

THE INCREDIBLE MYSTERY



A Paradigm Shift
From Nationalistic Expectations
To Overwhelming Reconciliation

DICKSON

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INTRODUCTION

Two millennia ago there were two despondent men returning home on a long road out of Jerusalem after the Passover of A.D. 30. They were exhausted, bewildered, downcast and totally confused. Their joyous expectations of an independent national Israel free from Roman occupation had just been crushed. Their return home to inform their wives and family of the tragedy they had just experienced on a hill outside Jerusalem was not good news. They were possibly discussing how they would break the bad news to their families.

Unexpectedly, another gentleman meandered up and joined them on the way. He entered into their discussions. The stranger asked, “*What manner of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk?*” (Lk 24:17). The two despondent disciples were shocked at the question. It is interesting to note carefully what Luke, the historian, recorded about the mental state of these two discouraged hopefuls: “*And they stood still, looking sad*” (Lk 24:17). We must not forget the historian’s explanation of the despondent mood of these two men, as well as all those who had placed their hopes in a Nazarene who had just been executed on a cross back in Jerusalem. To them, and the rest of the hopeful followers, **there was no good news (gospel) in the execution of their hopeful leader whom they supposed would be the new crowned King of Israel.**

So the party of three men continued on their way toward the small village of Emmaus. One of them, Cleopas, then questionably responded to the stranger who had joined the downcast party of two, “*Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem and have not known the things that have come to pass there in these days?*” (Lk 24:18).

There had been hundreds of thousands of Jewish visitors in Jerusalem for the annual Passover/Pentecost feast. And now these two, discouraged about the execution of their hopeful liberation leader, did not even wait around for further festivities of the feast. They simply headed on home to inform their families of the bad news.

Everyone in Jerusalem had either heard or witnessed the Roman execution of the would-be King of the Jews. For all those who accepted this Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of Israel, **there was no good news (gos-**

pel) in the execution. The best hope that they could muster up at the time was that He would become a martyr in the religious history of Israel.

To the two disillusioned disciples on the road to Emmaus, all their dreams had just been nailed to a cross. They confessed to the stranger who had joined them on the road that this Jesus of Nazareth “*was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people*” (Lk 24:19). But then, they related to the stranger, the religious leaders “*delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him*” (Lk 24:20). **There was no good news in this crucifixion of their would-be Messiah and King.**

And then the two men made a statement that could have been made by every nationalistic Jew who became a disciple of this crucified King: “*We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel*” (Lk 24:21). Their hopes were all nationalistic. They hoped for “redemption” was all about being delivered from Roman occupation. As all those dispersed disciples of the day who were on their own way home, **there was no gospel message in the execution of the hopeful King of national Israel.** Their hopes of being nationalistically redeemed from foreign occupation in order to enjoy the glories of a kingdom as those back in the days of David and Solomon were all crushed. **There was no inherent good news at all about the execution.**

These two sad disciples were only two examples of thousands of nationalistic Jews who had put their hopes in Jesus of Nazareth to be the messianic king. They hoped that it would be Jesus who would deliver to Israel their lost independence as a glorious nation. To many of them, Jesus was at least a good friend who worked many mighty works, taught many good things, and gave hope to a Roman-oppressed society of Jews throughout the Roman Empire.

Everyone had put their hopes in this Deliverer, this Messiah who would restore Israel to be free as in her former days of glory when King David and King Solomon led the farming communities of Israel to be a noted united nation among the nations of the world. Israel was great back in those days. And then, inspired by the leadership of this Jesus, they would all “Make Israel Great Again!” But their hopes were all dashed to the ground as each drop of blood drained from the nail-pierced hands of their would-be king. **There was no known gospel in that cross.** Nevertheless, this was not the end of the story!

Chapter 1

SOMETHING WAS UP

A little over thirty-three years before the Emmaus road encounter, those who knew the prophecies also knew that something was in the wind. However, they had no idea that there was redemption for sins just over the horizon with the incarnation of the Creator who had brought into existence out of dust the flesh in which He would dwell. But there was a stirring that century old prophecies were about to be fulfilled.

A. Preparing the way:

Before the angel Gabriel came to Mary, one of the first announcements concerning the “Savior” of Israel was made to a priest from Galilee who was serving his order of priestly duties in Jerusalem. His wife, Elizabeth, was to give birth to a son. Nine months later, and eight days after the birth, it was time to give a name to the newly born child. The mother said that he would be named “John.” But this name was not after the name of the father, Zacharias (Lk 1:59). Everyone considered this odd, and so the neighbors and cousins wanted to confirm with the mute father that the name would be “John.”

We must now go back at least nine months before the birth of John. The father could not speak at the time of the birth because the angel Gabriel punished him for his unbelief. Gabriel initially said to Zacharias, “*Do not fear, Zacharias, for your prayer has been heard. And your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will call his name John*” (Lk 1:13). Gabriel was announcing “glad tidings” in reference to the gospel (Lk 1:19). But Zacharias was made mute for at least nine months, for Gabriel said to him, “*You will be mute and not able to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words that will be fulfilled in their proper time*” (Lk 1:20).

So being constantly reminded of his doubt for several months by not being able to speak, Zacharias and Elizabeth waited in anticipation to what

would transpire in reference to the one in the womb of Elizabeth. Then *“Elizabeth’s full time came to give birth, and she gave birth to a son”* (Lk 1:57). The people had wondered why the mother, Elizabeth, called the newly born child “John.” So the father *“asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, ‘His name is John’”* (Lk 1:63).

After Zacharias had scribbled “John” on the tablet, *“his mouth was opened immediately and his tongue loosed, and he spoke and praised God”* (Lk 1:64). But no one had any idea that this John would grow up in order to fulfill the prophecy of Malachi: *“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You”* (Mk 1:2; see Mt 3:1). No one had any idea that this baby John would eventually be as Isaiah prophesied, *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord. Make His paths straight’”* (Is 40:3; see Mk 1:3). It was all so inconceivable.

Certainly, there were exceptional things that happened around the birth of a babe to a humble priest and his wife from Galilee. Especially, there was absolutely no consideration in their minds that something most incredible was about to transpire about thirty years after the birth of both John and Jesus. Just like what often happens today, that there is also a great deal of misunderstanding concerning the “mysterious” events that happened among the people in those days. *“Fear came on all who dwelt around about them. And all these sayings were talked about throughout all the hill country of Judea”* (Lk 1:65).

In the evening hours of the night in these times, and in the isolation of farm houses throughout the countryside of Judea, fear—we might say “apprehension”—was in the hearts of everyone. This all began at the appearance of Gabriel to Zacharias and continued to the time of the miraculous utterance from the mouth of Zacharias at the time of the birth of John nine months later. All those farmers of Judea *“who heard them **laid them up in their hearts**, saying, ‘What manner of child will this be?’”* (Lk 1:66). Zacharias, Elizabeth and everyone else had no idea what this child would be. They could not have presumed that the child John was the forerunner about whom both Isaiah and Malachi prophesied. Before John’s ministry, there was mystery in Judah about these things.

We must remind ourselves that we understand these statements be-

cause we are on this side of their fulfillment. After much study of the documents of the New Testament that explain what transpired at that time in history, we understand the mystery of the gospel. But the immediate witnesses who were living out the events had no idea that there were salvational events about to transpire in the history of mankind. They all lived before the cross, and certainly had no idea of what would happen in the realm of heaven at the time of the cross.

B. Conception of a King:

One of the greatest events that caused a stir in those days took place in the house of a humble carpenter in the small village of Nazareth. In the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary, the angel Gabriel showed up at the house of Mary in Nazareth. He again was about his God-sent business to answer all the questions as to what was transpiring in reference to the pregnancy of Elizabeth (Lk 1:26). Mary was a young woman who had never had sexual intercourse with any man, including the man to whom she was engaged (Lk 1:27). When the angel announced to Mary that she was specifically favored by the Lord, “*she was troubled*” (Lk 1:28,29). Then Gabriel explained, “*You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son*” (Lk 1:31). This was only the beginning of the story. The best was yet to be.

But notice what Gabriel continued to reveal to Mary: “*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David*” (Lk 1:32). Nothing was said about the future Son being the One who would redeem people from their sins. There was no salvational message in this proclamation of Gabriel. Nevertheless, Gabriel continued, “*He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end*” (Lk 1:33).

There was no salvational indications in this statement. In fact, the word “forever” is translated from the Greek phrase, “unto (into) the ages.” The phrase is not from the single Greek word *aionios*, meaning “forever,” or “certainty.” The “forever” translation is qualified only by the last phrase of the verse in reference to the kingdom reign of the One who would be conceived: “*there will be no end.*” We must remember that Mary’s under-

standing of the prophecy was limited to the nationalistic fulfillment of the promises that were made to David, that God would set One on his throne. This was the accepted interpretation of all the prophecies that referred to the Messiah. Gabriel did not, therefore, speak of salvational matters in these initial pronouncements. For the time, it was only necessary to reveal that prophecies in reference to One sitting on the throne of David were to be fulfilled by the One who would be conceived in the womb of Mary.

And now the conversation between Gabriel and Mary became very intriguing. Gabriel continued to reveal, “***The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you***” (Lk 1:35). There would be no sexual intercourse between a man and a woman in reference to the conception of this One about whom Gabriel spoke. In reference to the fertilization of the seed of Mary, this would be left to the Holy Spirit. And because the fertilization of the Seed of woman would be accomplished directly from God the Holy Spirit, then the One who would be born of Mary “***will be called the Son of God***” (Lk 1:35). The conception was as the angel announced to Joseph. The seed that was “***conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit***” (Mt 1:20). If Mary’s seed would have been fertilized by the sperm of Joseph, then the One born would be called the Son of Man only. But because His birth would be “of the Holy Spirit,” then He would be the only begotten Son of God (Jn 3:16).

Mary did not understand that the One to be conceived in her womb would reconnect man with God through the atoning death of a cross for the forgiveness of sins. None of these salvational matters were “***pondered in her mind***” (Lk 1:29). Nevertheless, when the angel announced to Joseph the conception of the One in the womb of Mary, he added, “***He will save His people from their sins***” (Mt 1:21). This is the first mention of sins in reference to the birth of the “Son of God” who would be a Savior of national Israel. But Joseph understood none of these things in reference to the forgiveness of personal sins against God through the atoning blood of the Son of God on the cross. In fact, when all these salvational events took place, it is possible that Joseph was already dead. Mary bowed alone in grief at the foot of the cross of her Son. According to her understanding at the time of the cross, her Son was executed, not crucified for the redemption of humanity. Even at that time beneath the cross she had no understanding that her

Son was on the cross for salvational matters. For a mother who had just lost her son, it was all bad news. There was no gospel rejoicing at the foot of the cross.

Thirty-three years before, at the time of the actual birth of her Son, an angel was once again summoned to go to some shepherds in the night. The angel announced to the shepherds, “*For to you a **Savior** is born this day in the city of David, who is **Christ** [Messiah] the **Lord** [King]*” (Lk 2:11). But far from the shepherds’ minds was any concept of this “Savior” being One who would redeem Israel “*from their sins.*”

It is not without notice that the Holy Spirit used the third person plural pronoun “their” in this statement in reference to sins (Mt 1:21). Reference was to **their** sins, which being interpreted by those surrounding the birth of the “Savior,” surely referred to the collective “sins” that Israel had committed that brought them as a nation into the bondage of the Romans. The consequences of such “sins” in the past was what God promised in the Sinai law in reference to Israel sinning against the law of God (See Dt 28; 30; 33). Because of their “national sins,” they had formerly been delivered into Assyrian captivity, and then again into Babylonian captivity. And now, because of their “sins” as a nation, they had been delivered into the bondage of the Romans. The Savior about whom the angel spoke to the shepherds was certainly interpreted as the One who would be a national Savior to deliver the Jews from the bondage of the Romans.

The Jews hoped for the fulfillment of the prophecies, specifically those that were made to David that God would set One on his throne (2 Sm 7:12; Ps 132:11). The understanding of Israel in reference to the promise was that God would restore Israel to her former glory that she enjoyed during the reigns of David and Solomon. Therefore, many centuries after David and Solomon, when Israel was under the oppression (bondage) of the Roman Empire, the Jews were diligently looking for this “Lord” (king) who would be the “Savior” of Israel to lead the nation into national independence. In the thinking of the Jews, this would be the mission of the Messiah (Christ). He would be the anointed One of Israel to redeem Israel from bondage, and then be their Lord King on earth.

The shepherds in the field viewed the announcement of the angel in reference to Israel’s salvation from Roman bondage, not salvation from per-

sonal sins that individuals commit against God. Though the statement made by the angel to the shepherds was the first announcement of the gospel, the shepherds did not understand the statement as we do today this side of the cross. We look back through all the revelation of the New Testament documents, which documents they did not have. We understand the meaning of all these things. But at the time these things were initially being revealed in history, neither Zacharias, Elizabeth, Joseph, Mary, nor the shepherds had any idea of what was coming into the world. They were handicapped with their nationalistic aspirations that did not allow them to think beyond the confines of this world.

This is similar to people today who believe in some future return of Jesus who will supposedly reign on this earth for one thousand years. These people misunderstand the prophecies of the future because they do not understand the present gospel reign of King Jesus over all things. They do not understand the first appearing of Jesus into this world, and then after accomplishing His redemptive mission, His going out of this world to reign on the throne of David. They do not believe in the totality of the present gospel reign of King Jesus that will be terminated when He comes again (1 Co 15:28).

Zacharias, Elizabeth, Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds did not understand the fulfillment of the past Old Testament prophecies in reference to the Christ because of their nationalistic aspirations. As all Israel at the time harbored expectations for an earthly kingdom reign of the Messiah, so some today have similar expectations for a future earthly kingdom reign of the Messiah. Both of these expectations are flawed, and thus the theology of the supposedly earthly reign of King Jesus is an attack against the present gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2

BEYOND THE CROSS

As we research into the message of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is paramount to understand the means by which God through the Holy Spirit revealed this eternal mystery. In the beginning, the early disciples

focused only on the events on earth. But there were marvelous things taking place in the heavenly realm that proceeded from the throne of God. We have all believed in the historical event of the crucified Jesus, His resurrection, and finally His ascension. However, there was more to the gospel than the events that occurred on earth. The good news transpired in heavenly circles. Before the outpouring of the Spirit on the apostles in A.D. 30, the early disciples did not understand the fullness of the mystery of the gospel.

In fact, after we understand those things that transpired in heaven at the time of the crucifixion on earth, we would affirm that the crucifixion of the cross was not the good news in and of itself. The crucifixion was the manifestation on earth of the redemptive good news that happened in heaven at the throne of God where our sins were forgiven because of the incarnate sacrifice of the Son of God on earth. Therefore, to those immediate disciples, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, the crucifixion was a sad day and the termination of a beloved son and friend. In view of their nationalistic expectations, the two men on the road to Emmaus had every reason to be sad.

But when we view the crucifixion by looking back to Calvary through the pages of the New Testament, the heavenly reconciliation with God that transpired before the throne of God was demonstrated through earthly events outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. In order for people on earth to know this, **it initially took the direct revelation of God through the Holy Spirit.** Understanding the gospel of grace, therefore, begins by first realizing that the disciples who first witnessed the earthly events, **did not understand that the cross, resurrection and ascension signified something far greater than what occurred through earthly events.** But in order to understand the full significance of the gospel, the eternal mystery of the gospel that was established in heaven when the crucified Jesus sat down on the throne of David at the right hand of God had to be revealed on earth through the work of the Holy Spirit. All those things that are explained in the book of Hebrews had to be personally revealed to the apostles through the Holy Spirit. This gospel news was not self-evident at the time Jesus was crucified. Therefore, the announcement of the heavenly reconciliation that took place in heaven had to be revealed, which indeed it was on the Pentecost of A.D. 30.

Understanding the preceding depends on our understanding of revelation. Revelation is God making something known to man, that man by no other means, could have known. Those things that God chose to reveal concerning the gospel were those things in the heavenly realm that no one could ever have discovered through diligent Bible study, or from any philosophical religious discussions among men. The good news (gospel) of the sacrificial atonement of the Lamb of God on the cross had to be revealed from heaven.

After the revelation of any truth has come forth from God, then inspiration by the Holy Spirit takes over. It was the work of the Holy Spirit to take those things that were revealed from God to be transcribed into the words that men on earth could understand. Unless the revelation was transcribed and explained, the hidden things of God could never be understood. In order to understand the atonement of the crucifixion of Jesus, therefore, there had to be revelation directly from God concerning the redemption that took place at the cross. And for us to understand this redemption today, the revelation of the mystery of the good news of the cross had to be recorded by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We must understand revelation in order to understand how the mystery of the gospel was revealed on earth. The Holy Spirit, through Paul, explained to the Corinthians how revelation worked. Paul began by saying, *“But we speak wisdom among those who are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this age nor of the princes of this age, who are being brought to nothing”* (1 Co 2:6). On the contrary, Paul continued to explain to the Corinthians, *“We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery [of the gospel], even the hidden wisdom that God foreordained **before the ages to our glory**”* (1 Co 2:7). This certainly reminds us of the commentary that Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:10-12 in reference to the Old Testament prophets. These prophets became diligent students of what they wrote by inspiration, and yet, they did not understand what they wrote.

*Of this [gospel] salvation the [Old Testament] prophets have inquired and **searched diligently**, who prophesied of the grace [of the gospel] that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when He testified before-*

*hand of the sufferings of Christ [on the cross] and the glory [of the gospel] that would follow. To them it [the gospel] **was not revealed**, that not to themselves, but to you they ministered the things that are now reported to you by those [New Testament prophets] who have preached the gospel to you **by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven**, which things angels desire to look into.*

It must be noted that Peter made the preceding statement in writing over thirty years after the message of the gospel was initially revealed to him and the other apostles on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. He, as well as those to whom he was writing, were more blessed than the Old Testament prophets who wrote of these things in their recorded prophecies. We are blessed in the fact that we now know the gospel about which the Old Testament prophets wrote and the New Testament apostles and prophets preached in the first century. The gospel was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets, but it was great news as the New Testament apostles and prophets went forth and preached everywhere after the initial revelation of the gospel to the apostles in A.D. 30.

So to the Corinthians, Paul continued in his explanation of revelation and inspiration by which the mystery of the gospel was revealed, and since that initial revelation was preached throughout the world: *“This wisdom [of the gospel] none of the princes of this age has known, for had they known, **they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**”* (1 Co 2:8). The rulers of this world would not have crucified the Lord of glory (Jesus) if they had known that His execution would lead to Him being their King and Lord (See Jn 18:36,37). They would not have crucified Jesus if they had known that the crucified Jesus would ascend to the right hand of God, and from heaven reign as their Lord and King (Ep 1:20,21).

Neither the Old Testament prophets, nor the princes at the time of the crucifixion could possibly have understood the meaning of the cross and ascension without the direct revelation of God through the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles. No matter how wise one was, he or she could not apart from revelation have ever discovered the meaning of the cross, and the significance of the ascension of Jesus to reign over all things at the right hand of God. No philosophy, or any intellectuals of the day, could figure out this

mystery. To the world that then was, **the cross was only the execution of a rebel Jew from Nazareth.**

In his commentary of this revelation of the gospel, Paul then emphasized the following point: “*Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Co 2:9). This was a quotation from Isaiah 64:4. Isaiah lived about six hundred years before the time Paul quoted this statement. Isaiah himself had been informed concerning all those things in which the Old Testament prophets futilely searched in reference to what God was planning for all those who love Him. But still these things were not revealed until a rushing mighty wind came upon the apostles in A.D. 30. The apostles were those whom Jesus had chosen to be informed concerning those things that had been planned before the creation of the world (See Jn 14:26; 16:13).

In His eternal plan, it was indeed planned that the Son of God be crucified. This atoning crucifixion was planned before the creation of the world (1 Pt 1:20). By the time the incarnate Son of God came into the world at the appointed time, the purpose for the crucifixion was still not revealed. The revelation of the meaning of the gospel plan only came seven weeks after the event of the crucifixion. During this time, no one understood the redemption meaning of the cross. The event of the crucifixion took place on Passover. However, the revelation of the meaning of the event did not take place until Pentecost.

Between Passover and Pentecost all those who believed on Jesus were left in the dark while they mourned over the crucifixion of their friend Jesus. Three days after the crucifixion, however, they at least rejoiced in His resurrection. But no one had any idea that the “good things” about which the prophets searched, went far beyond the resurrection. While they waited, they could only have faith that in all these things there was yet something greater to be revealed.

A week before the Pentecost of A.D. 30, the only “good news” that had been revealed to the apostles was that their friend Jesus had been raised from the dead. Though they initially doubted the report of the resurrection by the first witnesses, they eventually believed, possibly only when Peter and John personally visited the empty tomb and confirmed the fact (See Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:14; Lk 24:1-12). However, at the time, the Spirit had not

revealed to them the good news of reconciliation with God through the atoning sacrificial blood of the Son of God. Nevertheless, on the basis of their limited belief in the resurrection alone, they were encouraged and planned to go forth and proclaim that their martyred Messiah was alive and ready to lead in the restoration of national Israel (At 1:6,22). Many years later, Peter wrote of their encouragement that was generated by the resurrection:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has **begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection** of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pt 1:3).*

So only on the basis of the resurrection, Peter, about a week before the Pentecost of A.D. 30, stood up in an upper room and said to the other remaining apostles—Judas was now gone—that from those who had walked with them from the baptism of John until that day, there must be selected one who would “*become a witness with us of His resurrection*” (At 1:22). Peter’s plea was that a replacement witness be found to proclaim the resurrection, **not** the gospel, though this was the gospel resurrection of Jesus. At the time he stood up before the others, neither he nor the other apostles had any idea what the mystery of the gospel was. They were getting over the sad scene of the cross and were excited about telling the resurrection story to others.

We would think it commendable that at least the apostles would take the initiative to go forth with only the news of their resurrected Messiah. But at the time, it had not yet been revealed the connection between the cross and the eternal mystery of God that was kept hidden since the time of the creation. The only news that the apostles had was the resurrection. The atoning death of the cross was still not revealed. The revelation of this news was to be made in a about a week after the selection of Matthias in the upper room.

The revelation of the atoning death, and subsequent redemption, was eventually revealed by the Holy Spirit who came on the apostles on the day of Pentecost. The initial announcement of this gospel key to the kingdom reign of Jesus was first made by Peter, the one to whom Jesus had initially promised the keys of the kingdom (Mt 16:18,19). So Paul continued with

his explanation of this matter to the Corinthians: “*But God has revealed them to us through the Spirit for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God*” (1 Co 2:10).

What the Old Testament prophets could not discover in their studious and continued search for centuries of the prophecies that they had written, the Holy Spirit finally on the day of Pentecost in the whisper of a mighty wind revealed to the apostles. What wise men throughout history could not figure out, the Spirit figured in with the revelation of the gospel through the apostles. So Paul concluded by reassuring the Corinthians the certainty of the gospel message that he had preached to them:

*For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of man that is in him? **Even so the things of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, **but the Spirit who is from God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God** (1 Co 2:11,12).*

And finally, Paul explained the connection between revelation and inspiration in reference to the gospel that was delivered verbally to the Corinthians, and then to us through words of inspiration. God revealed the truth of the gospel initially to the apostles on the A.D. 30 Pentecost. The Spirit subsequently used the verbal word for preaching the gospel for the next two and a half decades, and then the Holy Spirit began inspiring writers in order to record the truth of the gospel. This was the birth of what we call the canon of the New Testament. The “perfect” (complete) revelation of the gospel was initially preached verbally, but that which was first preached had to be recorded by inspiration (See 1 Co 13:8-11). See if this is not in the following concluding statement that Paul made on this subject in the context of 1 Corinthians 2:13

*Which [gospel] things we also speak, not in the words that man’s wisdom teaches, but what the Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual [gospel] things with **spiritual words.**”*

Chapter 3

JESUS PREACHED MESSIAHSHIP

It is significant to note that the documents of Matthew and Mark, with John as an apologetic for Jesus of Nazareth being the Christ and Son of God, were all written in order to prepare the Jews for the consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70. This event would be the last evidence to the Jews that Jesus was the prophet about whom Moses wrote, and thus, according to John, He is also the Christ and Son of God (See Dt 18:18-22).

The document of Matthew focused specifically on preparing the Jews for the end of national Israel through Jesus' fulfillment of all prophecies in reference to the Messiah. Matthew's key point was to remind the Jews of example prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth during His ministry on earth (See Mt 2:17; 4:17; 12:17; 21:4; 26:54; 27:9). The nature of the book of Mark is urgency. It seems that Mark was in a hurry to pen a brief letter to remind everyone concerning the impending fulfillment of what Jesus prophesied. The key word of the book of Mark is "straightforward," or "immediately." Both Matthew and Mark wanted to record the fact that all the dots between prophecy and fulfillment in reference to Jesus being the Messiah had been connected. It was now time for the Jews to prepare for a demonstrated end of their special covenant relationship with God, which covenant was finalized at the cross (See Jr 31:31-33; Hb 8:1-13). This end would be the final testimony that the kingdom of King Jesus would be manifested to the remnant of faithful Jews who would pass through the sifting of the A.D. 70 destruction of national Israel (See Mt 13:36-43).

The "spiritual words" of the gospel about which Paul wrote to the Corinthians were not at first revealed to the disciples while Jesus walked on earth. These words of revelation came later through the apostles. Nevertheless, during His earthly ministry Jesus prepared His Jewish disciples for something that was outside their Jewish theology, and thus, outside their expectations as the hope of Israel.

As a prisoner of Rome, and upon his arrival in A.D. 61, Paul was facing the end of his ministry and his life in Rome. Therefore, upon his

arrival, he immediately gathered the Jews of Rome together in order to explain to them the message he and others were preaching throughout the world (At 28:17). Once the Jewish audience was gathered, he said to everyone, *“I have called for you, to see you and to speak with you, **because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain**”* (At 28:20). The “hope of Israel” was initially grounded in a hope that national Israel would be restored. This was a narrow understanding of the prophecies, but it was the common belief among all the Jews, even to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This thinking was in the minds of the apostles right to the time when Jesus ascended (At 1:6). It was a common hope of all Israel, for they yearned for their freedom from oppression by the Romans. However, during his meeting with the Jews in Rome, Paul redefined the “hope of Israel.”

During Jesus earthly ministry with the apostles, He laid before the apostles hints that the “hope of Israel” would be far beyond any earthly aspirations. For many of the disciples, however, their “earthly hope” that they deducted from the prophecies brought them only to the point of accepting Jesus as the Messiah. However, as Paul, with the unbelieving Jews in Rome, the Holy Spirit on Pentecost took the “hope of Israel” far beyond any earthly fulfillment.

The Holy Spirit initially connected all the dots for the apostles on the Pentecost of A.D. 30, and now Paul wanted to connect the dots for the Jews in Rome. He sat down and explained all the prophecies in reference to Jesus of Nazareth being more than a “Son of Man.” He lifted their minds from any hope in the things of this world to salvational matters that transpired in heavenly places. He thus explained to them the gospel according to the book of Hebrews, which gospel was concealed from the prophets for millennia.

It cannot be said that Jesus failed to set before the disciples during His earthly ministry that His coming into the world was beyond things of this world. Unfortunately, the disciples as a whole were as the two men on the road to Emmaus who said to the resurrected stranger, *“**But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel**”* (Lk 24:21). These two disciples revealed the commonly accepted “hope of Israel” of the Jews at the time Jesus came into this world. Regardless of what Jesus had taught

during His ministry in reference to salvational matters that were above this world, these two disciples, as well as the rest of the apostles, could not get their hopes above this world. The two disappointed disciples use of the word “redeem” was in reference to fulfilling the “hope of Israel” that the nation of Israel would be delivered from the oppression of the Roman Empire. They hoped to be free again. But this hope was earthly, and thus, it was all wrong. Jesus would bring freedom, but His freedom would be freedom from something far greater than Roman oppression.

The same word “redeem” that the two disciples used was also used by the Holy Spirit when Paul wrote a letter to Titus. But the “redemption” about which Paul wrote to Titus was far beyond the meaning that the two men on the road to Emmaus assumed would be a national “redemption” from Rome.

After the Pentecost of A.D. 30, the word “redeem” took on a salvational meaning. Paul wrote, *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men”* (Ti 2:11). This is the revelation of the gospel of God’s grace through the cross. So in reference to the cross, Paul continued, *“... who gave Himself for us so that He might **redeem** us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a special people who are zealous for good works”* (Ti 2:14). This was certainly a redemption that was beyond the “redemption” for which the two men from Emmaus hoped.

To the two men on the road to Emmaus, the cross at the time was an execution of their supposed “king of Israel.” But when Paul wrote to Titus many years later, the supposed earthly king was not martyred by the Romans on a cross. On the contrary, the cross was a salvational offering for every sin that we have committed against the Father of this crucified Son. To Mary, and the other disciples at the time of the cross, the cross was only an executed son of Mary on the cross. But from the viewpoint of heaven, it was a sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God. All this meaning of the cross had to be revealed, which it eventually was a few weeks later to the apostles on the Pentecost of A.D. 30.

So now we understand why the apostle John at least two decades after the cross wrote his apology in reference to the sacrificial offering. Matthew and Mark focused on the fulfillment of prophecy, but John focused on that which God could only do, that is, command the realm of the supernatural.

So John commenced his dissertation with the incarnation of God (Jn 1:1,2,14). By the time John completed his record of the supernatural works of Jesus, he concluded:

*And Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you might believe that **Jesus** [of Nazareth] is the **Christ** [Messiah], the [incarnate] **Son of God**, and that believing you might have life through His name” (Jn 20:30,31).*

John wanted to take his readers’ minds from the carpenter Jesus who grew up in Nazareth, into the realm of Him as the One who fulfilled all prophecies concerning the Messiah. Though the disciples initially wanted to stop there in reference to this Jesus as their supposed earthly King Messiah, John wanted his readers to know that Jesus was beyond being a nationalistic Savior who would supposedly redeem Israel. He was certainly the Messiah, but he was also the incarnate Son of God. And as the incarnate Son of God, His redemption of Israel was far beyond national expectations.

Chapter 4 REVEALING THE DOTS

We can only imagine the confusion that was caused at the time of the baptism of Jesus when John made a statement that no one really understood at the time. When Jesus approached John the Baptist in order to be baptized, John proclaimed, “*Behold, the Lamb of God **who takes away the sin of the world!***” (Jn 1:29). This gospel proclamation was made through John by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But at this time at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, we must conclude that the people had no idea what John was saying. It could be that the Spirit only revealed this specific proclamation concerning the purpose for which the Son of God came into the world. But the Holy Spirit did not reveal to John what he had just said in reference to the sacrificial offering of the One he was about to baptize.

We must not assume that the revelation of the gospel that was to be

revealed only to the apostles about four years later on the Pentecost of A.D. 30 was also revealed in full to John the Baptist. If the gospel had been revealed to John before the events of the cross, resurrection and ascension, then this would certainly contradict what Jesus later promised to the apostles that they alone would receive all the truth of the gospel when the Holy Spirit came upon them (See Jn 14:26; 16:13).

The lack of information concerning the truth of who Jesus was and His real mission into this world was also indicated by the lack of understanding that the disciples of John the Baptist had concerning Jesus. On one occasion, during the ministry of John the Baptist there was a dispute between some of his disciples and the Jews: *“Then there arose a dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification”* (Jn 3:25). What is significant about the dispute is what John’s disciples said to him after the dispute: *“Rabbi, He [the Christ] who was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, the same is baptizing, and all are coming to Him”* (Jn 3:26). But notice John’s reply to their statement: *“You yourselves bear me witness that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him’”* (Jn 3:28). This statement corresponds to the Jews’ interrogation of John not too long before his disciples encountered the Jews in reference to matters about purification.

“The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him [John], ‘Who are you?’” (Jn 1:19). John confessed, *“I am not the Christ”* (Jn 1:20). John’s response to the priests and Levites was the same as his statement to his disciples when they had their confrontation with the Jews. John did not see himself as the Messiah (Christ). He was simply the voice of one crying in the wilderness to make the way ready for the Christ. So he instructed his disciples, *“I am not the Christ, but, I have been sent before Him”* (Jn 3:28). Nevertheless, more than Jesus being the Christ (Messiah) was revealed to John, for he said, *“He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth is earthly and speaks from the earth”* (Jn 3:31). He continued to testify, *“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life. And he who does not believe the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”* (Jn 3:35,36).

We can at least assume that the origin of Jesus was revealed to John.

We can also assume that John knew that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God, and that He had come down out of heaven. From the testimony of John, it is difficult for us to know all that was revealed to John in reference to who Jesus was and what He would eventually do at the cross. But it was revealed to him that Jesus was the Messiah, and had been sent from the Father. Though we might read “incarnation” into the phrase “come down out of heaven,” this revelation was left to the apostles. John the apostle, had introduced the book of John with this subject (See Jn 1:1,2,14). But we would not conclude that the totality of the mystery of the gospel was revealed to John, especially any information concerning the purpose of the cross, resurrection and gospel reign of King Jesus. This would all be revealed later to the Christ-sent apostles, fulfilling Jesus’ promise to them.

^ The apostle John wrote many years after Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist in order that his readers know that Jesus, during His earthly ministry, revealed hints of what would later be explained in full when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles. When Jesus compared Himself with John the Baptist for the purpose of convincing the antagonistic Jews that He was from the Father, He reminded them that John the Baptist “*was the burning and shining light*” (Jn 5:35). But then Jesus said, “*I have greater witness than that of John*” the Baptist (Jn 5:36). He reminded the antagonistic Jews of the miraculous works that He had already worked: “*For the works that the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me*” (Jn 5:36). But He did not reveal why the Father had sent Him. We can only conclude from the statements that John the Baptist made that His sending had something to do with the taking away of the sin of the world.

Jesus then reminded His Jewish skeptics, “*You search the Scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life*” (Jn 5:39). But Jesus, as Matthew wrote, stated, “*It is these [Old Testament Scriptures] that testify of Me*” (Jn 5:39). The Old Testament Scriptures indeed testified that Jesus was the Messiah. However, this is as far as the Old Testament Scriptures went in reference to gospel matters. There was no revelation of the “mystery” of the gospel revealed by the Old Testament prophets. They could only search diligently concerning the hints of the prophets as to what the Messiah would be and do (See 1 Pt 1:10-12). When Jesus eventually came

into this world, His miraculous works were a signal to the Jews that He was beyond any earthly Messiah. John wrote in order to take the minds of his readers from Jesus of Nazareth, to the Messiah of Israel. He recorded the miraculous works of Jesus in order to prove that Jesus was greater than an earthly Messiah. He was the Son of God.

One particular miracle during the end of Jesus' ministry is the only miracle that was recorded by all the Spirit-inspired scribes of the earthly ministry of Jesus. This was the feeding of the five thousand (See Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:30-44; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-14). What was significant about this particular miracle of Jesus was its nature. This nature was revealed by the twelve baskets that were full of leftovers that were taken up after the feeding of the five thousand.

The twelve baskets were a stunning conclusion for everyone who witnessed the amount of leftovers. It was a surreal happening that the disciples at the time surely did not fully comprehend. The feeding of the five thousand started with five loaves of bread and two fish. But when everyone was full, they ended up with twelve baskets full of bread and fish. **It was a miracle of creation!** And only God can create. Standing in their midst, therefore, was One who had the power to create (See Cl 1:16). It is not surprising that after this miracle, and on a sea that Jesus had just been calmed, the disciples worshiped Him (See Mt 14:33).

So throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus worked in order to bring the thinking of His disciples to accept Him as the Prophet, and then to be their Teacher and Messiah. And finally, they had to accept Him as their resurrected Messiah. But Jesus did not reveal to them the meaning of the cross and resurrection while He was on earth. He only reminded them of all the prophecies that He had fulfilled in reference to Him being the One about whom all the prophets wrote. Once they concluded that He was more than a prophet, then it was time to consider Him to be the Son of God in the flesh who had come into the world to take away the sin of the world.

The immediate disciples of Jesus seem to have been so dense in this matter during His ministry in reference to Him being the Messiah, that after His resurrection He walked with them again and explained "*that all things must be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, concerning Me*" (Lk 24:44). But even when He ex-

plained these things to them, they still did not understand. They needed more help in order to understand. Therefore, “***He opened their understanding so that they might understand the [Old Testament] Scriptures***” (Lk 24:45). The fact that He had to miraculously open their minds to understand the Old Testament prophecies, reveals that they had difficulty in connecting all the dots between prophecy and fulfillment in reference to Him being the Messiah. His being the incarnate Son of God seemed still to be beyond their comprehension while He was on earth.

Though Jesus opened their minds to connect prophecies with fulfillment in reference to His messiahship, **He did not open their minds concerning the gospel of the cross**. This would be the business of the Holy Spirit who would come upon them in just a few days after He opened their minds concerning the prophecies (Jn 14:26; 16:13). In fact, the Spirit would not “open their minds” in reference to the gospel in the Old Testament Scriptures. He could not because the gospel was not there in its fullness. There were only hints of the gospel. The prophets searched to connect all those dots in reference to these hints, but they could not come to a gospel conclusion (1 Pt 1:10-12). What the Holy Spirit would do on the day of Pentecost was to reveal the mystery of the full gospel that had been hidden from mankind since the creation of the world.

Chapter 5

PERSONAL REVELATION OF THE GOSPEL

In order to take our minds into the realm of heaven, right to the origin of the gospel plan of eternal salvation, it is good to use the case of Paul as a commentary on what happened on the Pentecost of A.D. 30 in reference to the apostles. Before the day of Pentecost, the apostles had no idea what the cross and resurrection meant until the Holy Spirit revealed to them all the truth of the gospel that Jesus had promised to them (See Jn 14:26; 16:13).

The apostles were nationalistically dumbfounded by the crucifixion, and then experienced some nationalistic hopes in the resurrection of the One they presumed would restore the national kingdom of Israel (At 1:6). Their hope was renewed to the extent that after the resurrection they now had

hope in a nationalistic Messiah. But still, their minds had not been lifted into the realm of heavenly planning that had been confined to a mystery since the creation of the world. For this reason, therefore, the revelation of the gospel to Saul explains the situation of the apostles until the outpouring of the Spirit in A.D. 30.

Saul, later the apostle Paul, was possibly in Jerusalem when all the commotion of the A.D. 30 crucifixion and “rushing wind” took place. As a young man, he may have been at that time studying at the feet of Gamaliel, a renowned Jewish scholar of the day (At 22:3). Over twenty-five years after the A.D. 30 event, Paul reflected on his behavior at the time of the beginning of the church. He testified before King Agrippa, “*They [the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem] **knew me from the beginning***” (At 26:5). Paul then challenged those Jewish accusers who were present in Agrippa’s court, “*If they would testify,*” they would all identify him as a faithful Pharisee. Concerning those days, Paul added, “*After the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee*” (At 26:5).

As an ardent young student of the traditions of the fathers, Saul excelled beyond his fellow classmates while he studied in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel. He later wrote of his zeal, “*I advanced in Judaism above many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more **extremely zealous for my ancestral [religious] traditions***” (Gl 1:14). He was surely overzealous about his studies as all young Jewish students were at the time (See Ph 3:3-6). All the contemporary Jewish leaders in Jerusalem in A.D. 30, who were present in the court of Agrippa, certainly knew the extremely zealous young Saul. They all knew what had transpired in reference to the crucifixion of the rebel from Nazareth. But none of them at the time, including Saul, made any connection between the crucifixion and the sacrificial atonement for the sins of the world that was announced later on the A.D. 30 Pentecost. These things were hidden from everyone, including Gamaliel, Saul, and the religious leaders of the Jews. They were revealed only to the apostles, who in turn, proclaimed the message to all the Jews.

Upon graduation with honors, Saul was then promoted to a leadership position among the Jewish guard in Jerusalem in order to protect the religious heritage of Judaism. Without going into detail of his persecution of Christians in Judea, our main point is to emphasize the fact that young Saul,

as a student of Gamaliel, possibly witnessed what was considered the execution of a rebel. At least he was a resident in Jerusalem in A.D. 30, who, as the two men on the road to Emmaus, certainly heard of or witnessed the execution that took place outside the city gates of Jerusalem. It was there that the people witnessed the execution of the apostate Jesus of Nazareth.

Though Gamaliel possibly restrained his students from the spectacle of the execution scene, in the classroom the following Monday morning, he surely reminded his students that such would be the end of all those who would be a traitor to the Jews' religion that had been handed down from the fathers (See At 5:34). At least, he warned his students, execution awaited all insurrectionists against the Roman Empire.

There were examples of recent executions throughout the Roman Empire with which the Jews were historically familiar (See At 21:38). In 73 B.C., for example, the Thracian gladiator Spartacus led a rebellion against Rome that led to his death in a final battle in 71 B.C. Because of the insurrectionist movement of slaves that was led by Spartacus, over six thousand slaves were crucified in one day when the army of Spartacus was finally defeated by the Romans. In 4 B.C., the year of the death of Herod the Great in Palestine, the Roman general Varus crucified about 2,000 Jews in other regions of the Roman Empire. In A.D. 9, the Germanic leader Arminius defeated the Romans who ventured into his tribal regions of the northeastern part of the Empire. He subsequently crucified the captured Roman soldiers. In A.D. 28, the Germanic tribesmen crucified Roman tax collectors. Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived between A.D. 37 and 125, stated, "Christ was crucified [in A.D. 30] on the pretext that he instigated rebellion against Rome, on a par with zealots and other political activists." At the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, therefore, both the Romans and Jews were very familiar with the crucifixion of anyone who would participate in any insurrectionist movement against the Roman Empire. At the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, therefore, Jesus' crucifixion was simply just another execution of a Jewish rebel.

After Saul's graduation, and over a decade later, things changed in the life of the young Saul. Somewhere between A.D. 40 and 43, this zealous former disciple of Gamaliel, who had obediently listened to the instructions of his teacher, found himself lying blinded on the ground somewhere on a

dusty road between Jerusalem and Damascus. He was lying there stunned in a conversation with the One who many years before had been nailed as a criminal to a cross (See At 9:1-19).

As a leader commissioned by the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem to crush the apostasy of the sect of Christians, the now grown Saul was in a surreal experience on the Damascus road. His encounter with the crucified Jesus represented an entire paradigm shift of all he had learned from his hero teacher, Gamaliel. In obedience to what he had learned at the feet of Gamaliel, he had formerly led Christians off to prison (At 8:3). He believed that they were traitors of Judaism. Regardless of their proclamation that Jesus was now the King of kings, Saul threw traitors into prison.

Therefore, whether witnessed personally, or revealed to him by his Christian prisoners who defended themselves, **the cross was not good news to those, as Saul, who were at the time in the bondage of Judaism.** On the contrary, the principal persecutor of the Way of the Christians thought that he was doing right by confining to prison those who were a rebellious sect that everyone eventually referred to as Christians (See At 11:26; 1 Tm 1:13). Therefore, Saul had no idea that the crucifixion was actually a redemptive connection between God and man. It was simply retribution against Christians who were considered traitors to Judaism and national Israel.

The “cross connection” between God and man was not self-evident in the execution of Jesus. Saul knew about the event, possibly having personally witnessed it as a young student of Gamaliel. But at the time, the self-proclaimed King of the Jews was just another apostate Jew who needed to be executed for His apostasy from the Jewish fathers’ religious heritage. In reference to the Roman state, as in the past, the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth was simply a Roman government execution of a would-be Jewish king.

In those days, it was all about nationalism among the Jews. It was about preserving the religious heritage and identity of the Jews. The Jews endured the occupying foreigners (Rome), but they did so only until an opportunity arose when they would deliver themselves from Roman oppression under the leadership of the Messiah. In his younger years, Saul was certainly one of those who harbored the aspirations of zealot Jews who would eventually seek to throw off the oppression of Rome. Therefore, as

the young man Saul stood by and witnessed the stoning of one of the disciples of the self-proclaimed King Jesus, he consented to the stoning. He saw the stoning of Stephen as just one effort to terminate the apostate sect of Christians (See At 7:58; 8:1).

Saul was subsequently inspired by the stoning of Stephen, and thus he launched his personal vendetta against Christians. “***He made havoc of the church, entering into every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison***” (At 8:3). At the time, therefore, **the cross event in and of itself was not a self-evident revelation of the gospel.** Though Saul knew all about the execution event, he knew nothing about the redemption that took place in the heavenly realm at the time of the crucifixion. To him and thousands of others, the cross was only the execution of a Jewish rebel.

The only thing the blinded soldier, who lay prostrate on a Damascus road could say to the One he saw in the vision, was, “*Who are You Lord?*” (At 9:5). And then it all changed. It was a turning point of history. What the Jewish student Saul could not initially understand in the event of the crucifixion and resurrection over a decade before, was now to be laid out before him by revelation. The result would be a paradigm shift in the Gentile world.

Chapter 6 THE MYSTERY REVEALED

What began in Paul’s life on the Damascus road eventually resulted in his obedience to the gospel. After following the instructions of Ananias, he arose and was baptized in order to wash away his sins (At 22:16). While in Damascus, Jesus connected the dots for Paul between the historical event of the cross in Jerusalem over a decade before, with the remission of his sins that was poured forth from the throne of God (At 2:38). Paul had known of what he and others considered to be an execution. For several years, therefore, he had cast into prison those who knew the truth of the gospel, but were considered apostates to Judaism. In Damascus, it was finally revealed to him that the crucifixion of Jesus was not just the execution of another rebel Jew. What Christians had known since the A.D. 30 Pentecost, was finally

revealed personally to Saul.

Therefore, in obedience to the instructions of the Christ-sent Ananias, Saul “obeyed the gospel” of the death of Jesus for his sins, in order to enjoy the resurrection to come through his own resurrection from water. Paul would later explain that in baptism, one indeed connects with the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See Rm 6:3-6; 2 Th 1:8). Peter would also use the same phrase, “obey the gospel,” in reference to signalling a paradigm shift from one living in sin, to one living in Christ (See 1 Pt 4:17,18).

What is significant to understand from Paul’s paradigm shift is that he knew all the events and claims surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus, as well as the Jews’ fake news concerning the missing body of the entombed Jesus. The Jews had spread abroad the fake news that the disciples secretly came in the night and stole away the body of Jesus (See Mt 28:11-15). But in his three days of blindness, all the second hand information that Paul had known about the actual events, were clarified as Jesus revealed to him directly that which had been a mystery throughout the millennia. Even Gamaliel had surely searched diligently what was stated by those as Isaiah concerning the Suffering Servant (See Is 53; 1 Pt 1:10-12). But he too could come to no salvational conclusions. He could not reveal to his students, including Saul, anything concerning the great mystery of the gospel.

A. A personal revelation:

Many years after the beginning of the A.D. 30 Pentecost, Jesus directly revealed to Paul that the good news of redemption was beyond the actual crucifixion of Jesus on earth. Redemption originated in heaven, and subsequently was a blessing on earth. Paul then personally revealed to the disciples as those in Ephesus how he came to know the gospel that was reflected on earth through the cross. In **Ephesians 3:1-6** he explained this. After reminding the Ephesian disciples again that he was in prison in Rome at the time of writing because he firmly believed and preached the gospel, he wrote that this gospel had come to him personally by revelation (Ep 3:3).

We appreciate the word that the Holy Spirit directed Paul to use in reference to one’s knowledge of the gospel. He wrote, “*You have heard of the **stewardship** of the grace of God that was given to me*” (Ep 3:2).

The gospel of the grace of God that was revealed on the cross was entrusted to Paul. This knowledge of what transpired in the heavenly realm at the time of the cross was something that was entrusted to those on earth. The gospel, therefore, could never have been some invention of zealous religionists. If it had originated from the efforts of clever religious leaders, then the crucifixion of Jesus would have been the execution of a religious martyr.

But when the gospel was revealed, it was entrusted to faithful and trustworthy people as the apostles, and finally to Paul. Those to whom the gospel message was entrusted, therefore, had the responsibility to entrust it to others. Inherent in the good news of the incarnational offering of the Son of God is the necessity of both living incarnationally and preaching the gospel to others. Those who do not take the initiative to announce the gospel to the lost do not fully understand the motivating power of the gospel.

B. Applied power:

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that the stewardship of the gospel of grace was certainly personal. But for it to be effective in the lives of those into whose care the gospel is entrusted, it must be shared with others. He reminded the Ephesians, “... *the grace of God that was given to me for you*” (Ep 3:2). In order for the gospel of the grace of God to unleash its power to mold one’s life, those into whose care it is entrusted must be good stewards to share it with others. Paul explained this stewardship in his own life. He wrote to those in Rome, “*So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome*” (Rm 1:15).

Inherent in the gospel is the necessity to share it with others (See Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15,16). When one understands that the crucifixion was not just the execution of another Jewish rebel on a cross, but was for the remission of the sins of all repentant believers, then the cross becomes good news. And good news must be proclaimed around the world. If there is no sharing of the good news by those into whose hands it had been entrusted, then the effect of the gospel will have little power in changing one’s life. Those who are not motivated by the redemptive news of the cross have diminished the power of the gospel in their own lives.

C. By revelation only:

In explaining this point to the Ephesians, Paul moved into the origin of his knowledge of the gospel. In one profound statement he explained the origin of the gospel that was entrusted to his stewardship: “*By revelation He made known to me **the mystery***” (Ep 3:3).

As a reminder, **revelation is God revealing truth to man that man by no other means could have known**. Paul knew all the events of the execution, as well as the fake news concerning the stolen body. But for over a decade after the Spirit initially revealed the gospel to the apostles, he himself could not connect the dots between the heavenly redemption and the earthly execution. That connection was always a mystery to him, as it was for centuries to the prophets until the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in A.D. 30.

But after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in A.D. 30, there was no longer a mystery. The incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus’ crucifixion for our redemption, His resurrection for our hope, with His ascension to the right hand of God to reign as King of kings was known to all. The mystery of the gospel came to be known to the world through the apostles. It came by the Holy Spirit in a similar manner to Paul. For those who first beheld the event of the cross, therefore, the crucifixion was only the death of a good friend and hopeful leader to deliver Israel to her desired former glory. To them, **the cross was initially not good news**. Only on Pentecost was it revealed by the Holy Spirit that the Divine connection had been made at the cross between sinners and the sacrificial blood of Jesus. This was the revelation of the mystery that had been hidden since the creation.

D. The spoken and written gospel:

For over two decades after the Pentecost of A.D. 30, the gospel that was revealed first to the apostles was preached to the world. It was initially communicated verbally, but then as the initially gifted apostles and prophets were passing away, the Holy Spirit began, through chosen hands, to have the message of the gospel transcribed in words. So Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “*As I wrote before in few words*” (Ep 3:3). This gospel takes only

a few words to explain, but its mystery could not be discovered by the most scholarly saints since the beginning of creation. How could something so simple not be discovered by those who knew well their Old Testaments?

Paul's point is that the gospel could never have been the invention of some religious monks off in a secluded monastery. How could anyone come up with the thought of God in spirit becoming the single-cell seed of woman in order to be born into the world as the Savior of the world (See Lk 2:10,11; Ph 2:5-8)? This is something that was simply unimaginable. It was inconceivable. In fact, some who march under the banner of "christianity" today want to reverse the order of incarnation. To them, the gospel of the incarnation is contrary to human nature. The Son of God gave up being equal with God and humbled Himself into the flesh of man (Ph 2:5-8). With man, it is the opposite. Men seek to be gods.

There are also those who want the Savior to come and reign on this earth for one thousand years. They still want a king to hug and a shrine before which to bow down. The concept of the gospel of the incarnation and kingdom reign of King Jesus is so inconceivable that it was impossible for any human being to dream it up. It had to be a divine plan that could only be revealed by the Creator of all things (Cl 1:16).

Chapter 7

THE MYSTERY FOR THE WORLD

At the time Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, the knowledge that had been revealed to him concerning the gospel was revealed to him directly by the Holy Spirit (Ep 3:4). This knowledge allowed him to understand the mystery of what was concealed from human minds since the beginning of time. It was a mystery to all people on earth because it could not be understood unless the knowledge of it was revealed by the Holy Spirit. This knowledge was first revealed to the apostles in A.D. 30, but was now revealed to Paul at least a decade after the events of the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

After receiving the knowledge that allowed him to understand the mystery of the gospel, he both preached it to others, as well as recorded it for

the Ephesians. We today have the advantage of understanding the knowledge of the mystery of the gospel through our study of the New Testament Scriptures. We can understand the mystery of the gospel through no other means. After the gospel was revealed to Paul, the last Christ-sent apostle, the direct revelation of the gospel to individuals ceased.

A. The hidden mystery of the gospel:

Until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the morning of the A.D. 30 Pentecost, the apostles had no understanding that the cross was the incarnational offering of the Son of God for the sins of the world. As all the disciples to that point in history, they were not able to connect all the dots between prophecy and fulfillment. Therefore, Jesus helped them to connect prophecy and fulfillment in reference to Him being the Messiah (Lk 24:44). But the gospel was not revealed through the Old Testament Scriptures. Those were the times when it was still a mystery. It was a mystery that all the prophets searched diligently to discover (1 Pt 1:10-12). But the prophets could not unveil the mystery through their diligent searching. During those years, not even the angels knew the mystery of the gospel.

It is for this reason that the apostles initially understood the death of Jesus on the cross to be only the death of a supposed future leader who would restore the former glory of national Israel (At 1:6). After His resurrection, therefore, Jesus helped them to understand that He was more than the Messiah, but not simply a nationalistic messiah. Jesus explained His fulfillment of all prophecies concerning His Messiahship. However, He left it to the Holy Spirit to make the connection between the earthly and heavenly in reference to the gospel plan of salvation. The Spirit would reveal the connection between crucifixion and redemption after Jesus' ascension and on the day of Pentecost.

After the resurrection, therefore, the apostles disbursed themselves to as far away as Galilee to the north in order to go fishing (See Jn 21:3). For this reason, Jesus subsequently had to go fetch them out of a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee in order to get them back to Jerusalem seventy-five kilometers to the south. He did this in order that the Spirit could make sense out of all their confusion (See Jn 21:1-14).

So back to Jerusalem they went. Just before Jesus ascended “*He commanded them not to depart [again] from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father*” (At 1:4). Once Jesus got them back to Jerusalem a week before Pentecost, they were in need of a command not to run off somewhere else in their disillusionment and lack of understanding. So Jesus reminded them to “*wait for the promise of the Father, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me*” (At 1:4). Jesus then promised the apostles, “*You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now*” (At 1:5).

The promise that they would receive the Holy Spirit from the Father was made during the earthly ministry of Jesus: “*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, **He will teach you all things** and bring all things to your remembrance what I have said to you*” (Jn 14:26).

And then on another occasion at the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus again promised on the evening before the betrayal and crucifixion:

*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He will guide you into all the truth** [of the gospel]. For He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears, that He will speak. And He will declare to you things to come* (Jn 16:13).

In both of the preceding statements, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would reveal to them the rest of the story that they could not deduct from the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures. During His periodic visits with the apostles after the resurrection, Jesus rebuked them concerning their inability to connect the dots between prophecy and His fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies. He said to them, “*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken*” (Lk 24:25). And indeed they were slow, but we must give them a break. Neither could the Old Testament prophets figure out the mystery of the gospel after searching through the prophecies for centuries.

Now these disciples truly knew the Old Testament prophecies concerning the purpose of the Messiah. However, they certainly misunderstood the messianic prophecies simply because of what Jesus said to them as a

rebuke to their following question at the time of His ascension: “*Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” (At 1:6).

Even after Jesus had connected the prophecies of messiahship with their fulfillment in Him, the apostles were still thinking earthly. They still could not deduct that prophecies as Genesis 3:15 had salvational meanings embedded in them that were beyond a supposed kingdom of Israel on earth. Genesis 3:15 and similar prophecies contained indications of something that would be heavenly, something that was far more wonderful than kingdom reign aspirations. But at the time just before the ascension, the disciples asked Jesus about nationalistic aspirations. They still could not expand their thinking beyond this world. Because of their nationalistic thinking as Jews, they could not set their minds on things that are above (See Cl 3:1,2).

We might say that the apostles were somewhat slow in comprehending these matters. Even though they had been with Jesus for three and a half years they still could not get their minds beyond the earthly, and specifically, beyond the nationalistic expectations of a restored national Israel. At least we can gather from their total inability to understand the purpose of the cross until Pentecost that the gospel was still a mystery that had to be revealed to them only by the inspiration of the Spirit of truth.

Just before He ascended, Jesus said something very significant in reference to the apostles’ understanding of the Old Testament prophecies. He said,

These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, concerning Me (Lk 24:44).

We must not add too much to this statement in reference to the revelation of the gospel connection with the cross. Jesus’ class review for the apostles on this occasion was in reference to prophecy concerning His messiahship, not gospel revelation. Prophecy spoke of Him being the Suffering Servant. But in prophecy there were no details of why the Servant would suffer. He was the one who “*was wounded for our transgressions ... bruised for our iniquities*” (Is 53:5; see At 8:29-35). But in the Old Testament it was never revealed why or how He would be wounded and bruised.

Revelation concerning the purpose of the wounding and crushing would be revealed only after the fact.

But even after the historical bruising, the Ethiopian eunuch could not on his own figure out how this bruising had any reference to the remission of his sins (At 8:29-35). The prophecies focused on the earthly fulfillment, whereas gospel was in reference to heavenly reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins. This truth of the gospel had to be revealed directly from heaven.

In those weeks after Jesus' resurrection, and before His ascension, He wanted the disciples to connect all the prophecies with their fulfillment in Him in reference to Him being the Messiah. He left the revelation of the truth of the gospel of reconciliation to the Holy Spirit, for when "*the Spirit of truth, has come,*" Jesus promised the apostles, "*He will guide you into all the truth* [of the gospel]" (Jn 16:13).

It was the business of the Old Testament prophets to lay the foundation upon which the incarnate Son of God would fulfill all prophecy in reference to Jesus of Nazareth being the Christ (Messiah). Indeed, there were indications sprinkled among the prophetic statements concerning the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God. However, there were no explanations as to why He would suffer and die. The prophets searched diligently to understand this mystery (1 Pt 1:10-12). But their efforts were futile. The revelation of the good news was reserved for a specific day and for a chosen group of men. And until that special day, no one on earth had any idea that the incarnate Son of God would be a sin offering for all humanity in the year A.D. 30.

B. The gospel for all:

In Ephesians 3 Paul continued that in the gospel covenant "*the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel*" (Ep 3:6). Jeremiah had prophesied that God would establish a new covenant with the united houses of Israel and Judah (See Jr 31:31-33). In the promise of this new covenant, the nationalistic Jews still did not get the point that both Jews and Gentiles would be brought into fellowship with one another in Christ. They only understood from the prophecy of Jeremiah that something new in reference to their nationalistic covenant relationship with God would be established. It was only

by revelation that they understood that the Gentiles would be grafted into this new covenant (See Rm 11:1-24).

Many years after Pentecost, it took a special vision from heaven in order to convince both the Jewish Peter and the rest of the Jewish Christians to understand this point (See At 10,11). After Peter went to the house of the Gentile Cornelius, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem initially confronted him about going into the house of a Gentile (See At 11:1-3). In their strict adherence to the customs of the Jews' religion of the time, even these brethren could not understand that the gospel brings humanity closer together in a covenant relationship with God. However, religions as the Jews' religion always move people further apart from one another.

The religion of the Jews at the time Jesus came into the world had moved the Jews so far away from the Gentiles that it was difficult for Jewish Christians to accept the Gentiles into the gospel covenant. The Jewish Christians could not understand "*that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakes of His promise in Christ through the gospel*" (Ep 3:6).

Peter was led to the house of Cornelius by a vision. Paul was led specifically as an apostle to the Gentiles (Gl 2:9). When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he reflected on his personal commission by the Lord Jesus Christ that he was made a minister of the gospel "*according to the gift of God's grace that was given*" to him by "*the effective working of His power*" (Ep 3:7). This ministry of the gospel was directed specifically to the Gentiles.

Paul concluded his personal revelation of both the gospel and his special ministry with the following statement:

*To me, who am less than the least of all saints is this [gospel of] grace given, so that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable [undiscoverable] riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the stewardship of the mystery [of the gospel], **which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things** (Ep 3:8,9).*

Chapter 8

COMPARING GOSPEL NOTES

Paul's knowledge of the gospel was based on the fact that he did not receive it from any man. He was very specific in this claim, lest others assert that he was instructed in matters concerning the gospel by the apostles, or some New Testament prophet. The fact that he was very clear on this matter was used by him as evidence that the Lord Jesus actually appeared to him on the Damascus road. His argument for his direct reception of the gospel was based on the fact that there was no other way he could have preached what he did if he had not received the message of the gospel directly from the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus revealed to him the good news that was beyond the event of the cross, which execution event he already knew. But the gospel beyond the cross came to him directly from the resurrected Jesus. In fact, his defense that he received the message of the gospel directly from the Lord Jesus proved that the gospel **was not** the invention of some religious fanatics in Jerusalem who dreamed up the message after the execution of their leader. It was the mystery of the eternal God that had been hidden from the minds of men for millennia.

Paul began his defense of his direct "education" in the gospel early in his letter to the Galatians. He gave his defense of the message because the Galatians were in conflict with those who preached "another gospel" (Gl 1:6-9). In answer to those who preached the other gospel, Paul began his defense of the personal reception of the gospel that he preached with the following statement:

*But I want you to know, brethren, that **the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through the revelation of Jesus Christ** (Gl 1:11,12).*

The gospel that he taught could not have been received from men, for the message of the incarnate Son of God was entirely beyond what the

nationalistic religionists of his day could invent. It was totally contrary to what Gamaliel taught him as a young student in Jerusalem.

Gamaliel, and the other rabbis of national Israel, taught a message of nationalistic restoration. What Paul taught the Galatians was a message of a crucified and reigning King Jesus. The rabbis taught religion. Paul taught gospel. In his defense, Paul presented one point of contrast between religion and the gospel that he taught. The contrast reflected the gospel to be contrary to the religion that he had formerly advanced:

*For you have heard of my behavior in the past in Judaism, how beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. And I **advanced** in Judaism above many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more **extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions** (Gl 1:13,14).*

Paul's reception and obedience to the gospel was a paradigm shift in his personal life. It was a shift from the religion of the Jews that he had been formerly taught at the feet of Gamaliel. His was a paradigm shift to the incarnational life-style that was motivated by the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God. When Jesus, through a vision, dismounted him from his horse on his way to Damascus, Saul's paradigm of faith began to change because the gospel message was revealed to him by King Jesus.

Before the shift, however, Saul believed that the Nazarene was simply executed by the religious establishment for His supposed betrayal of the "ancestral traditions." But after the shift, Saul, now Paul, sacrificed all his advancement in the Jews' religion, including all the ancestral religious traditions, in order that he might truly understand this Son of God who was incarnate in the flesh of man in order to offer Himself as a fleshly sacrifice for the sins of the world. Once he made the shift, the execution of a rebel many years before became the sacrificial offering of the Son of God.

Paul explained the reason for his own extreme paradigm shift of faith. As the Son of God embodied Himself in the flesh of man, Paul emulated in his personal life his own incarnational transformation after the manner of the One who gave up being in spirit as God in order to be a man who could be nailed to a cross by man:

*But what things were gain to me [in the Jews' religion], **those things I have counted lost for Christ**. Indeed more, **I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord**, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them **refuse** [Gr., "dung"] so that I may gain Christ (Ph 3:7,8).*

Later in the Galatian letter, he reminded the Galatians: "***I have been crucified with Christ***. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gl 2:20). Saul lived for himself before his spiritual paradigm shift. Afterward, however, Paul lived for King Jesus.

Just in case some might assume that his personal change in life originated from what may have been taught to him by others concerning the gospel, he reminded the Galatians, "*When it pleased God ... to reveal His Son to me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, **I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood***" (Gl 1:16). He continued this point by reminding the Galatians that he did not "*go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. But I went to Arabia and returned again to Damascus*" (Gl 1:17). Then it was three years after his obedience to the gospel that Paul finally went to Jerusalem. He wrote, "*I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter*" (Gl 1:18).

Paul's defense that he was not personally taught the message of the gospel by any man becomes more definite when he finally went to Jerusalem three years after his obedience to the gospel. He wrote, "*Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see **Peter**. And I stayed with him **fifteen days***" (Gl 1:18). It is interesting to note why Paul mentioned the "fifteen days." Was this enough time for Peter to personally teach Paul what took Jesus three and a half years to teach the apostles? And after this period of time personally with Jesus, the apostles still could not connect all the dots between prophecy and fulfillment concerning Jesus as the Messiah. After the resurrection, Jesus finally reaffirmed for the apostles that He was the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies (Lk 24:44). But it was the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost who had to graduate them to the meaning of the cross and kingdom reign.

During the fifteen days Paul was in Jerusalem, he also saw James, the physical brother of Jesus (Gl 1:19). James, at the time, was certainly a

church-sent apostle, but the twelve Christ-sent apostles were still in town by the time Paul made his way to Jerusalem. In Acts 15, about fifteen years after the A.D. 30 Pentecost, the apostles were still there when Paul went up to Jerusalem after his first mission journey.

The apostles stayed in Jerusalem in order to receive and teach unbelieving Jews who journeyed to the city every Passover/Pentecost after the A.D. 30 Passover/Pentecost. Though these sojourning Jews were taught the message of the gospel by the apostles (At 2:41), Paul wanted the Galatians to understand that the gospel had already been revealed to him before he stepped foot in the city of Jerusalem on the visit three years after his obedience to the gospel in Damascus, and then again after fourteen years of preaching the gospel on a two-year mission trip.

We must not miss the point that when Jesus instructed Ananias to go to Paul while he was still blinded after the Damascus road vision, **Ananias did not go to him in order to teach Paul the gospel**. We must notice carefully what Ananias did say to Paul when he met him: *“The God of our fathers, has chosen you [Paul] to know His will and to see the Just One and to hear the voice of His mouth”* (At 22:14). Ananias’ message to Paul gets better: *“For you [Paul] will be His witness to all men of what you **have seen and heard**”* (At 22:15). Paul had personally seen the resurrected King Jesus. He had both heard the voice of this King, as well as the message of the gospel that was personally revealed to him. In other words, before Ananias showed up, the gospel had already been revealed to Paul.

This is the precise point that Paul was seeking to argue before the Galatians. Paul heard the message of the gospel directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. Ananias did not preach to him the gospel. Peter did not preach to him the gospel. James, the Lord’s brother, did not preach to him the gospel. Jesus personally preached to him the gospel, after having given to him the added evidence of personally appearing to him. From the encounter on the Damascus road, Paul saw and heard King Jesus. We would assume, therefore, that the Holy Spirit took it from there and revealed all the heavenly good news that had been a mystery for millennia.

There is only one conclusion to all this that we deduct from Paul’s address to the Galatians, to whom he had preached the gospel. In his former years of persecuting the church over a decade before his mission trip into

Galatia to preach the gospel to the Galatians, Paul had personally received the message of the gospel directly from the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Before this revelation, the cross was to him only the execution of an apostate Jewish Rabbi from Nazareth, the followers of whom, he concluded, must be subjugated through imprisonment. He had previously supposed that Jesus was nothing more than an executed martyr of those who had hoped that He would reestablish the nation of Israel to her former glory.

This zealous student at the feet of one of the most renowned teachers of the day in the traditions of the fathers, could never have known the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ without direct revelation. If the zealous persecutor of Christians could not have known the gospel without a direct revelation from Jesus, then we are left to accept one of two conclusions in reference to ourselves knowing the gospel: First, in order for one to know the gospel today, Jesus must appear directly to him as He appeared to Paul. But we know that this will never happen simply because Jesus will not marginalize the work of the Holy Spirit who had recorded in the document of the New Testament all that is to be known concerning the message of the gospel. It is in this document as a whole of twenty-seven letters that the Spirit would remind us,

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you **through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord**, as His divine power has given to us **all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue** (2 Pt 1:2,3).*

The second conclusion, therefore, is necessary because Jesus will not supplant the Holy Spirit's work through the inspiration of the New Testament. We must read the Spirit-inspired word of God in order to know the gospel. There is absolutely no other source today to come to a knowledge of the message of the gospel than the New Testament Scriptures.

Since the truth of the gospel has once and for all time been delivered to the saints (Jd 3), then it is imperative that we come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through our personal search of the Scriptures. In the life of the early disciples, King Jesus would reveal His presence through one final event in the history of Israel. This would be the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Before the event, Peter wrote the following exhortation

around A.D. 66,67: “*But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18). At this time in history, growth in the grace and knowledge of the gospel of Jesus could only happen if the early disciples consulted the written Scriptures, which at the time Peter wrote were in existence and circulated among the disciples. This same growth can happen today only if we search the same New Testament Scriptures.

There is only one way to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We must study the documents that the Spirit has left for us to study. If we become ignorant of the content of these documents, we will eventually create a “Jesus” after our own imagination. We will resort to “feeling” this Jesus, and not knowing Him according to the Scriptures. This very thing was happening within thirty years after the earthly ministry of Jesus. Because Jesus was turning into a mythical character in the minds of some, Luke wrote to set the record straight (See Lk 1:1-4). He wrote by the direction of the Holy Spirit “*that you [Theophilus] might know the certainly of those things you have been taught*” (Lk 1:4).

In concluding his letter to the Galatians, Paul wanted the Galatians to know that the gospel had been revealed to him directly, apart from any conference discussions with the apostles or anyone else. So after His initial visit to Jerusalem to see Peter and James, he did not go to Jerusalem for another fourteen years. This visit followed his first mission journey to preach the gospel throughout Galatia (See At 13,14). He went up to Jerusalem “*by revelation and communicated to them [the apostles] the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles*” (Gl 2:2). He discussed privately the gospel he preached with “*those who were of reputation [the apostles], lest by any means I run, or had run in vain*” (Gl 2:2). And then after explaining what he preached, he stated that “*those who seemed to be important contributed nothing to me [concerning new information about the gospel]*” (Gl 2:6). So Paul then concluded,

But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed to me as the gospel of the circumcision was to Peter ... they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship so that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcision (Gl 2:7,9).

Appendix

BRIDGING THE “IMPERFECT” GAP

The nature of the subject of this book assumes that we need to add the following appendix material. We have discovered that Bible students sometimes have a difficult time understanding the behavior, or response, of the early Christians because of our difficulty of placing ourselves in their historical context. We have this desire to study the New Testament documents from our perspective today. As an even greater handicap in our modern age of shallow Bible study, we often have a very difficult time of getting beyond favorite passages, which passages are often taken out of the context of the whole text of the Scriptures. But more specifically, scripture statements are too many times taken out of their historical context. Extracting favorite statements of Scriptures from the text of the Bible does not encourage people to consider the whole text of the Bible. It does not encourage people today to study the Spirit-inspired documents that were initially written to encourage people in the first century.

The Holy Spirit wrote the following statement for the exhortation of everyone who would seek to study the Bible: *“For whatever things were written before were written **for our learning**, so that we through patience and encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Rm 15:4). This is learning far beyond favorite passages. Focusing only on favorite passages often leads us into a shallow understanding of the word of God. If we extract favorite passages from their historical context, then we will end up with a very limited understanding of the Bible as a whole. In doing such, the Bible often becomes a catechism of legal doctrines that must be obeyed without any motivational background.

If one does not place himself or herself in the historical context of the events that were revealed through the incarnation and ministry of the Son of God, then it will be somewhat difficult to understand the reaction of those who initially experienced the revelation of the gospel. We must be encouraged to learn from their response to the gospel in order that the gospel come alive in our own lives. The initial documents of the New Testament were written in the historical context of the first recipients. The better we understand their histori-

cal context, the better we will understand what was written to them.

When we turn to the documents of the New Testament, it is imperative that we understand why and when these documents were written. In order to understand the full impact of the message that the Holy Spirit wanted to communicate to us today, we must first consider the possible dates that the Spirit inspired the New Testament documents to be written. Knowing these dates helps us understand better the historical environment in which the early recipients lived. And when we understand the unique trials through which they were going, we will enhance our appreciation of the New Testament Scriptures. It is not necessary to understand the historical background of the New Testament documents that is outside the recorded history of the documents themselves. However, it is certainly in our interest to better understand the context in which the early disciples were living when they initially received these letters from the Holy Spirit.

If we can place some possible date of writing on a particular letter, then we can better understand the purpose of the document, as well as the response of those who initially received the document. For this reason, therefore, we offer some possible dates for the writing of the New Testament documents that fit into the historical context of the times. Though these dates can never be substantiated to be precise, at least they are accurate enough to give us some understanding of why the documents were first written.

Our understanding of the "timing" of the writing of the New Testament documents is predicated on a very important statement that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians. He wrote in the context of division and confusion in the organic function of the body of Christ in the province of Achaia.

*Love never fails. But where there are [the miraculous gifts of] prophecies, **they will be abolished**. Where there are [the miraculous gifts of] languages, **they will cease**. Where there is [the miraculous gift of] knowledge, **it will vanish away**. For we [at this time] know **in part** and we prophesy **in part**. But when that which is complete [perfect] has come, **then that which is in part will be done away** (1 Co 13:8-10).*

There has been too much debate over this statement that Paul made to

the saints in Achaia. Nevertheless, if we keep in mind that both 1 & 2 Corinthians were written to all the saints in the province of Achaia, not just to those who lived in the city of Corinth, then we will begin to understand the historical context of the statement (See 2 Co 1:1).

Paul’s explanation to what he had in mind as the “complete” or perfect, is explained by the illustration of his growth out of childhood. *“When I was a child I spoke as a child. I understood as a child. I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things”* (1 Co 13:11).

Some have suggested that the imperfect, or incomplete, about which he wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 referred to love. But this does not fit his illustration of maturing from childhood. Love is an emotional attitude. But in 1 Corinthians 13:11 he speaks of the actions of mental processes: “spoke,” “understood,” and “thought.” He was not speaking of “loving” as a child, and then growing into a “complete” love. On the contrary, he was speaking of childish mental actions that he put away when he matured. His speaking as a child, understanding as a child, and thinking as a child were put away when he grew up. In other words, when he was a child, his mental processes and speech were as a child. But when he matured, the immature thinking and behavior of his childhood had to give way to his adulthood.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul clarified that about which he was speaking: *“For now [at this time when he was writing] we dimly see in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know [the mind of God] just as I also am known [by God].”* This surely is not referring to loving one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. In using the third person plural pronoun “we,” he was referring to all of us as the whole body, not to individual members of the body.

Some individual members of the body in Corinth, as the household of Stephanas, had grown in great love immediately upon their obedience to the gospel (See 1 Co 16:15,16). Growing to a “complete” (perfect) love would seem to be ignoring the loving service of these first converts in Corinth who exercised great love as soon as they came out of the waters of baptism. There was something more significant about the coming “perfect” than simply growing in their love for one another, which growth is actually a lifetime process (See 1 Th 1:3).

This brings us to the context of how the gospel was first revealed on the

Pentecost of A.D. 30, and subsequently preached throughout the Roman world by the time Paul wrote the statement of Colossians 1:23 in A.D. 61,62. At that time Paul exhorted the disciples in Colosse that they not be “*moved away from the hope of **the gospel** that you [Colossians] have heard, which was preached to every creature that is under heaven.*”

From A.D. 30, to the time when Paul wrote Colossians 1:23 in A.D. 61,62, the gospel had been fully revealed and **verbally** preached “to every creature that is under heaven.” At the very time Paul wrote this statement, that which was verbally preached was now being written as Scripture, both by Paul and the other New Testament writers. Once all that which was first verbally preached had been written concerning the gospel, copied and circulated throughout the first century world, then there was no more a need for the miraculous gift of prophecy to verbally preach the gospel. This would also be true in reference to the prophets continuing their instruction of the church in the word of God. When all the truth of the word was recorded, then the prophets lost the reason for their inspiration to both speak and write the truth of the gospel. If anyone wanted to know the gospel, then he or she simply needed to study the written word of God.

When the perfect word of the gospel was written, then there was no more a need for prophets to receive and preach the gospel verbally. When the last person died on whom a Christ-sent apostle had laid hands to receive the gift of prophecy (teaching), then the written record of the gospel took the church from there unto this day. The “imperfect gap” had been closed with the complete recording of the word of God by the end of national Israel in A.D. 70. It was during the few years leading up to the close of the ministry of the miraculous gifts that the Holy Spirit reminded everyone:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, or correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tm 3:16,17).

In this statement, the Holy Spirit went beyond the recording of the message of the gospel. He took those as Timothy into accepting all instruction in reference to gospel living. This was “Scripture,” which was able to take the

church unto the time that Jesus would come at the end of time.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 was written about three to five years **before** the consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70. We believe that this statement to Timothy is significant in that the Holy Spirit, through the hand of Paul, wanted all the disciples, especially those as Timothy who were gifted with prophecy, to understand that they needed to turn their attention from individuals who imparted the word of God verbally, to the written word of God itself. So about three years before the end of national Israel, the Holy Spirit, through Peter, once again reminded everyone: *"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue"* (2 Pt 1:3). There was finality in the revelation of the truth of God to man. At the same time Peter wrote the letter of 2 Peter, Jude also concurred that his readers *"earnestly contend for the faith [of the gospel] that was once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jd 3).

Notice from the following chart the possible dates when the documents of 1 & 2 Corinthians were written. The dates are at least twenty years after the revelation of the gospel in A.D. 30. The Corinthians were at least five years in the faith at the time of writing. Though their relationships with one another were not yet perfect in love, their growth in love was a work in progress.

But in the context of 1 Corinthians 12 - 14, the function of the body in reference to the miraculous gifts was under consideration. Function in reference to the miraculous gifts was the problem when those in Achaia came together in a common assembly in the city of Corinth (See 1 Co 11:18). Some of the gifted disciples were competing with one another in reference to the use of their gifts. Paul wanted to remind them that that over which divided them, and were in competition with one another, would pass away as the complete revelation of the word of God was recorded and distributed throughout the church of the first century.

Those gifts over which they competed with one another would soon be gone. They would be gone because the recording of all the information concerning the gospel, as well as all truth that God desired should be revealed. Within a little over a decade after the time he wrote, the written word would supplant that which was used to communicate the truth in the gap between the initial revelation of the gospel in A.D. 30 and the recording

of the last New Testament document. That over which they competed with one another (prophecy and languages) would soon pass away. The "vehicle" by which the gospel was preached and the church was edified, would give way to the necessity of their study of the inspired letters of the word of God. These letters were that at the time being copied and circulated among the churches. Once all the letters were written, this would mean the termination of the miraculous gifts.



The preceding chart gives a visual interpretation of the age of the function of the miraculous gifts ("the imperfect") that would give way to the communication of the Spirit through the inspired New Testament documents that were completed a little over a decade before A.D. 70. We understand the dating of the New Testament documents in view of the consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70. In view of the decade of their writing before A.D. 70, we assume that the Holy Spirit wanted to terminate the ministry of the miraculous gifts by A.D. 70. At the same time, He wanted to prepare the Jewish disciples for the consummation of their Jewish heritage.

Following the suggested dates on the chart of the documents of the New Testament gives some general reason for the writing of each particular letter in the context of the lives of those to whom the letters were first written. Regardless of any exact date for the writing of each New Testament document, one thing is obviously clear. The writing of all the New Testament books, with possibly the exception of Revelation, took place within about a decade before the historical event of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There was a gap of at least twenty-five years from the time of the revela-

tion of the gospel to the apostles on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 and the fifteen years within which the New Testament documents were finalized before A.D. 70. It was during this twenty-five year gap that the word of the gospel went forth verbally until the time when the Holy Spirit deemed it necessary to begin the inscription of the New Testament documents. This leaves little doubt that the gap was the time of the “in part” about which Paul wrote to the Corinthians and the “complete” (perfect) that would be consummated in the completion of the canon of New Testament documents by A.D. 70.

A. 1 & 2 Corinthians:

When Paul used the third person plural pronoun “we” in writing, “we know in part,” he took the subject of the context of 1 Corinthians 13 beyond the context of the Corinthians themselves. He did not say “you.” He said “we,” which included all the Christians at the time, including himself. Since 1 & 2 Corinthians were written around A.D. 55, or shortly thereafter, then the church as a whole only knew the word of God “in part” because it was preached through the ministry of the apostles and prophets who had limited contact with the world church.

The problem at the time was that the apostles and prophets could not be everywhere in order to mature the saints in the knowledge of the incarnate Son of God, the gospel reign, and the final coming at the end of time in order to consummate all things. This was particularly true in reference to the gospel reign of King Jesus. So in the gospel according to Hebrews, the Hebrew writer took the Jewish Christians from the first principles unto the meat of the kingship and priesthood of Jesus (See Hb 6:1-3).

1 & 2 Corinthians give us some idea of the function of the miraculous gifts within the churches to which a Christ-sent apostle had gone in order to lay hands on those who would receive the miraculous gifts (At 8:18). Since Paul addressed only the Corinthians concerning their dysfunctional experiences in reference to the function of the miraculous gifts of prophecy and languages, we would assume that they alone had difficulty in their relationships with one another in these matters. None of the other churches to which the Christ-sent apostles had gone experienced the same confusion concerning the gifts as the Corinthians.

Nevertheless, Paul's argument in the context of 1 Corinthians 12 – 14 was that the Corinthians were disputing over something that would eventually be removed from their function as the body of Christ. The occasion for the Corinthians' dysfunctional use of the gifts would soon pass away. It would be then that their unity would have to depend on their loving one another, not their functional use of the gifts to edify one another.

Paul's insertion of 1 Corinthians 13 between chapters 12 and 14 of the first letter seems to argue the case that when the gifts passed away from among the disciples in all Achaia, it would be then that they would discover if their fellowship was based on their love for one another. The passing of the gifts would transpire in a little over a decade after Paul wrote to them. Most of them would still be alive when the miraculous gifts were terminated. It would be then that they would determine if they were bonded together with love, apart from the need of the whole church depending on those who possessed the gifts.

B. 1 & 2 Thessalonians:

These two letters were also written in the latter part of the 50s. Paul had passed through Thessalonica on his way to Corinth, from where he wrote 1 Thessalonians. The second letter was written shortly thereafter while he was still in Corinth. He initially wrote 1 Thessalonians that was misunderstood in reference to the final coming of Christ. The Thessalonians associated the final coming at the end of time, with the coming of the judgment of Christ in time on national Israel in A.D. 70. The second letter, therefore, corrected their misunderstanding. In both letters he wrote concerning first principles of gospel living in order to guide them in their living as disciples in the absence of any prophets or apostles among them who could continue teaching them. Though Timothy and Titus initially matured them in the faith, these two prophets went on to other areas.

C. Romans:

Since Paul had not yet been to Rome, he wrote the document of Romans in order to ground the disciples in the region of Italy concerning the

foundation of the gospel of God's grace. Since he as a Christ-sent apostle had not yet traveled to Rome, Paul explained in the document of Romans what all the other apostles and prophets were personally teaching in other areas. Since the Roman disciples had been personally taught by those who could have returned from one of the Passover/Pentecost feasts either on or after A.D. 30, Paul wanted to fill in the gaps that they not misunderstand the grace of the gospel. Since there were legal-minded Jews in their midst, Paul wanted to explain in detail the nature of the gospel by which they were set free from law.

We would correctly assume, therefore, that the document of Romans was the beginning of the end for the need of the prophets who were gifted with direct information concerning the gospel. When the letter of Romans was first received, the Christians in Rome began immediately to make copies and distribute the letter to all the disciples throughout the region of Rome, as well as copies for those who were traveling from Rome to the rest of the world (See Rm 16).

The Roman letter was part of "the complete" about which Paul had written to the Christians in Achaia around the same time. We would assume, therefore, that when the letter of Romans arrived in Rome, and the Corinthian letters arrived in Achaia, then all three letters were copied and circulated, both in the regions throughout Rome and in the province of Achaia. The "complete" was thus in the process of production, and then in a little over a decade later the canon of New Testament documents would be complete. No letter as Romans would need to be written again directly to the disciples in Achaia, and no letters as 1 & 2 Corinthians needed to be written directly to the disciples in Italy. As soon as a letter was written and received, it was copied and distributed.

D. Galatians:

Galatians was the Holy Spirit's document to counter any digression away from the gospel of grace, which digression was taking place among some of the disciples in Galatia. This document, with the letter of Romans, were the initial documents of the Holy Spirit to begin the completion of the recorded information concerning the verbally preached gospel of grace. Ro-

mans was more positive in presenting the gospel of grace. Galatians was more negative in defining how one can be brought into the bondage of another gospel, that is, the bondage of legal performance in order to justify oneself before God through works of merit. Upon the reception of this document in Galatia, we can again correctly assume that the initial recipients of the document set about immediately to make copies for all the disciples throughout Galatia.

E. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus:

Paul made one important statement in Colossians 4:16 that is very significant in reference to the writing of all the New Testament documents: *“When this letter is read among you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the letter from Laodicea.”* As mentioned before, the interchange of correspondence that is stated in this passage must be understood as a system by which the Holy Spirit brought “the perfect,” or complete New Testament canon of instruction into existence among all the disciples in the decade leading up to A.D. 70.

When an inspired letter was received from a known Christ-sent apostle, or gifted prophet, the document that that person wrote was considered very precious by the initial recipients. In fact, it was considered inspired by the Holy Spirit (See 2 Pt 3:16).

One example of this was when the disciples in Colosse received the letter of Colossians, they certainly did not send the original autograph of the letter of Paul on to the disciples in Laodicea. It would not be logical to conclude this from the statement that Paul made in Colossians 4:16. What obviously did occur is that when the Colosse brethren read this statement of Paul in Colossians 4:16, they called on all the brethren in Colosse to come together with what papyrus paper they had, and their “pens.” We can only imagine that all of these volunteer scribes met on one candle-lite night and went to work making copies of the entire letter from Paul. One brother stood before all the scribes and began the reading of Paul’s letter word by word. The others began copying each word on some papyrus paper. Some even used old broken pieces of pottery, pieces of which still exist today with portions of Scripture written thereon. When the process of copying the

document of Colossians was completed, copies were sent by messengers to Laodicea, as well as to churches throughout Asia.

This process of making copies happened with all the documents of the New Testament when they were initially received. The original recipients kept the original autograph, but copies were made by the disciples and distributed without end. Today we have at least five thousand surviving fragments of these documents that date back to as early as the John Rylands Papyrus of A.D. 125. The accumulation of all these documents into one volume is what we refer to as the canon of the New Testament.

When the last document of the canon was written (Revelation), then the age of the "perfect" was realized. That which every disciple knew in part before the completion of the entire canon of the New Testament Scriptures, had by A.D. 70 been completed in full. We affirm, therefore, that all the New Testament documents were probably written before the consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70. The consummation of national Israel was God's last proof that His Son was the Messiah of Israel. The consummation was His last proof because His Son had prophesied in detail the events that would transpire throughout the year of A.D. 70. The early disciples, as well as ourselves, need no more proof that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

F. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, Jude, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1,2,3 John:

Beginning with the prison letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, the Holy Spirit in the background of these letters began to prepare the early disciples for the trauma of the end of national Israel in A.D. 70. The general epistles of the New Testament must all be read with the historical fulfillment of the prophecy of this event by Jesus that was recorded in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. The letters of the Holy Spirit that were written in the early part of the 60s, the decade before the "end" in A.D. 70, made references to the finality of national Israel. In the mind of the Jewish writers of these documents, the urgency of the writers was to prepare for the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus. The prophecy of the consummation was personally taught by the apostles and prophets when they went forth preaching

the gospel, but now in writing direct and indirect references were made in order to prepare the Jewish disciples for the signal of God’s rejection of national Israel.

The principle documents that reaffirm the faith of the disciples in Jesus as the Messiah, were the documents of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Hebrews. These five books must be understood in the historical background that the prophecy of the end of Israel was at hand. The recipients of these letters would need the reassurance of the message of these documents in order to take them through the ordeal of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This was particularly necessary in reference to the Jewish disciples.

When the tragedy for the Jews was only about three to five years in the future, the Holy Spirit intensified His message of comfort for the disciples. When the time was near, James made a statement that was typical of these writers who made specific statements in view of the imminent consummation of national Israel:

*Therefore, be patient, brethren, **until the coming of the Lord** [in judgment on national Israel]. **Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth. And he has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. **Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near**** (Js 5:7,8).*

In view of this prophecy concerning the “coming of the Lord,” and a similar statement by Jude (Jd 14,15), we must remember that neither James nor Jude lied to the initial recipients of their letters. The New Testament nowhere teaches the imminent return of Jesus, that is that Jesus was to come in His final coming in the days of the initial recipients of the documents. The Holy Spirit did not deceive the people. And since He did not deceive the people into believing that Jesus was coming in His final coming in their lifetime, then neither does the New Testament teach such today. What the New Testament does teach is that we must be prepared at all times for the final coming of the Lord. We must keep in mind that two thousand years of generations have already passed since these statements were made. And yet, the Lord has not yet come, though faithful believers in each generation expected the Lord to come in their particular generation.

In view of the fact that James wrote the above statement no more than five years before A.D. 70, then we would certainly be irresponsible interpreters if we stole this statement of comfort away from the immediate Jewish Christians to whom the warning was initially written. There were Jewish family members being recruited throughout the Roman Empire to take up swords against the Romans in order to free the Jews from the Roman occupation of Palestine. Sons were sneaking out the back windows of their parents’ houses at night in order to join the resistance in Jerusalem. In view of the content of the letter of Hebrews, some, because of the radicalization of Judaism at the time, were being intimidated to forsake Christ in order to go to war with Rome.

The last decade before A.D. 70 was a perilous time of social chaos for the Jews. And since many of the Christians during those years were Jews, the Holy Spirit set out through the inspiration of messages of encouragement to reaffirm the truth of the gospel they had all previously obeyed. His purpose in producing these final documents before A.D. 70 was expressed through the one who wrote the document of Hebrews: “*But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul*” (Hb 10:39).

G. Revelation:

We would also place the writing of the book of Revelation during the time shortly before the A.D. 70 destruction of national Israel. Though there is good historical evidence to link the message of the book with the destruction of Rome that was finalized in A.D. 476, there is also good evidence that the “beast” and “false prophet” of the book refer to national Israel and its religion of Judaism. But our presumption on the early date of writing before A.D. 70 is encouraged by how John introduced the series of visions in the book: “*The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave to Him to show to His bondservants, **things that must shortly come to pass***” (Rv 1:1). “Shortly come to pass” would not mean that they would come to pass three centuries later when Rome eventually fell. However, John could have meant that the beginning of the cycle of visions in reference to the fall of Rome would begin shortly. This is a plausible understanding of John’s reference to “shortly.”

Nevertheless, in order to emphasize the urgency of his recording the visions of Revelation, John restated the "shortly" statement at the end of the book: "*These sayings are faithful and truth. And the Lord God of the spirits of the prophets sent His angel to show to His bondservants **the things that must shortly take place***" (Rv 22:6). The word "bondservants" is plural, and thus we assume that John was speaking of others than just himself. This may be a reference to the other writers who were inspired to write documents as James, 1 & 2 Peter and Jude. All of these writers spoke of the consummation of national Israel. No one knew the time of the event. Jesus only gave the signs of wars and rumors of war that would lead up to the end.

Regardless of our speculations concerning the date of writing of all the New Testament documents, it would be safe to say that all were written before the A.D. 70 national tragedy of the consummation of Israel in the destruction of Jerusalem. Since this would have been the completion of that about which Paul wrote to the Corinthians a little over a decade before, then we could conclude that all the miraculous gifts had passed away by A.D. 70. The early disciples did not need that some apostle or prophet come by and teach them after all truth was recorded, especially all the truth of the gospel. This is surely what John meant when he wrote, "*I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, **but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth***" (1 Jn 2:21). We would assume that the early disciples would have, in their travels here and there, picked up copies of the New Testament documents that had all been written by this time in history.

There would possibly be one principle upon which this assertion would be valid. This would be the fact that the Holy Spirit wanted the early disciples, especially the Jewish disciples, to transition through the A.D. 70 event in order to come out on the other side fully convinced that the gospel was the truth. He wanted them to be reassured that the church was now the true Israel of God, and that the old national Israel was no longer considered favorable in His sight. On the other side of A.D. 70, the righteous would indeed "*shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (Mt 13:43). And they are still shining today throughout the world as the true believers who have put their faith in the incarnate Son of God.

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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**