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In Defense Of The Apostle Paul

A while back, a certain Christian fellow made the following comment to me:

"I agree with you. I place the words of Jesus above those of all others. If Jesus spoke on an issue, then that should be the final word. Many Christians lend more credence to Paul's writings. I believe this is a mistake, and is perhaps the "easy way out." Some of Jesus' teachings are very hard to understand ... which is why he spoke in parables so often ... but just because we don't understand them doesn't mean we shouldn't read them."

----- End Of Quote -----

While I can cautiously agree with what this person said. I think we should all be mindful of the danger that this kind of mentality can present were it to be taken to the extreme. In other words, if we start making distinctions between different parts of the Bible and prioritizing them as to what should be believed first and foremost, then we are in effect neutralizing the overall veracity of the entire Bible. In my view, the minute we start treating the Bible like a spiritual cafeteria, taking what we like and leaving the rest, there is absolutely no end to it. Before long, we will be like the old woman who was left with nothing but the covers of her Bible. For those of you who are not familiar with the old story, each time the pastor would tell his congregation that a certain Biblical passage didn't really mean what it said, or that it no longer applied to our modern age, the poor woman would simply cut out that particular verse or section of verses from her Bible. After so many years of faithfully going to this pastor's church, and hearing so many of his sermons in which he made similar claims regarding other Scriptures in the Bible, this poor woman finally had nothing left but the front and back covers! This pastor, probably a lot like many of the secular humanist false shepherds of our day, had totally destroyed this woman's faith in the Word of God! He didn't do it in one quick attack; he did it slowly and methodically! Year after year, through human reasoning, rationalization and understanding, he chipped away at this woman's faith until there was no longer a base upon which it could stand; and in the end it came tumbling down. BEWARE of the devices of Satan, folks!:

"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." (2 Corinthians 2:11)

Do not fall for his subtle lies and half-truths! Remember, he knows the Word of God better than we do! He has been

quoting it and twisting its meaning for literally thousands of years, ever since the Garden of Eden when he first said:

"... Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1b)

In fact, someday soon, through the mouth of the Antichrist and his False Prophet, Satan will twist or wrest the Scriptures so far, that he will finally bring about his own destruction:

"As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."
(2 Peter 3:16)

Don't be deceived! The Antichrist and the False Prophet will know the Word of God, and they will use it to their own advantage. Even now many have been deceived by the false doctrines and lies which have crept into the religious systems of our modern world. If you would like an extensive collection of verses regarding these false prophets, please refer to the last part of my article entitled 'Endtime Witnessing: Winning The Sheep And Waging The Warfare.' But getting back to the main point of this discussion, i.e., dissecting the Word of God, it is indeed true that Paul did say in a few places that he was merely expressing his personal opinion on a certain matter. For example, concerning the issue of marriage, Paul said the following:

"But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away." (1 Corinthians 7:12)

In other words, he was admitting that He was not teaching something he had heard directly from the Lord, or from the original Eleven who had been with the Lord; he was speaking his own mind on the topic. However, considering his knowledge of the Scriptures, and the anointing of the Lord's Spirit on his life, I think we can safely assume that he was being led of the Lord in his thoughts. The main concern here is that we need to be careful that we aren't encouraging young Christians to be too judicious in what they choose to read and believe in the Bible. In all honesty, we each have our pet theories and doctrines which we strive to strengthen with verses from the Bible; but we need to let other younger Christians know that we do accept the entire Bible as the inspired Word of God. As Paul said in his letter to Timotheus:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:" (2 Timothy 3:16)

The Apostle Peter likewise echoes this sentiment when he tells us:

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:21)

At this point in our conversation, another fellow who also has a hard time accepting the writings of Paul as the inspired Word of God, offered the following comments:

"I would like the group to consider: Is the book of Mormon Scripture? Is the Koran Scripture? Why then would Paul's letters be considered as such? Messiah, while He was on Earth, never mentioned anything but the TANAKH. If I write you a letter and we hide it in the desert for a few thousand years, does it become Scripture?"

----- End Of Quote -----

Concerning the Book of Mormon and the Qur'an, I will discuss these and other works in part two of this article. This first part, however, will specifically deal with the life and ministry of the Apostel Paul and some of those who accompanied him. It is my hope that after you finish reading this article, whether you be Jew or Gentile, that you will have a renewed respect for one of the pillars of our Christian faith.

As you may have guessed, the person who made the above comment is a Messianic Jew. While he accepts the direct words of Jesus as being inspired, he has a serious problem with most of the rest of the New Testament. His principle reason for this, particularly in the case of the Pauline Epistles, is that Paul was not with Jesus, so he doubts their inspiration. While Paul was not counted among the Original Twelve who lived and worked with Jesus for some three and a half years, as will be seen by the time you finish reading this article, this is a very poor excuse for discounting his writings as being inspired by God. If we really want to get technical about it, neither Mark, (aka John Mark or Marcus), nor Luke, (aka Lucas), were counted among The Twelve either:

"Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him." (Matthew 10:2-4)

This being the case, why do we consider their Gospels just as inspired as the Gospels of Matthew and John? Why do we accept their works yet deny the writings of the Apostle Paul their due, or at least minimize our belief in their Divine Inspiration? If we are going to apply this sort of criticism against the writings of Paul, then in all fairness, to perform a proper evaluation and arrive at an impartial conclusion, we need to apply the same critical thinking against the entire New Testament. In this article, this is exactly what I have done; and as you will see shortly, these claims against the writings of the Apostle Paul are simply not valid.

Let's begin with Mark and Luke who were not included among The Twelve. From reading both the book of Acts and all of

the Epistles, we can deduce from the information available, that both Mark and Luke were known to the Original Twelve, and that they did a lot of travelling, particularly with Paul, Barnabas and Silas, on their various missionary journeys throughout Israel, Asia Minor and the surrounding coastal areas of the Mediterranean. We have no direct indication that either Mark or Luke actually spent time with Jesus. They may have, but there is no scriptural evidence to support this. In fact, it could be that they learned everything about Jesus second-hand from Peter, or from Paul or from some of the other disciples. In Mark's case we find the following verses which shed some light on his life:

"And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying." (Acts 12:12)

"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark." (Acts 12:25)

"And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;" (Acts 15:37-39)

"Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)" (Colossians 4:10)

"Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." (2 Timothy 4:11)

"Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers." (Philemon 1:24)

"The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son." (1 Peter 5:13)

In quoting these verses, I am making the broad assumption that all of them are referring to the same person who wrote the Gospel of Mark. Can I completely validate this? Of course not, but this is all we have to go on without getting into other texts. As some of you will know, I prefer to prove things directly from the Bible first, before relying upon external sources. The Bible does a very good job on interpreting itself if we just know where to look.

Concerning Luke, in addition to his name being mentioned in a few of the above verses, it is also believed that he wrote the book of Acts. The introductions to both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts seem to confirm this. In essence, the book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Perhaps it would have been better to put these two books together, or at least one after the other so that more people would see the connection. Maybe they should have been

placed together right after John so that the story flows a little better. Consider the beginning of the Gospel of Luke:

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus," (Luke 1:1-3)

Notice that Luke is directing his account of the life of Jesus to someone who is apparently in a position of authority, by the name of Theophilus. Given that the Romans were in power at the time, it may be safe to assume that Theophilus may have been of Roman origin. We find a similar opening in the book of Acts:

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:" (Acts 1:1-2)

As can be seen, Luke is informing Theophilus that he is going to continue where he left off in his former treatise, that is, the Gospel of Luke. As another confirmation that Luke travelled with Paul, in the sixteenth chapter of Acts, we see that the writer, Luke, suddenly begins to speak in the plural instead of the singular:

"And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." (Acts 16:10)

Later on in chapter twenty-one, we find both Paul and Luke joining up with the Original Eleven disciples in Jerusalem:

"And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present." (Acts 21:17-18)

In Paul's second letter to the the Corinthians, we discover in the postscript or translator's note that, possibly due to his poor eyesight, the epistle was actually written by Titus and Luke under Paul's dictation:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen. <<The second [epistle to the Corinthians was written from Philippi, a city of Macedonia, by Titus and Lucas.]>>" (2 Corinthians 13:14)

In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul also identifies Luke as a physician. This may explain why Luke concentrates his Gospel on the physical miracles of Jesus, to show that He was the Divine Healer:

"Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you." (Colossians 4:14)

And finally, in his letter to Timotheus (Timothy), Paul makes the following comment:

"Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."
(2 Timothy 4:11)

From the evidence I have presented thus far, we can see that the lives of The Eleven as well as those of Mark, Luke, Barnabas, Paul, et al were heavily interwoven. Based on this fact, to try to say one book is inspired of God while another is not seems to be unfounded in my view. Maybe Paul didn't sit at Jesus' feet as the other Apostles had done, but we know that the Lord dealt with him in a very direct manner to cause a major change in his life. Consider a picture of Paul's life before and after his conversion. First we are introduced to him as a devoted Pharisee who hated and persecuted the followers of the new Christian faith. In Acts chapter seven we find him witnessing the stoning death of Stephen:

"And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." (Acts 7:58)

Exactly when this incident happened, we cannot say with any degree of certainty. However, based on evidence I will provide a bit later in this article, I believe it was probably during the third decade of the first century. We know that after His resurrection, Jesus appeared unto His disciples for a period of forty days according to Luke:

"To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:"
(Acts 1:3)

Luke also tells us that the Lord commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of this Holy Ghost just prior to His Ascension:

"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me." (Acts 1:4)

The Disciples of course obeyed, and we find them waiting for the Holy Spirit in the upper room:

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James." (Acts 1:12-13)

It is only a short time later on the day of Pentecost that we find them all together when the gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them:

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4)

It is important to note that while some of us have long believed that the Jewish Hierarchy didn't decide to take action against the fledgling Christian Church until Acts chapter eight, this is a misconception based on not taking a closer look at the Scriptures. The persecution began the minute that the Jews realized that they were losing control of the masses because of Jesus' 'dangerous' doctrine, and it has been going on ever since. Jesus was the first martyr, but it didn't end there. As I said earlier, because the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are separated by the Gospel of John, we tend to form the idea in our minds that there is a time gap there. Well, if there is, it isn't a very big one. When the jealous Jews strung up Jesus, the verbal persecution ended, and the physical persecution began right then and there, and the first Apostles went into hiding. Remember what John tells us towards the end of his Gospel:

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. (John 20:19)

There may possibly have been a small lull in the persecution during the forty days that Jesus appeared to His disciples. After all, the Jewish elders were probably feeling quite confident of their assumed victory over the Son of Man. In addition, beginning with His arrest, The Disciples had abandoned the Lord and gone into hiding as I have just shown. They probably weren't doing a lot of witnessing at that time. That is why the Lord had to come to encourage their faith. It wasn't until the downpouring of the Holy Ghost a short time later that Christianity began to explode in Jerusalem with many miracles being done, and thousands coming to accept the Lord, as the first chapters of the book of Acts bear out. The Jerusalem Hierarchy may have thought that they had won at first, but when they saw the sudden drop in Temple and synagogue attendance, the Sanhedrin must have immediately increased their efforts to squelch this new religion which was posing a threat to traditional Jewish orthodoxy. Much to their dismay, they realized that just killing Jesus had not been enough. In fact, rather than serving to put an end to His 'dangerous' doctrines, Jesus' death on the cross only served to further strengthen the spread of Christianity, for as Jesus Himself had prophesied:

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32)

One thing we do know, is that when this persecution began, Saul was involved with it. While we are not introduced to

him until five chapters later in Acts chapter seven at the stoning death of Stephen, this does not necessarily mean that this was the starting point of his campaign of terror. In fact, as other verses indicate, which I will share shortly, he may have spearheaded the entire campaign against the Early Church from the very beginning. The main point I am trying to make here is that Saul's life was not that distant from Jesus and His ministry in Israel as some would like us to believe. By distancing Paul from Jesus, they hope to discredit the Divine Inspiration of his writings even further. According to the historical record, the dates for Paul's life are approximated at 5 B.C. to 67 A.D. This means that he was living during the exact same time period as Jesus. They must have been close to the very same age. Who knows, maybe Saul even saw or heard Jesus speak on a few occasions. Being a Pharisee himself, perhaps Saul may have even witnessed Jesus speaking in the Temple. After all, Saul was in cahoots with the very High Priest who had actually condemned Jesus:

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." (Acts 9:1-2)

In his final testimony on the steps of Roman castle in Jerusalem years later, Paul said:

"And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished." (Acts 22:4-5)

The day after that speech when he appeared before Ananias the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, he also said:

"...Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." (Acts 23:6b)

In short, prior to his conversion, Saul was a lackey of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, the religious council of the Seventy Elders. Maybe he was career-minded and interested in moving up in the ranks. If he wasn't actually a member of the Sanhedrin, maybe he was a high-ranking Temple guard. After all, for the High Priest to grant him the authority to go after the Christians in Damascus, Saul must have had close ties with him. Saul was their chosen man for the hour. He was a typical manpleaser who prided himself in observing the Torah. He was probably a lot like some self-righteous church religionists today who condemn and go after any new Christian group or church which arrives on the scene. In further speaking of his own actions and pharisaical zeal at that time prior to his conversion, Paul also says:

"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the

church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."
(Galatians 1:13-14)

When Paul appeared before King Agrippa and Queen Bernice after several years of imprisonment in Caesarea, he told them:

"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."
(Acts 26:9-11)

As can be seen, Saul was the wrath of Satan in the flesh. I believe he was completely aware of what he was doing. It seems to me that even if Saul had never met Jesus personally while the Lord was still in the flesh, the Sanhedrin probably shared with him some of the things that Jesus had taught and done in the Temple. Maybe they even related Jesus' trial to Saul. Not only that, some of the many disciples whom he persecuted must have also witnessed The Truth to him. In short, he was very responsible for his actions. In speaking of his own knowledge of the Lord after his conversion, Paul makes it clear in his letter to the Galatians that despite what he may or may not have heard from others, his primary source of information was the Lord Himself:

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11-12)

One of these revelations occurred after his eyes had been healed and he had returned to Jerusalem for a fifteen-day period:

"And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."
(Acts 22:17-21)

As I will show shortly, it was right after this that Paul had to flee from Jerusalem with the help of The Elders. While Paul may have learned additional things from the other Apostles, it is apparent that he relied directly upon his personal communion with the Lord to lead, guide and teach him what he needed to know. Between his in-depth knowledge

of the Torah, and his new relationship with the Lord following his life transformation, he must have been a spiritual powerhouse. In essence, this is exactly what many of us do today who have never met the Lord face to face; we rely upon the leading of His Spirit through our knowledge of His Word, for as Jesus said to His first Disciples:

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26)

But to go on, with the blessing of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, Saul was largely responsible for the persecution going on against the Church in Jerusalem, which he then personally attempted to carry up to Damascus:

"And Saul was consenting unto his [Stephen's] death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." (Acts 8:1-3)

As explained in my article 'Are You Saved And Sealed And Healed And Filled?', it was during that fateful journey to Damascus that Saul had his life-changing confrontation with Jesus when the Lord blinded him and knocked him off of his horse. Notice the words that the Lord spoke to Saul. Saul was very well aware of the Truth. It was just because of his pharisaical pride that he was resisting it. In seeking to silence the early Christians, Saul was undoubtedly trying to squelch the Inner Voice which was speaking to his own heart:

"And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." (Acts 9:5)

As we know, once the Lord had humbled and humiliated Saul through three days of blindness, he became a new creature; he became Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:" (Romans 11:13)

"Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity." (1 Timothy 2:7)

"Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles." (2 Timothy 1:11)

Saul was totally transformed by the Spirit and Power of God. Just as the Lord had chosen his first disciples, Saul was likewise chosen of God to be an Apostle. It is believed by

some Bible students, such as myself, that he was chosen by the Lord to replace Judas Iscariot who had betrayed our Lord and then gone and hung himself. God took one of the very worst, and made him into one of the very best to show His own Power and Glory:

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." (Psalms 76:10)

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." (John 15:16)

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28)

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God," (Romans 1:1)

"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,"
(1 Corinthians 1:1)

When Ananias expressed reservations about going to heal Saul after his encounter with the Lord, the Lord told him:

"...Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:15b-16)

Paul later confirmed these very words when he told the unbelieving Jews at Antioch in Pisidia:

"...It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."
(Acts 13:46b-47)

Immediately after his life-changing encounter, Paul tells us that he detoured to Arabia which was very close to Damascus, probably less than a day's journey:

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus."
(Galatians 1:15-17)

It was probably a day or so later that Saul returned to Damascus, where Ananias then healed his eyes and Saul

finally accepted the Lord:

"And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink...And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." (Acts 9:8-9, 17-18)

Paul was so changed after his encounter with the Lord and subsequent healing and in-filling of the Holy Spirit, that he immediately began preaching Jesus in the synagogue at Damascus much to the confoundment of his former Jewish brethren:

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:" (Acts 9:20-23)

According to Paul's letter to the Galatians, the book of Acts, and his letter to the Corinthians, Paul preached for three years before he was finally forced out of Damascus from whence he fled to Jerusalem with the assistance of some of the disciples in Damascus:

"Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." (Acts 9:25-26)

"In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands." (2 Corinthians 11:32-33)

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother." (Galatians 1:18-19)

As Paul may have anticipated, at first, because of his former persecution against the Church, there was a certain degree of animosity and mistrust towards him. It was only because of Barnabas' intervention that Paul was finally allowed to meet for the first time with Peter and some of the other disciples:

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join

himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." (Acts 9:26-27)

What the Apostles at Jerusalem didn't realize is that Paul was a real fireball for the Lord. As he stated above, Paul only lasted fifteen days with the brethren before they had to get him out of Jerusalem:

"And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." (Acts 9:28-31)

Paul was just too on-fire for his more conservative brethren in Jerusalem who were still ministering primarily to the Torah-observing Jews. Here they were trying to sit low under Jewish persecution in the mouth of the lion, and Paul immediately stirs up trouble due to his radical preaching. So, to save his neck as well as their own, they finally decided to send him on his way to his hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia via the seaport of Caesarea. Paul confirms this in his own writings when he says:

"Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me." (Galatians 1:21-24)

In continuing to read the book of Acts, we discover that following Stephen's death and the increased persecution which ensued, some of the Jerusalem disciples scattered as far north as Antioch in Syria, not far from Paul's home country of Cilicia. When word of these developments got back to The Elders in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to assist the fledgling church. Barnabas then took it upon himself to go to Tarsus to get Paul to assist him in the ministry at Antioch. They stayed there for a whole year before being sent to Jerusalem to offer some financial relief for The Elders there. Antioch has great historical significance for us as it was there that the disciples were first called Christians:

"Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch...Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of

Barnabas and Saul." (Acts 11:25-26, 29-30)

It was at around the time that Paul and Barnabas went down to Jerusalem that King Herod Antipas had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. Herod then went after Peter as well and had him imprisoned since he saw that it made the Jewish Elders happy (Acts 12:1-40). But, as we know, the angel of the Lord freed Peter from prison during the night, and Peter fled to Caesarea. You can find the whole exciting story in Acts chapter twelve. It was right after this persecution against the Church that the Lord intervened and smote King Herod so that he died of worms. According to the historical record, Herod Antipas died in 40 A.D. One thing we can deduce from these events is that if this date is correct, then Paul's encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus must have occurred no later than 36 A.D. if not earlier. We can easily reason this because Paul spent three years preaching in Damascus before his ouster from that place, and then another year in Antioch before his journey down to Jerusalem. This would also place the martyrdom of Stephen around the same year of 36 A.D. or earlier. Following the death of King Herod, Paul and Barnabas left Jerusalem and returned to Antioch taking John Mark with them:

"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark." (Acts 12:25)

It is some time after their return to the Church at Antioch that Paul and Barnabas began their first missionary journey. This can be found in Acts 13-14. Some historians place Paul's three journeys within an eleven year period from about 46 A.D. to 57 A.D. This may be partially based on Paul's own words in his epistle to the Galatians where he says:

"Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also." (Galatians 2:1)

If you add the three years that he preached in Damascus, this would be a total of fourteen years. However, upon closer scrutiny of the Scriptures, I am not certain that this is what Paul was referring to. In the book of Acts, we are not told the exact length of time of their first missionary journey. All that we are told is that after the completion of that first trip, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch for a 'long time':

"And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples." (Acts 14:26-28)

After this 'long time,' Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to resolve a problem with Peter, James and John and some of the other Elders regarding the need for circumcision and keeping the Mosaic Law. This was a result of some of the

Judean brethren going up to Antioch and erroneously declaring that the disciples had to be circumcised in order to be saved. This can be found in Acts chapter fifteen. It is in reference to this that Paul is speaking in the second chapter of Galatians. So then, it appears that what Paul is really saying is that either from the time he escaped to Jerusalem following his three years of preaching in Damascus, or possibly from the time of his second trip to Jerusalem to offer them aid, (following his one year of working in Antioch), until his third visit there to work out this problem with The Apostles, a total of fourteen years had passed. This then seems to include the total time of the first missionary journey, plus the 'long time' after that journey was completed. It was not the length of time of all three of his journeys as he had only performed one of them at the time he went to Jerusalem to work out the circumcision problem.

What I find particularly interesting about the whole incident regarding circumcision, is that this was one time where Peter and Paul were opposed to each other. As Paul explains in Galatians chapter two, Peter was called to be the Apostle to the circumcised Jews, while he was called to be the Apostle to the uncircumcised Gentiles. In the final outcome, according to Paul's writings and the book of Acts, Peter, James, Cephas and John agreed with him that circumcision was unnecessary for salvation. In Acts 15, Peter summarizes this when he says:

"Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."
(Acts 15:10-11)

Despite this victory, Peter was still having a problem with being fearful of the Law-keeping Pharisees who had entered their ranks. After all, he and The Elders were sitting in their midst right there in Jerusalem. Because of this, there was a bit of manpleasing and compromising going on. When Peter went to see Paul in Antioch some time after the Jerusalem meeting, Paul says that he had to withstand Peter and point out his error to him when Peter was afraid to eat with uncircumcised Gentiles in front of the Law-keeping disciples sent by James in Jerusalem:

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the

faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

(Galatians 2:11-16)

In thinking about this incident, the Lord showed me clearly how this also applies to those who insist on water baptism for salvation. If The Elders clearly agreed that the physical act of circumcision is not necessary for salvation, why then do some Christians today continue to insist that the physical act of baptism, which is also a matter of the flesh, is necessary for salvation? It doesn't make any sense whatsoever. It is a contradiction to say one isn't necessary while the other is. They are both dead works of the Law and do absolutely nothing to save us. Either we are under the Law, or else we are not. Either we have to keep all of it or none of it. The Apostle James made this very clear when he said:

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10)

As Paul said above, we are not justified by the works of the Law, but only by our faith in Jesus Christ. As I explained in my series of articles on baptism, by his very actions, Peter was showing that he was having trouble totally forsaking the works of the Law. I think that is why he and others were not willing to give up water baptism at first. They were afraid of the Law-keeping Pharisees who had crept into their midst feigning to be believers. The epistles are full of verses showing how these enemies of Christ crept in to cause division...and The Elders were fully aware of this.

Some time later, after returning to Antioch from this third trip to Jerusalem, Paul determined to make his second missionary journey in order to visit the churches they had established previously. It was at this time that he and Barnabas had a disagreement regarding taking John Mark with them. Paul felt to the contrary since John Mark had abandoned them on their previous journey and had returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). As it turned out, Barnabas took John Mark with him to Cyprus, while Paul took Silas, a brother who had joined them from the Jerusalem church, on his second journey to confirm the churches:

"And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches." (Acts 15:37-41)

It was during this second journey that a devout believer named Timotheus (Timothy) joined them in Derbe. Again, we see how the Jews' religion of fear affected the early disciples. Even though he knew it was totally unnecessary, Paul had Timotheus circumcised to please the Law-bound Jewish disciples:

"Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek." (Acts 16:1-3)

Eventually, Paul's missionary team would go through Philippi in Macedonia, (where they were flogged and jailed), Thessalonica, (where the Jews also stirred up trouble), Athens, Corinth, (where they picked up Aquila and Priscilla, and where the Jews again sought to cause problems), and finally Ephesus. Paul then sailed to Caesarea, stayed in Jerusalem for the feast, and then returned to Antioch.

What is interesting about Paul's missionary journeys is that even though he and his team were literally hundreds and hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem, there were Jews and synagogues in just about every place that they visited; and in most cases they tried to stir up trouble against Paul. It seems that by the first century, these enemies of Christ had infiltrated all of the major cities and countries of southern Europe since their dispersion from Israel almost five hundred years before under the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, they had become such a conniving nuisance in Italy, that Claudius Caesar, obviously aware of their agenda and lust for power and influence, had to order them to leave Rome:

"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them." (Acts 18:1-2)

Considering the above, is it any wonder then that today, two thousand years later, the Jews have finally achieved their goal and have now taken control of the political, financial and religious empires of the world, including Rome itself? They may not have Jewish names, they may not speak Hebrew, but their goal is one and the same. They continue to reject Christ just as they did two millenia ago, and they will use all of the laws at their disposal to squelch the spread of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

After returning to Antioch from his stay in Jerusalem, Paul eventually headed out on his final missionary journey to confirm the Churches. This excursion lasted approximately four years. The majority of that time was spent in Ephesus with Aquila and Priscilla, although he also spent some time travelling through Macedonia and Greece:

"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." (Acts 20:31)

On his return trip, Paul purposed to go to Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost. He was repeatedly warned by the disciples in various places that he should not go there because he

would be imprisoned. When Agabus the prophet attempted to warn him, Paul responded with the following:

"...What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 21:13)

"And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present." (Acts 21:17-18)

Despite the great way in which the Lord was using him, Paul remained a humble servant, ever mindful of his sinful condition. In his letter to the Church at Corinth he writes:

"For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1 Corinthians 15:9)

As we know from the historic record, Paul eventually did pay with his life when he was beheaded in Rome after several years of house arrest. Paul knew that his days were numbered. During his last visit to the church at Ephesus, he said:

"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." (Acts 20:22-25)

In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul also wrote:

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Paul was gladly received on his final visit to the brethren in Jerusalem. However, what I find amazing is that James and the others, because of their fear of the Law-abiding Jews, still attempted to get Paul to compromise his radical message. They wanted him to tone things down a bit so as to not stir up trouble with the Jews. Unlike his previous encounter with The Church Elders in chapter fifteen, Paul went along with them this time and shaved his head and began the seven days of purification according to Jewish custom, to show that he still observed the Torah. In short, he compromised his message to please The Elders and the Jews. In spite of this, it still didn't save his neck. Some of the very same Jews who had caused him problems during his missionary journeys throughout Asia, were now in Jerusalem, and they stirred up the people against him. One can only

wonder if these characters didn't just follow after Paul like a pack of wolves nipping at his heels:

"And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar." (Acts 21:27-31)

If it hadn't been for the intervention of the Roman peacekeepers, the jealous Jews would have probably killed Paul on the spot, but the Lord wasn't quite through with him yet. He still had some very important people to witness to: the Caesars of Rome! When the Jews continued to demand Paul's death, despite his attempt to witness to them on the steps of the castle, the Romans attempted to carry him away for flogging and questioning. Fortunately, through a bit of quick thinking, Paul was able to avoid the flogging and was only imprisoned. The next day, Claudius Lysias, the chief captain, presented Paul before Ananias the high priest and the council of seventy. Through more quick thinking, Paul turned his enemies against themselves, and the following night the Lord revealed His final plans for Paul's life:

"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." (Acts 23:11)

While Paul was safely inside the castle walls, forty plus Jewish zealots conspired with the High Priest and the Sanhedrin to kill him. Fortunately, the chief captain became aware of the evil plot because of one of Paul's young relatives. As a result, Paul was secretly whisked away from Jerusalem by night accompanied by two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen. While the Romans may not have understood Paul's important place in God's plans, they were privy to the subtle nature of the Jews and weren't about to take any chances. Paul was then safely escorted to Governor Felix in the seaport of Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. When the High Priest and his entourage arrived there five days later, they accused Paul of being the ringleader of a sect. How similar this is to some among organized religion today who make the same accusations against any who might try to worship the Lord outside of established churches:

"For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:" (Acts 24:5)

Despite the Jews' attempts to silence Paul, Felix found no

fault with him. In fact, he was very interested in what Paul had to say regarding his new faith, being already familiar with it himself; and was even hoping that Paul would pay him a bribe so that he could set him free:

"And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him." (Acts 24:24-26)

But Paul didn't give him a bribe as he knew the Lord wanted him to go to Rome. Being the manpleaser that he was, when Felix left office two years later, he left Paul in prison in Caesarea:

"But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." (Acts 24:27)

The minute Festus took over as the new governor, the Jews again conspired to kill Paul, but Festus never gave them the opportunity. Instead, when Festus offered to have Paul taken to Jerusalem for questioning, Paul turned the tables on everyone and made an appeal that he be tried before Caesar Augustus:

"But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go." (Acts 25:9-12)

When Paul appeared before King Agrippa and Queen Bernice while still in prison at Caesarea, Governor Festus accused him of being out of his mind:

"And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." (Acts 26:24)

However, Paul's testimony was so powerful that even the King could not deny the Spirit of God, and he was cut to the heart by Paul's words:

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." (Acts 26:28)

King Agrippa would have let Paul go right then and there had it not been for the fact that Paul had already made a legal appeal to Caesar to fulfill God's purposes:

"And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar."
(Acts 26:30-32)

As we know from the final chapters of the book of Acts, Paul was eventually shipped to Rome where he was given a hired house to live in. He lived in bonds for another two years while he continued to write and minister to the Early Churches. In one of his final recorded conversations with the Jewish elders at Rome, he said something which has held true ever since then:

"And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." (Acts 28:25-28)

And indeed we have! Thanks in large part to the untiring work of Paul the Apostle, we Gentiles have received and believed in the Word of God. Because of this man's faithfulness, despite heavy Jewish persecution, many of us today have received the free gift of salvation. In speaking of his own sufferings for Christ, Paul tells us:

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."
(2 Corinthians 11:23-27)

Seeing then how devoted this man became to the Lord Jesus, and how much he gave of himself, truly presenting his body a living sacrifice, how is it that anyone can doubt the Divine Inspiration of his Letters, be they Jew or Gentile? It just doesn't make sense. Nowhere can we find where Paul's actions or teachings contradict what the Lord taught. If anything, the Lord used Paul to steer The Elders in Jerusalem in the right direction concerning the matter of circumcision. In every opportunity, Paul uplifted the Lord and His sacrifice on the cross. Paul has done more for Christianity than many

men have done since. How many of his present day accusers who seek to discredit his writings, can claim to have done as much for the Lord or to have suffered as much? Let his accusers come forth with their own testimonies. They would probably pale by comparison. Largely due to Paul's labor of love, the Gospel of Jesus Christ was carried outside of Israel, and throughout Asia Minor all the way to Rome itself. When John the Revelator received his prophecies for the seven churches some thirty years later, it was to the very churches which Paul had helped to establish through his many years of tears and suffering:

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:" (Acts 20:17-19)

It was only natural that Paul would want to reach these people; after all, he was from that very part of the world himself:

"But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people." (Acts 21:39)

While Paul was actually born in Tarsus, it should be noted that, according to his final testimony on the steps of the Roman castle in Jerusalem, he was taken to Jerusalem at an early age:

"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city [Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." (Acts 22:3)

The above discourse does not include every facet and every detail of Paul's life or of his missionary journeys. To do so would be quite lengthy. However, with what I have presented, it is my hope that I have now dispelled any doubts regarding the Divine Inspiration of the Gospels of Mark and Luke, the book of Acts, and the Epistles of Paul. All of these men had a very strong connection with the Lord and with the other Apostles who had actually lived with Jesus. While they may not have sat at His feet, they were in communion with His Spirit. As I said when I began this article, we cannot just pick and choose what we like and leave the rest, particularly when our decision to do so is based on faulty reasoning. We must be willing to accept the whole counsel of God as written by His prophets, holy men and Apostles. We have to go to the cafeteria and take the whole course, and not just selected portions. As Paul said to the elders at Ephesus:

"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27)

This leaves us with a small portion of the New Testament to

contend with. Concerning the non-Pauline epistles, we know that they were all written by the Apostles and disciples who did have firsthand knowledge and experience with Jesus, that is, James, Peter, John and Jude. As explained in my article 'The Family Life Of Jesus Christ', some such as myself believe that both James and Jude may have been two of the flesh brothers of Jesus who later came to believe in their older sibling. Please see that article for more details.

The final book, the book of Revelation, was written by the youngest disciple, John, who also wrote the Gospel of John. If one accepts the Gospel of John as being Divinely Inspired, then it should be an easy step to accept the Book of Revelation which John wrote many years later when he was exiled to the isle of Patmos in his old age. This is believed to have been around 90 A.D. Truly, Revelation is one of the greatest prophecies of the entire Bible. In conjunction with the prophecies of Daniel, it provides us with an amazing picture, not just of things which have already been, but also of things which must shortly come to pass.

So then, as I have now shown, to accept the four Gospels, but to deny the rest of the New Testament as being Divinely Inspired, is an error in judgment. These writings are deeply intertwined. It is the same Spirit which inspired all of the writers of the New Testament. In fact, it is the same Spirit which inspired every single person who had anything to do with writing the entire Bible. To deny this would be similar to eating the outside of the sandwich but leaving the middle untouched. It is for this reason that I firmly believe that either we believe and accept the entire Bible as the inspired Word of God, or else we don't. The minute we start dissecting the Scriptures, there is no end to it. While I esteem Jesus's words above all, I also accept the rest of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, as the inspired Word of God. I am reminded of something which Job said in the middle of his afflictions:

"Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." (Job 23:12)

We are to esteem the entire Bible the same, without partiality, for as I have said before, the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. If you don't quite understand what that means, it simply means that they complement each other. The New Testament fulfills all of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything was fulfilled in Jesus. Likewise, everything written after the Gospels is for our spiritual edification, as it grounds us in the history of the Early Church, and provides us with the foundation and pattern which we are to follow as God's Endtime Church. In addition, as I have already stated, many passages in the New Testament are prophetic in nature, and apply to these Last Days. So then, for anyone to throw out or disregard any part of the Bible because of personal prejudices, is to cut away and leave out part of the full picture. As the Lord tells us

in His Word, He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End:

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." (Revelation 22:13)

In concluding the first part of this article, I would like to recommend a movie which I saw many years ago which truly left me inspired. If I recall correctly, it was simply called 'Peter And Paul.' I don't recall who played the part of Peter, but Anthony Hopkins did an excellent job in the role of the Apostle Paul. Believe me, it is much better than some of his more recent work such as 'The Silence Of The Lambs.' The Lord truly annointed Hopkins in the movie 'Peter And Paul.' If you haven't already seen it, I encourage you to do so. You'll be glad you did. You may even be able to purchase it on video in Christian book stores. Having now done this study of the man's life, I can honestly say that I truly admire and respect his love, faith and perseverance even more than before. He is a Christian role model we should all seek to live up to. Just reading about his sacrificial example should show many of us how little we really do for the Lord in our modern day. We have all been blessed by this man's life. What are we doing about it?

In part two of this article, I will offer additional comments concerning remarks I quoted at the beginning of this paper. I trust this article has been an inspiration to you all.

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Are Other Works Inspired Of God?

In part one of this article, I attempted to show how that, despite the fact that the Apostle Paul may have never sat at Jesus' feet, his writings were still every bit as inspired as the rest of the New Testament books and epistles. In this second part, I want to address some of the additional comments made by those who inspired this article. To refresh your memory, here is what was said:

"I would like the group to consider: Is the book of Mormon Scripture? Is the Koran Scripture? Why then would Paul's letters be considered as such? Messiah, while He was on Earth, never mentioned anything but the TANAKH. If I write you a letter and we hide it in the desert for a few thousand years, does it become Scripture?"

----- End Of Quote -----

Let me comment on the last part of this statement first. I am sure that everyone will agree that the idea of validating a text for its scriptural worth based solely on how old it is, should certainly be viewed as a lack of professional integrity. I believe that when this person made the above comment, he was more than aware that it was a weak argument. Granted, dating a text or parchment is an important part of the process; however, the ultimate decision as to what should and shouldn't be included in our modern day Bible was not based on the time factor alone. It was also based on how much the writing in question concurred with all of the other inspired texts of that period. If there was agreement between them, if they spoke of the same characters and events, if the writing style was similar, then these were good indications that it might be a valid text. However, the ultimate decision was based on the witness of the Spirit. Did each newly-discovered or translated text agree in Spirit with all of the others? Was the same Spirit of God detected in them? Did the Spirit flow from one work to the other, or was there conflict and contradiction?

This is one of the very things which confirms that what we have today in the Christian Bible is in fact the inspired Word of God. Despite the fact that it was written by so many different authors over such a long period of time, the entire book agrees with itself. It flows in Spirit from one end to the other. As stated in part one of this article, the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. There are many many prophecies in the Old Testament which find their completion in the New Testament, particularly those dealing with the life of Christ. There are absolutely no contradictions as the enemies of Christ like to claim. If there is any

contradiction, it is not in the Word of God itself, but rather in our poor understanding of it. In the case of those who have consciously rejected the Bible, or at least some part of it, God will purposely allow them to be deceived due to their own hardheartedness and the darkness in their own minds. As I have quoted before, the Lord says:

"I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not."
(Isaiah 66:4)

So again, trying to use this example of burying something in the sand for a few thousand years to discredit the writings of Paul carries absolutely no weight. His writings were judged by all of the above criteria, and not just by how old they are.

THE BOOK OF MORMON:

In his above comment, the Messianic Jew also tries to make a comparison, and a poor one at that, between the Book of Mormon, and the Epistles of Paul. For the record, I have read the Book of Mormon in its entirety. Actually, for reasons which I will share shortly, it would be more truthful to say that I struggled through the Book of Mormon. I have likewise read other Mormon literature, and have had chats in person, as well as electronically, with members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. While they disagree with my understanding of their religion, I am left with the impression that it is a mixture of grace and works. 'Jesus saves us, but we need to help Him to keep ourselves saved,' is what they seem to be saying. Perhaps I just don't have a full enough understanding of their faith.

However, what bothers me the most about Mormonism is that when pressed for an answer, adherents of the faith will readily admit that they esteem the Book of Mormon above the Bible. Unless my memory fails me, several decades ago, they didn't even carry Bibles with them when they went house to house. All they carried was their Book of Mormon and their church literature. When it came to witnessing, out would come the Book of Mormon instead of the Bible. From what I understand, they have changed their strategies since that time. But the fact remains; instead of seeing the Book of Mormon as a supplement to the Bible, they view the Bible as a supplement to the Book of Mormon. They feel that their book is the new revelation.

In addition to the above, I did not feel the same Divine Inspiration when I read the Book of Mormon. It is for this reason that I stated previously that I struggled with it just to complete it. The more I read it, the more I found things which I had to seriously question. I felt like I was walking in totally unfamiliar territory. As stated above, if something is an inspired work of God, then it should have a lot in common with all of the other texts which have been verified as such. The Spirit should flow from one to the other. The Book of Mormon contains very little of this. Quite frankly, I find the whole story of the tablets, the

gold-rimmed glasses, the Thummim and the Urim, and Joseph Smith staring into the darkness of his hat to translate the tablets a bit far-fetched. While the Thummim and the Urim are indeed mentioned in the Bible, they were not a pair of magical glasses. Exodus chapter twenty-eight deals with the garments of Aaron the High Priest. It is here that we read of the two onyx stones worn on his garments. The Scriptures say that these stones contained the names of the twelve tribes of Israel:

"And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel: Six of their names on one stone, and the other six names of the rest on the other stone, according to their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, shalt thou engrave the two stones with the names of the children of Israel: thou shalt make them to be set in ouches of gold. And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD upon his two shoulders for a memorial. And thou shalt make ouches of gold; And two chains of pure gold at the ends; of wreathen work shalt thou make them, and fasten the wreathen chains to the ouches...And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the LORD: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the LORD continually." (Exodus 28:9-14, 30)

If you read the entire chapter, it seems to be indicating that Urim and Thummim were the names given to those two onyx stones which Aaron wore on his priestly garments.

Another thing which bothers me regarding the Mormon faith, is that they adopt an attitude and a belief which is very similar to other organizations I have had experiences with. Like these others, they are of the mentality that they are the chosen of God. They are God's organization. They were founded by God's prophet, (Joseph Smith), and their leaders are His twelve apostles. How many other organizations have we heard of which make similar claims? Without getting deep into their actual doctrines, these are just some of the basic reasons why I reject the faith of the Mormons. To even make a comparison between the Epistles of Paul and the Book of Mormon is ridiculous to say the least in my view.

THE QUR'AN (KORAN):

As to comparing the Pauline Epistles to the Qur'an (Koran), I also find this to be a weak argument. There is absolutely nothing in common between the writings of Paul and the Muslim holy book. I have undertaken to read parts of the Qur'an, and perhaps someday I may yet finish it, time permitting. Perhaps I may be mistaken, but it seems to me from what I have read thus far, that Muhammad may have been trying to explain Christianity to his Arab brethren in a way which they could understand it. If not that, then he was trying to incorporate some Christian teachings into his own doctrine. Regardless of what his motivations and intentions may have been, the Muslims turned around and idolized their prophet and just about made a god out of him. I do not

believe that Muhammad intended for this to happen. In fact, I also question if Muhammad really taught his disciples that it was honorable to kill for the faith. This is one aspect of Islam which many adherents of the faith try to keep undercover. I wonder if this might not be something which was added later by special interest parties. If Muhammad did teach this, then this is in direct contradiction to the teachings of Christ, and I must reject Islam wholeheartedly as just another false religion cooked up by Satan. In addition to these points, devout Muslims openly admit, as their literature clearly demonstrates, that they believe that Muhammad was God's final prophet. They believe that he was greater than Jesus, and that like Jesus, Muhammad ascended bodily into Heaven. In other words, in Muslim eyes, Mohammad is not just equal to Jesus, he is greater. No sincere Christian can possibly accept this idea.

DIVIDING THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF:

What we need to remember about all of these other religions and supposed 'holy' writings, is that they are false imitations. It doesn't matter how much they sound like the Bible. It doesn't matter how much they teach the same spiritual principles, wise philosophies, love for your fellow man, care for the Earth, etc. That is exactly part of Satan's bag of tricks. He offers people all of these other belief systems such as Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and their many modern New Age derivatives, which almost seem identical to The Truth, but they aren't. And do you know why they aren't? If you are a believer in the True Jewish Messiah, then I am sure you already know the answer: none of them can offer eternal life, because they all leave out the Main Ingredient...Jesus Christ, Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of God Who died on the cross for the sins of the world. They can offer all of their wisdom and mystical practices, but in the end, it is all dead works...and it will leave you spiritually dead if it does not bring you to Jesus. After all, Jesus is the only one Who said:

"...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

These other religionists, be they Muslim or otherwise, can shout and holler about how good their religion is as much as they want, but unless it acknowledges Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, and not just as another great prophet, Ascended Master, Sananda, Krishna or whatever other titles they may give Him, then it is a lie. This is exactly what the Qur'an does. Yes, it speaks about some of the very same people and events as the Bible does, albeit by different names than most of us are familiar with. Afterall, the Jews and Arabs are half-brothers through Abraham; they share a common history up to a certain point. However, the Qur'an falls short on the key point; and it is for this reason that we must reject it and any other purportedly 'holy book,' as being a cheap counterfeit without any degree of true Divine Inspiration. If it was truly inspired, it would contain the whole counsel from God, and not just a partial answer. It would point us to the One who can save us.

THE URANTIA BOOK:

Satan is very subtle. He will give all of these poor deceived people everything they need to know except the one thing which will free them from his grip. Sadly, this demon of darkness hasn't been happy with just spreading his lies of the ancient mystic religions of the East. Today he has added a new flavor to the poisonous candy he offers. It is called New Age thought and New Age religion. Those of you who are already familiar with my writings know how I have already exposed the lies and subtlety of one of these modern deceptions: the Urantia Book. In a way, it is much worse and more deceptive than the others, because the Urantians do preach Jesus. They even say He is the Son of God. Of course, they delve into all of their complicated New Age jargon as well which includes a lot of terminology which the common man cannot even begin to understand. It certainly isn't the simple Gospel which Jesus preached! You almost need a degree just to be able to understand the Urantia Book. The adherents of the Urantia Book claim that it is not New Age because it has been around since the early part of this century. However, if you dig a little deeper, you discover that this book was purportedly received as a set of papers from some higher spiritual beings, through a technique which is similar to, if not identical to what is commonly known today as New Age channeling.

In addition to the above, just like the Mormons and other modern-day religious groups, the followers of the Urantia Book hold their book in higher regard than they do the Bible. They are not the first group to do this, but the Urantians do continue in this practice. They, and other groups like them, will even quote from their writings as if it is the New Age Scriptures, the New Revelation, as the Urantians prefer to call it. From my own former experiences of many years ago, I also know that the members of the Children of God/Family Of Love also consider the writings of their 'prophet' Moses David as being the word of God, and they also quote and memorize it on a regular basis. Of course, that brings up a whole new issue: weren't the Gospels, the book of Acts and the Epistles new Scriptures at one time? For that matter, wasn't the entire Bible new Scriptures at one time? At what point did it become universally recognized as the Word of God? At what point did it become permissible and socially acceptable to memorize and quote from it? Perhaps some day I will have time to address these questions more in full.

In the case of the Urantians, they will say, 'Oh yes, we read the Bible!' However, as I pointed out in various other articles dedicated to exposing the false doctrines of this satanically deceptive book, they read it with a critical eye. They claim it is full of errors and things which Jesus never said. In fact, they go as far as to say that Jesus did not come to die on the cross for the sins of the world! They claim that they are the New Christians, and that they have the New Revelation from God which states in part that we got it all wrong, that the blood atonement is a false doctrine! They say that the very thought of someone having to die on a cross for our sins is barbaric and repulsive to them! Well, of course it is repulsive! Having to kill anything is

repulsive! Maybe if more of us watched when cattle were slain for their meat, we would all start being vegetarians. The point is, as explained in other articles, God's plan of redemption was at work since the Old Testament. Only through the pouring out of blood is there remission of sins. If we were to accept the lies of the UB people, then just being good and following Jesus' example, and forgiving each other is all that is needed to merit eternal life. In short, they basically deny a major part of the salvation message which tells us that we are all sinners in need of a Saviour. In so many words, they seem to be saying, 'We can save ourselves. Jesus didn't have to die on the cross.' You see, it is a totally self-righteous works trip, and not a doctrine of faith and grace. Similar to other New Age doctrines, the Urantian doctrine says that we have become our own gods. We can save ourselves just by being good and loving and forgiving. Sorry folks, but the Bible paints a very different picture!

One of the typical tactics used by these people when accused of being false prophets by sincere Christians, is to make a comparison between themselves and Jesus and the Early Disciples. They say that just as the Jews of old accused Jesus and His followers of being possessed by the devil, we Christian non-believers are doing the same today. Folks, do not fall for this deceitful ploy! Satan, through the mouths of those deceived by the doctrines of the Urantia Book, is twisting the Truth of God, and unless these people repent and come back to the Truth of the Gospels, they will face certain chastisement and possible destruction. In the light of the Scriptures, the doctrines espoused by these people do not stand up to scrutiny, plain and simple. If you are interested in more specifics regarding the UB, as it is commonly called, please refer to my two articles under the 'Aliens, UFO's And New Age' articles group at the web site, as well as the article 'The Blood Atonement: In Jesus' Own Words' under the 'Salvation And Holy Spirit' articles group.

THE APOCRYPHA:

On this same topic of what is and what isn't the inspired Word of God, our friend the Messianic Jew was then questioned regarding his opinion of the Apocrypha. For those of you who may not be aware, the Apocrypha consists of a series of books or fragments which are not included in the common Protestant Bible. They are referred to as apocryphal works because their Divine Inspiration and authorship was placed in question by some of the Church Fathers. These texts are: The Prayer of Azariah (added to the book of Daniel), the book of Baruch, the book of Bel and the Dragon (added to Daniel), 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, additions to the book of Esther, the Epistle or Letter of Jeremiah (Jeremy), the book of Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Prayer of Manasses, the book of Sirach (aka Ecclesiasticus), the Book of Wisdom (Solomon), the book of Susanna (added to Daniel), and the book of Tobit. While these books and segments are not found in the Protestant Bible such as the Authorized King James Version, most of them are included in the Catholic Bible. Our Jewish friend commented as follows regarding the Divine Inspiration of the Apocrypha:

"Well, since Chanukkah is recorded in 1 and 2 Maccabees, the 'Official' stand is: they were never in the Holy Scrolls, HOWEVER, they were regarded as important historical documents."

----- End Of Quote -----

I personally possess and have read the Apocrypha. Although it has been some time since I did so, as I recall, I was left with the impression that there is Divine Inspiration in most of it. The writing style and the flow of the narratives seems, in my opinion, to go right along with what we find in the King James Bible. Some of the same characters are mentioned, and some of the narratives are simply extensions of what we already have in the KJV. In other words, I don't recall having seen any blatant contradictions to what is in the KJV. In my view, the only exception to the rule may be the two books of the Maccabees. I personally don't feel that they are inspired. They seem to be more historical in nature and really don't appear to uplift the Lord as in the other writings. Something else I noticed is that the characters mentioned in the books of the Maccabees cannot be connected to those we find in the KJV, as those in the other books can. Thus, I have certain reservations regarding the books of the Maccabees. Perhaps I should also mention that I have undertaken to read other apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works as well. I must admit that the vast majority are highly questionable inasmuch as Divine Inspiration is concerned. The only one which struck a chord with me is the book of Enoch which I have commented on and quoted from in other articles such as in 'The Book Of Enoch: Truth Or Heresy?' I encourage you to read it if you haven't done so already. You may agree with me, and then again, you may not.

What it really comes down to is, where do we draw the line of distinction here? What criteria, other than the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient Hebrew and Greek texts, can we use as a frame of reference for determining what is and what isn't the inspired Word of God? Who really has enough Godly wisdom and guidance to decide on such a matter? Should we just trust the judgment of the Church Fathers, or should we each trust in our own witness of the Spirit? For many years I have unquestionably accepted the Authorized King James Version as the purest translation of the Word of God. When I began delving into these other apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works, it wasn't because I doubted the Divine Inspiration of the King James Bible; I just wanted to see what else was out there. I wanted to discover what was left out and why it was omitted. Being of the inquisitive nature than I am, I wanted to make a determination for myself which I could then compare with the conclusions arrived at by the Church Fathers. As stated previously, what I am seeing thus far is that for the most part, they were right in their judgments. A lot of these other works do not impress me as being Divinely Inspired in the least. There are still many which I have yet to read. Perhaps as I continue in my studies, I will have more to say on this.

DIVINE REVELATION IN OUR CURRENT DAY:

On a related subject, as I touched on above, we must ask

ourselves, is God still speaking today? Does He have His prophets and emissaries who are giving us, not necessarily new information, but perhaps expanding upon what has already been given in the Recorded Word? If God has stopped talking to modern man, at exactly what point in history did this occur? Some use the following verses from the book of Revelation to claim that the Lord stopped speaking almost 2,000 years ago:

"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

(Revelation 22:18-19)

Personally, my understanding is that these verses only apply to the actual revelation given to John. I am not fully convinced that they were meant to be applied to the entire Bible as some Christians like to do. We must ask ourselves then, why are some people so intent on shutting God up? Exactly what is it that they are afraid of? Do they fear He might say something which they will not like? Are they afraid that the Lord might expose their sins? Is it possible that God does indeed have His modern-day prophets and that the vast majority of us have simply shunned, ridiculed and villified them due to our ignorance of things of the Spirit? Many of us believe that God speaks to us and guides us on a personal level through His Holy Spirit. If this is true, then what would prevent Him from selecting someone to speak to us on a local, national or even international level? Are we saying that the Lord can speak to us personally, but we must not even consider that He might speak to more people on a larger scale through a modern day representative? And that is exactly where the problem lies. There are many different religious faiths, Christian and non-Christian alike, which claim that they are that Representative or Voice. As I have said many times, the criteria by which we as Christians should judge them all, is the Word of God, the Bible. If what they say and teach is in total agreement with the Word, then maybe they are sent of the Lord...but if not, we should shun them as workers of darkness.

What about the gifts of the Spirit such as tongues, healing and prophecy which Paul mentioned in his epistle to the Corinthians? Are they still valid today? Some say that they are, while others deny them saying that they were just for a time to give the early Christian Church a strong spiritual foundation. Naturally, I cannot answer this question for anyone except for myself. I believe we all have to operate according to our own faith. Having been involved in what I was taught were the gifts of tongues and prophecy in times past, I tend to hold a very reserved attitude nowadays. With so much deception and lying spirits in the world, I prefer to exercise caution and even a healthy degree of skepticism regarding such matters. In the case of the gift of prophecy, I particularly regard this as a very serious matter. There are many so-called 'prophets' in the world today who claim to be the very voice of Jesus or of God Himself. For any

human to accept the responsibility of saying such a thing is not something which should be taken lightly. I would tremble in my boots before making such a claim. Believe me, I speak from experience as I have made the same claim in times past. I have prophesied in the name of the Lord...or at least what I thought was the voice of the Lord. Nowadays I must question how much of it was really the Lord, and how much of was just my own spirit. I do not say these things to squelch those who may be true prophets of God; but I do say them so that you will seriously consider what you are doing before you do make such a claim. I'd sure hate to be wrong, wouldn't you?

I recommend the same cautious attitude towards miraculous apparitions, angelic voices and other manifestations commonly reported within certain religions such as Catholicism. Let me again direct the reader to other of my articles such as 'Lying Wonders Of The Endtime' where I expose the devices of Satan. As said there and elsewhere, our faith is built upon the solid sure Word of God, and not upon the need for physical manifestations of any kind. Faith which requires physical signs and wonders is not true faith. These things may result as a by-product of our faith, but they should not be necessary to create faith within us to begin with. We should compare everything to our knowledge of the Scriptures and to the experiences of how God has worked in our lives. If you have a doubt about anything, if it doesn't appear to conform to God's Word, if you don't have a positive witness of the Spirit, then it is probably best to reject it. I think the best thing we can all do is to operate according to the inspired Word of God which we do have and leave it at that. After all, most of us have a hard time living by what we already know anyway, don't we? At the same time, we don't want to go so far to one extreme that we totally reject the possibility that God might indeed perform miracles today. Speaking from personal experience, I am not sure that I have ever witnessed a true bona fide miracle. There are a few instances where the possibility has existed, but I can't say with any degree of certainty. Neither have I ever witnessed any type of miraculous apparition or angelic voice. To be honest, I don't feel that I need these things in my life. My God's grace, my faith is sure without them.

THE MOSAIC LAW:

Returning to the central theme of this article, there is one other topic which I feel I should discuss. As some of you will know, in a number of articles where I discuss grace versus law, I have made the statement that Jesus came to fulfill the Law. Through quite a few scriptural references, I have explained this as meaning that through fulfilling all of the Old Testament prophecies, and by ultimately giving His life on the cross, Jesus brought an end to and did away with, or terminated, the Mosaic Law. He was the final blood sacrifice. I have tried to demonstrate this through a series of verses such as those used by Paul in his epistle to the Galatians. Another one I have quoted frequently is Romans 7:4 which states:

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another,

even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Romans 7:4)

Some folks who believe that we are still under the Law have had a hard time understanding exactly what it means to be dead to the Law. Some may even question how I can say that I believe in the whole Bible when I have clearly stated that the Mosaic Law is outdated, outmoded, and that we are dead to it. Again I must ask you, what do think I mean by this? Do you think I am saying that it is now okay to murder, commit adultery, rob people, and commit other acts of violence which the Mosaic Law clearly prohibits? Obviously, this is not what I mean. Without getting into a lot of Scriptures which I have already quoted in other articles, let me just say that being dead to the Law means that we realize that no matter how hard we try to observe all of the different ordinances of the Mosaic Law, we will never live up to it. As I quoted from the epistle of James in part one of this article, if you break even one of the commandments of the Law, you are guilty of breaking all of them. We will never earn or merit eternal life due to our observance of the Mosaic Law because none of us can keep it. The Mosaic Law basically teaches us two things: First, it teaches us what kind of behaviour God expects from us, that is, it is a schoolmaster; and second, it shows us that we are sinners because we will never be able to live up to God's expectations. Sin, as John explained it, is simply the transgression, or breaking of the Law:

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4)

Simply put, the Law teaches us that we are sinners. It teaches us that we need a Saviour. With Jesus' death on the cross, we are now to put our faith in Him for our salvation, and not in the old Mosaic Law. The Law cannot save us, so we should not have faith in it. We are dead to it, and by its very ordinances, we are in fact dead, if we think we still have to observe them.

Think again on what I said in part one of this article. When it came down to the real nitty gritty, when confronted by Paul, even The Elders at Jerusalem had to admit that circumcision (a part of the Old Mosaic Law), cannot save anyone, that it is no longer a necessary practice. They had to decide right then and there where their faith was. Was it in still obeying the Law, (works of the flesh), or was it in the blood of Jesus, (the work of the Spirit)? This is what being dead to the Law is all about.

With His death on the cross, Jesus brought in a New Covenant and a New Law...and that is the Law of Love. In a sense, God was saying, 'Look, I am making a new set of rules, much more simplified than the last. I realize that you can't possibly keep all of the Mosaic Law, so here is the New Deal; here is My New Covenant with you.' That New Covenant was sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Based on the New Covenant, we will now be judged, not by whether or not we can observe all of the practices of the Mosaic Law, but rather by how much of what we do is motivated by love. Of course, as I have pointed out in other articles, if we love someone, then of

course we are not going to kill them, steal from them, go to bed with their wife, or anything else. So you see, in a way, the Law of Love is just as demanding of us as the Mosaic Law was, but what we now realize is that doing these things will not save us, only our faith in Jesus will. Why? Because He did what we cannot; He fulfilled the whole Law, thus becoming the perfect sacrifice on the cross. Through that sacrifice, He opened the way for a new agreement between God and man. If He hadn't kept the whole Law, then His sacrifice would have been invalid. But He did, and now all we have to do is put our faith in that sacrifice instead of in the Law.

This is exactly why Paul said that we are married to another in Romans 7:4. The Mosaic Law was our old master, our former schoolmaster, our old husband. But now, Paul tells us that, as the bride of Christ, we are to be married to another. We are to enter into a new relationship. We cannot be married to both the Old Law and Jesus. That is akin to polygamy, or perhaps even spiritual adultery. We are to be married to only One, and that is Jesus. We cannot love both, we cannot be saved by both. We cannot have two husbands. After all, we are told many times that our God is a jealous God. He won't put up with it. As Paul said, either we are saved by grace (faith in Jesus), or by works (trying to keep the Old Law):

"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." (Romans 11:6)

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" (Titus 3:5)

People who say that Jesus saves us but who still insist on water baptism, circumcision, or other works of the Law, are basically saying that they want to be married to both. They want to accept the new relationship, but they aren't quite ready to give up the old one yet. Try that in real life and see what happens. <grin>

So, as you can see, by saying that we are dead to the Law is not to deny part of the Bible. It is not to pick and choose just what we like and leave the rest. It is simply accepting the New Conditions, the New Rules laid out in the New Testament, the New Covenant. You can only drive an old car so far and so long. Eventually you have to trade it in for a new model. That is what Jesus is; He is the author of the New Model, the New Covenant, the New Law. He is in the Driver's Seat, and He wants to take us to Heaven if we will just hop on board and leave behind the decrepit old model which has run out of gas. I don't think I can make it any clearer than that. You can stay with your '52 Chevy, or else you can grab a seat in God's Celestial Sedan. Won't you please leave the driving to Him? Or do you prefer to try to get there yourself by trying to fix that old chevy of yours?

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, I believe in and accept the entire 1611 KJV Bible as the inspired Word and Full Counsel of God, from the pages of Genesis, to the pages of Revelation. The KJV has

stood the test of time. It has changed countless lives and saved millions of souls over the past three hundred plus years. I personally believe that those who translated and compiled it were God-fearing men, Spirit-filled men who carefully and prayerfully considered the usage of every word. I believe that God has ensured and preserved the veracity, validity and true meaning of His words within its holy pages. While some newer versions may do this as well, there are others which do the exact opposite. They are spiritless and dry. Is this to say that the KJV is a perfect work? Of course not. Afterall, it is a product of human endeavors to translate the Spirit of God into print. Undoubtedly, there probably are some minor discrepancies from the original Hebrew and Greek texts, but I believe they are just that, minor, and not of enough significance to where they would alter the overall message the Lord wishes to convey to us. I believe that God is powerful enough that He would not allow politics or human religious philosophies to corrupt what He has given to His prophets, apostles and disciples. I honestly don't know if I can say that for some of these newer versions. It is all really a matter of faith. We should each use whatever version we feel most comfortable with. The most important point to consider is, do we accept it all, or do we not? I hope this article has been an encouragement and a blessing to many.

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