leviticus* by L. Michael Morales). In the Edenic context, although the cherubim of the Holy of Holies corresponded to the cherubim that guarded the Garden of Eden, there is also a “progressive” sense in which the boundaries of holiness were expanded during the history of redemption, and in this context, the gates of the temple, (and the Levites who guarded the temple) and also the gates of Jerusalem itself could correspond to the Cherubim and the flaming sword that guarded the Garden of Eden. There was also a development from the situation at Eden, since in the later developments such as the temple, access to the presence of God was allowed—and the extent and nature of this access also increased during redemption history. In Revelation Chs. 21 and 22, in the new Jerusalem, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb *are* the temple, and the gates of the city are never shut. So we see in Revelation that this “expansion” of holiness and access has its ultimate fulfilment in Christ—in Whom alone we have our righteousness - and (e.g. Rev. 21:2) in the Church, the Bride of Christ. The tabernacle and temple, both as wholes and in their individual features, were types of Christ and in this respect, the “gates of righteousness” would typologically represent Christ as the perfect, righteous and only Way to the Father.

Well, whether or not our suggestion regarding the origin of the name Beautiful is correct, how might the *horaïos* beauty of the gate, as a type of Christ, relate to the healing of the lame man?

First of all, the initial “audience” for whom Luke wrote Acts would have been Greek speakers who would likely have been acquainted with the “timely” nuance of *horaïos* beauty in classical Greek. Is it possible then that Luke intended his readers to infer that the healing of the man in the name of Jesus at this gate was the moment of timely beauty to which the name of the gate pointed—the name to which it *really* (?prophetically), referred? If this is correct, then the significance of the gate was not just as the location of the healing, but of its role in admitting this man, healed in the name of Jesus, to the (symbolic) presence of God represented by the temple: the gate was finally and most fittingly achieving its “gately” purpose as an Old Covenant type of Jesus as the way and “door” to the Father’s presence. It would then have the beauty of “its finest hour”, and we would have a possible explanation for why the name of the gate was included for us in Scripture!

A feature of this explanation is that the fulfilment of the role of the “gate”

in admitting the man healed in the name of Jesus would correspond to the "now" aspects (proposed in the present book) for the fulfilment of OT prophecies regarding the restoration of all things, and also the times of refreshing, described in Peter's sermon: the physical healing of the man corresponds to the spiritual healing being offered to Israel through Peter's sermon.

A Final Note . . .



Detail from *Horae Serenae*, 1896
by Edward John Poynter (1836—1919)

We have been looking at the Greek adjective *horaios* which is etymologically derived from the Greek word *hora*—an hour, time or season. In this connection, it is likely that Luke's initial readers/hearers, as well as being acquainted with classical Greek, would know of the Horai. (Horae in Latin). These were the Greek goddesses of the seasons who guarded the "cloud gates" of Zeus and Olympus - a function in Greek mythology that could be seen as corresponding to the gates of the temple in Jerusalem. Did perhaps Luke expect his readers to note this possible link?

One function of the Horai was their role in "bringing in the seasons" - a role known as "the dance of the Horai." The Horai symbolically clothed the seasons with their beauty, and their own appropriate beauty reflected this role. Thus, for example, Thallo, "the one who brings blossoms" (equivalent to the Latin Flora) was the Hora associated with

Spring and was described in Greek literature as a blooming maiden with flowers. Thus the Horai both reflected, pointed to and brought in the seasons each with its associated seasonal beauty. (In the Greek classical tradition, there were three seasons—Spring, Summer and Autumn.) Again, would Luke perhaps intend his readers to see the *Horaios* Gate as functioning in corresponding ways to this aspect of the Horai—that is, in connection with the healing, restoration and (symbolically) bringing in to the presence of God of the lame man, and thus as pointing to the real, true and ultimate seasons of refreshing and times of the restoration of all things brought in by Christ and which reflect His beauty?

