

Scripturalism vs Judaism XVII Martyrdom of Stephen and the Calling of Paul

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In Acts 5 we saw that that was really quite an episode. I really enjoy going through and trying to mentally picture what it was to be released out of jail by an angel and the guards not even know it; the guards standing right there and can't even see anything. I don't know if the angel opened the door and they all walked through and went out. Then the next morning that they sent the guards down to get them out of the jail and they're already out there preaching.

This account where this happened was really something. They brought them before the whole Sanhedrin. Let's just review a little bit of Acts 5. Just picture the whole Sanhedrin all in their uniforms and imagine that they have their beards. They're the ones with the power, who are important, and tell everyone what to do, and here are these renegades from Galilee:

Acts 5:27: "And they brought them in *and* set *them* before the Sanhedrin. And the high priest asked them, saying, 'Did we not order you by a *direct* command not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, with *the* purpose of bringing this man's blood upon us'" (vs 27-28). *They already brought it upon them. Sometimes God does things just the opposite!*

We had quite a discussion earlier speaking of suffering. Let's look at how the apostles accepted what they went through here:

Verse 29: "But Peter and the apostles answered *and* said, '**We are obligated to obey God rather than men.**'"

That, brethren, is the key: ***under all circumstances obey God rather than men!*** Men will come along and try, in the name of God, to have you do something that God says don't do. That's what they're trying to do here. They're trying to come and say, 'We're telling you don't do this,' and the apostles are saying, 'Look, God told us to.' This also is a proof that Christ was God, because He's the One Who said to go, didn't He?

Verse 30: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus Whom you killed *by* hanging *Him* on a tree.... [they couldn't get away from it because that's what they did] ...Him has God exalted by His right hand *to be* a Prince and Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins to Israel. And **we are His witnesses of these things, as is also the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those who obey**

Him'" (vs 30-32). *Very key verse!* You cannot receive the Holy Spirit of God unless you obey Him; it's an impossibility! It doesn't matter how sincere you are in whatever 'religion' you may be.

By the way, there's a great controversy now over religion, because of the sermonette on *Why God Hates Religion*. Well, the truth is, religion is never used in connection with the true worship of God. Religion, when you find it in the Bible in the book of James, has to do with doing good works of physical things for people. Nowhere does it ever say *the Christian religion*. We are called Christians, as we'll see in Acts 11, ***but God's way is a way of life; it's not a 'religion'!*** When you take God's way and make a 'religion' out of it, God even hates that, because He didn't intend it to be. {note sermon series *Why God Hates Religion*} Yes, God *hates* 'religion.'

Someone wrote about his grandmother who was a good Catholic and her 'religion.' Well, that makes no difference, I'm sorry about that. She was sincere, that's true. She may have been dedicated, that's true. But she was 'religious' and that was not of God, and her time is not yet. Her time will be in the second resurrection.

God gives His Holy Spirit "**...to those who obey Him.**" Now, when they heard *this*, they were cut *to the heart...*" (vs 32-33). Why? ***Because they didn't have the Holy Spirit, they weren't obeying God!*** Doesn't that always happen when you're confronted with a bunch of carnal people and something spiritual occurs or happens? *Yes!*

"...and took counsel to put them to death.... [typical; if you can't get rid of the problem, kill them] ...But a certain man stood up a Pharisee in the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel by name, a teacher of the law *who was* honored by all the people, *and* commanded *that* the apostles be put out for a short while. And he said to them, 'Men, Israelites, give careful thought to what you are about to do concerning these men'" (vs 33-35). *I'm sure that God inspired that!*

Verse 36: "For before these days *there* rose up Theudas, proclaiming that he himself was somebody, to whom a number of men were joined, about four hundred..."

People are always a sucker, aren't they? Here's someone who rose up. I don't know what he said. He may have said that he was the Messiah. He may have said that he was going to lead people into

the Kingdom of God. Who knows!

Do you know that they have more false prophets and more false Elijahs and more false King Davids in Judaism than any other religion on earth? And the funniest thing that I ever read was that in Jerusalem they have this special psychological department for dimwitted self-appointed prophets that come over there and say they are Ezekiel, Jeremiah, David, and Elijah. He had this one man who said that he was Elijah, and he was dealing with him and so forth, and a couple of days later another man came along and said that he was Elijah. So, he thought he'd work it out really good. He invited them both to dinner and said, 'Elijah, I would like you to meet Elijah.' Here they have someone rise and there were 400^[transcriber's correction] men joined a cause. *People love a cause!*

"...but he was put to death, and all those who had been persuaded by him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this one, in the days of the registration, Judas the Galilean rose up and drew away many people after him; but he perished..." (vs 36-37).

May this be a lesson to all of those who want to be the so-called sovereignists and not pay any taxes and rebel against the government. What's going to happen to them? *Right here!* It's one thing to die for God; it is another thing to die for a cause that you claim is God's cause, but isn't God's cause.

Example: A lot of people today under the sovereignist movement say, 'We need to get back to the Constitution once delivered.' Well, the truth is, the Constitution once delivered is a carnal, worldly government of this world. Though it has many more principles from the Bible in it than any other Constitution on earth, does not mean that it is what is going to be in the Kingdom of God when Christ returns. All you're doing is returning back to the starting point to where we now have all the end-result corruption of it. Nothing has changed! That's important to understand.

"...and all who had been persuaded by him were scattered. And now I say to you, withdraw from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be from men, it will be overthrown..." (vs 37-38).

We also need to understand that whenever someone goes out to do what is 'a work of God': 'I'm going to do this work for God, therefore, I'm going to go out and start this and do this and do the other thing, because I'm doing this work for God.' Maybe God never sent you!

One of the first things I learned, after the

fiasco with Biblical is that I'm not going to run out and say this is the work of God and run down the road and say, 'Oh, by the way, God, You've got to bless it because this is Your work.' *NO!* No one's going to do a work for God because they are so good. God is going to do His work and He's going to take whomever He wants to do whatever He wants, and when that is evident, then it will be evident because of God's Spirit, following God's Word! So, if anyone is going to go out there and do a work for God, then if it's not of God, *it's going to come to nothing!*

Verse 39: "But if it be from God, you do not have the power to overthrow it..." *At least Gamaliel still had some sense here!*

In other words, what God is truly going to do, it cannot be overthrown. If it appears that it's being overthrown—which just viewing the Church of God in what it's going through—people could say that the work is being overthrown. *NO!* God is correcting it and changing it, because it wasn't what He wanted. That's what we need to view has been happening.

"...Take heed, lest you be found to be fighting even against God.' And they were persuaded by him; and they called in the apostles and, after beating them..." (vs 39-40).

They were probably beaten with rods. Remember the big furor about the United States citizen in Malaysia because he was caught with a little bit of marijuana, that they were going to punish him with 40 stripes of the rod and there was a great uproar and a great to-do, that's cruel and unusual punishment and so forth. It think he got off with seven lashes and they let him go. Just think, these angry men, having rods in the hands to beat you on the back. That's going to hurt and be very painful, and it's going to be bloody, a terrible mess.

"...commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus; and they released them. Then they departed from the presence of the Sanhedrin..." (vs 40-41). Notice their attitude:

- they weren't complaining
- they weren't whining
- they weren't accusing God

They were "...rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (v 41).

Today people don't want stress. They don't want pain. They want a deliverer from every little thing that comes along, which is setting up the whole one-world government and one-world thing. Right here we need to take a little bit different look at some of the things that we suffer through and ask

God to give us understanding as to why we're suffering through these things. If we truly suffer for the name of Christ, then we should rejoice in it.

That is a very different frame of mind to come to, and obviously that has to be a converted frame of mind. But when they right there could look back and understand that this was within the first year after the crucifixion; that was still vividly in their mind and they remembered what Christ had suffered through, and they understood what He had suffered. They were rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for His name. What did they do? *The priests had said they were to do just did the opposite!*

Verse 42: "And every day, in the temple and in the houses... [this thing was like a raging fire] ...they did not cease teaching and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Acts 6:1: "Now, in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..."

When we come to the Apostle James and the Apostle Paul, James said to Paul, 'Look, see the thousands that are zealous for the Law, that believe.' The only problem is, they were really not converted. But at this point they multiplied. Then there was a controversy. Then they selected the deacons and so forth.

Verse 9: "Then certain arose among those of the synagogue who were called Libertines, and of the Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia; and they were disputing with Stephen."

These were all those who followed Judaism out of Alexandria, Egypt. These were the ones who were of the Essenes, the Therapute and so forth.

Verse 10: "But they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. Then they suborned men... [in other words, they had liars] ...who said, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and *against* God.' And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes; and they came and seized him, and brought *him* into the Sanhedrin. Then they set up false witnesses, who said, 'This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this Holy place and the Law'" (vs 10-13).

The Law was now going to change from physical to spiritual; the application of it was going to be entirely different. ***Judaism was now going to be separated!*** He was also showing that ***God was going to destroy the temple!***

Verse 14: "For we heard him saying that this Jesus, the Nazarean, will destroy this place, and will

change the customs that Moses delivered to us."

As we're going to see, circumcision was one of the most cantankerous, hard-hearted, absolutely politically high-bound problems within the Church. If you think we've had problems with sacred names and 14th/15th Passover! The thing they had with circumcision was just unreal! Later we will see that there was in the Church what is called a 'Circumcision Party.' We'll see what happened to them. It was amazing!

Verse 15: "And all those who sat in the Sanhedrin, looking intently at him, saw his face as *the face of an angel.*"

I don't know what happened there. Does that mean that his face was glowing? You read about some of the faces of the angels, like in the book of Revelation, their faces shine like the sun. I don't think it was quite like that, but at least it was something that was most unusual. Here comes one of the last great witnesses to Judaism. I think this was the last chance for the official Judaism to repent.

Three miracles of Jesus proved to Judaism, beyond a shadow of doubt, that Jesus was the Messiah. That was:

1. raising the dead
Especially in the person of Lazarus who had been dead for 4 days; the specific reason for that, specific timing—just before His crucifixion—so that it would be known.
2. healing a leper—He healed many lepers
3. healing the man born blind

Even the Talmud says that the three miracles that the Messiah would do, that we would know that He was the Messiah. Granted, the Talmud was written later, but that was oral tradition going clear back into the days of Jesus. Now then, you compound all of that with the miracles and healings that Jesus did, and you really got a stack of evidence. It's really something!

So, they rejected this. They rejected the preaching. They rejected the apostles. They beat them. They tried to stop them from preaching in the name of Christ. They couldn't do it and now here comes the final witness with Stephen.

Acts 7:1: "And the high priest said, 'Now then, are these things so?'"

He gives a whole account beginning with Abraham. Isn't that interesting? I think we need to understand how far back we need to go with things with the Church, because it does begin with Abraham. If anyone says that the roots of Judeo Christianity are buried in Judaism, you know that's a

lie.

Gal. 3 is very important and profound. I explain this in *The Christian Passover* book, that God gave to Abraham the promise of physical seed and the promise of spiritual seed. This promise of spiritual seed we find here:

Galatians 3:26: “Because you are all sons of God **through faith in Christ Jesus...**” *Today it’s true!*

Paul said to them that ‘after you’ve begun in the spirit, are you going to be perfected in the flesh?’ by carnal means? A lot of things that come along have to do over carnal, little picky things that are nothing! Are you going to be perfected in that? *NO!* But, by “...**faith in Christ Jesus.**”

Verse 27: “For as many *of you* as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek... [not going to go along racial lines; not going to go along national lines] ...there is neither bond nor free... [doesn’t matter whether you’re rich or poor] ...there is neither male nor female...” (vs 27-28).

God is giving salvation equally to women as to men, whereas under the Old Covenant, men were circumcised.

“...for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And **if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise**” (vs 28-29).

That’s where it goes back to; it goes back to Abraham, and that’s what’s important to remember in all of these things.

This section is a direct prophecy ready to be fulfilled in the days of the apostles. This is what Stephen was preaching:

Isaiah 66:1 “Thus says the LORD, ‘The heaven *is* My throne, and the earth *is* My footstool. Where, then, *is* the house that you build for Me? And where *is* the place of My rest? For all these things My hand has made, and these things came to be,’ says the LORD. ‘But to this one I will look, to him who is of a poor and contrite spirit and who trembles at My Word’” (vs 1-2).

If you’re going to be ‘religious’ and set up your own way and reject God, then He says:

Verse 3: “He who kills an ox... [that’s what the priests were doing at the temple] ...*is as if* he killed a man... [that would fly in the face of the high priest] ...he who sacrifices a lamb *is as if* he broke a dog’s neck; he who offers a grain offering *is as if* he offered swine’s blood; he who burns incense *is as if* he blessed an idol...”

Who does that? Who did that? *The priests!* This is what Stephen is bringing out (Acts 7)

“...Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions...” (vs 3-4).

We’re seeing the enactment of the choosing of the delusions of the priest and so forth with this final witness of Stephen. That’s why I may read about some of the accounts from *Josephus* of the destruction of the temple in 70_{A.D.}; and it was awful! It’s gruesome! It’s terrible! Cannibalism and just killing one another, Jew after Jew and person after person!

“...and I will bring their fears upon them...” (v 4).

- they didn’t want to lose their temple
- they didn’t want to lose their position

“...because when I [Jesus] called, **no one answered**; when I spoke, **they did not hear**... [we’re going to see that when Stephen gave this they didn’t hear] ...**But they did evil before My eyes and chose that in which I did not delight**” (v 4).

Acts 7:44—*Stephen is talking about the temple*: “The tabernacle of the testimony was among our fathers in the wilderness, as He Who spoke to Moses had commanded, to make it according to the pattern which he had seen; which also our fathers, who received it by succession, brought in with Joshua, when they took possession of *the land from* the nations... [taking over the ‘promised land’] ...whom God drove out before *the face* our fathers, until the days of David; who found grace before God, and sought to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob; but Solomon built Him a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made by hands, as the prophet says... [tie in Isa. 66]) ...“The heaven *is* My throne, and the earth *is* a footstool for My feet. What house will you build for Me, says *the* Lord, or what *is the* place of My rest? Have not My hands made all these things?”” (vs 44-50).

Notice what he does. Here is Stephen talking to all of the important people in Judaism:

Verse 51: “O stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so also *do* you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, of Whom **you have become the betrayers and murderers**” (vs 51-52).

You talk about God inspiring a witness! This was prophesied that it would happen, and it’s going to happen again.

Matthew 10:16: “Behold, I am sending you forth as sheep in *the* midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils... [didn't we just see that's what they did; they turned Stephen in] ...and they will scourge you in their synagogues... [they beat the apostles right in front of the council] ...and you shall also be brought before governors and kings for My sake... [that's what the Sanhedrin was] ...for a witness to them and to the Gentiles. Now when they deliver you up, do not be anxious *about* how or what you should speak; for in that hour it shall be given to you what you shall speak. For it is not you who speak, **but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you**” (vs 16-20).

That's exactly what it was with Stephen (Acts 7). This was a mighty, profound and very, very moving thing that he was brought up before this council.

Even though Luke wrote this, could this be the memory of Paul who was Saul? *I would say, yes*, because he was undoubtedly there with him. Remember, he was climbing within Judaism. He was about #2 or 3 going right up the scale in Judaism.

Acts 7:53: “Who received the Law by the disposition of angels, but have not kept it.” *All the time professing to keep the Laws of God!*

Judaism does not; they keep *their own!* They keep *their tradition!* They hide it behind the word called *torah*. Torah, which means law, incorporates everything that they have read, and all oral tradition combined, and in the middle of it is the Bible so buried under it that they never get to it.

Verse 54: “And when they heard these things, they were cut to their hearts, and they gnashed their teeth at him.”

I thought when I first read that that actually bit him. I don't think so. I think they were sitting there gnashing upon their teeth as they were listening to him speak. It's what you would call today *body language*; the clinched jaw; they could hardly stand it.

Verse 55: “But he, being filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven *and* saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

That was quite a vision! Quite an inspiration just at the last minute before they were going to get him and kill him.

- Was God involved in this? *Yes!*
- Was Christ involved in this? *Yes!*

Christ was standing! Normally, He's sitting at the right hand of God. Here He was standing, looking down to see what was going to take place.

Verse 56: “And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right *hand* of God.’” *That did it!* That angered them so much! That was like throwing gasoline on a raging fire!

Verse 57: “Then they cried out with a loud voice, *and* stopped their ears... [No more! We don't want to hear this!] ...and rushed upon him with one accord.” *Just a mass going up and getting him!*

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It wasn't against Stephen, it was their hatred of God! Sitting there, supposedly carrying out the will of God and the office of God and they hated God and they turned their backs on God. Again, we can go back to that which we gave in the book of Malachi. ***God rejected them because they rejected Him!***

Verse 58: “And cast *him* out of the city *and* stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul.”

They were so involved in this, they took off their jackets and grabbed the stones—as many as they could—and were throwing and stoning. I imagine that he was just covered with a heap of stones. When you're hit with stones, that's very, very painful. He died a very excruciating death!

Verse 59: “And they stoned Stephen, who called upon *God*, saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ And he fell to his knees *and* cried with a loud voice... [you talk about a converted attitude] ...‘Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge.’.... [all this great grand and glorious witnessing that so-called evangelists want to do, let's see if this will happen when it comes to them] ...And after he had said this, he died” (vs 59-60).

The thing that's important with this is that ***God answered that prayer immediately!*** We don't realize it, but He did! Now maybe we can understand some of the motivation of Paul, because he was standing there:

- He saw it!
- He heard it!
- He participated in it!
- He agreed with it!
- He wanted more!

Acts 8:1: “Now Saul had consented to killing him. And that day a great persecution arose

against the Church that *was* in Jerusalem... [they wanted to get rid of all it] ...and all *the believers* were scattered throughout the countries of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But **Saul was ravaging the Church...** (vs 1-3).

To root up just like a wild boar goes out into the forest and just roots everything up with the big tusks that he has and just tears it apart.

“...going from house to house, entering in...” (v 3)—*this is nothing more than Nazism and Communism! Same thing, looking for them!*

“...and dragging out men and women, and delivering them up to prison. Therefore, those who were scattered passed through everywhere, preaching the Word of the Gospel” (vs 3-4).

Instead of running and hiding in a corner, they ran out and preached even louder. God was going to now begin to open things in such a way that we haven't understood.

Then we have the first encounter here with Simon Magus, which is one of the first counterfeits to come along. We have to understand that religion in Samaria was also based on Judaism, because the temple that was built by Sanballat was staffed with a renegade priests which left during the days of Nehemiah. They went up there and established their own temple made just like the one in Jerusalem. They had Levites for their priests and everything.

Later on many of the Gentiles embraced this Judaism-type religion that they had in Samaria and it developed into this with Simon Magus. Let's see what Jesus said about this to the woman at the well:

John 4:17: “The woman answered and said, ‘I do not have a husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You have spoken well in saying, “I do not have a husband”; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband. This you have spoken truly” (vs 17-18). How is He going to know? Does God, even in the flesh, know? *Yes!*

Verse 19: “The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet... [astute observation] ...Our fathers worshiped in this mountain... [that's where the temple was and that's where Simon Magus was, at the temple] ...but you say that the place where it is obligatory to worship is in Jerusalem” (vs 19-20).

Yes, go to the true temple of God in Jerusalem, and it was the true temple of God. Corrupt as it was, it was still the true temple of God until He removed it.

Verse 21: “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you shall neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father. You do not know what you worship....” (vs 21-22).

We're going to see what they were worshipping: demons, men. As a matter of fact, we could unequivocally say that as far as the counterfeit religion of this world is concerned, Simon Magus was truly the first pope. He was pope before he had anything to do with Christianity. Most people don't understand that.

“...We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews... [out of Judea] ...But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth; for the Father is indeed seeking those who worship Him in this manner. God *is* Spirit... [not a spirit] ...and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and in Truth” (vs 22-24).

That was the encounter that Jesus had with the woman at the well, and that gives us an idea now of who Simon Magus was.

Let's come back here to Acts 8 and see that this brand of Judaism—which by the way was also connected with Alexandria, Egypt—had a close connection between the temple in Samaria with the Jews there and the Jews in Alexandria. Both of them were renegade Jews run out of Judea.

Acts 8:5: “Then Philip went down to a city of Samaria and proclaimed Christ to them; and the multitudes listened intently with one accord to the things spoken by Philip when they heard and saw the signs that he did, for unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many of those who had them; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed” (vs 5-7).

God was doing a special miracle as a special witness to the city of Samaria. Why would He do that?

Verse 8: And there was great joy in that city. But *there was* a certain man named Simon... [an individual particular man] ...who had from earlier times been practicing sorcery...” (vs 8-9).

Witchcraft to bewitch the people. What do you do with sorcery and witchcraft? There are demons around, so he was dealing with demonism, probably very, very high demons.

“...in the city and astounding the nation of Samaria, proclaiming himself to be some great one.... [some great important religious figure] ...To him they had all given heed... [everyone obeyed

him because he had pope-like powers] ...from the least to the greatest... [even the highest level of government there in Samaria] ...saying, **‘This man is the great power of God’**” (vs 9-10). *This was quite a confrontation that came on here!*

Verse 11: “Now, they were giving heed to him because *he* had for a long time...”

Going back into the ministry of Christ. So, when Christ told the woman at the well, ‘You don’t know what you’re worshipping’—they were worshipping Simon Magus, demons, they had all the idols there in their temple and so forth. It was a true statement.

“...bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip, who was preaching the Gospel—the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ—they were baptized, both men and women” (vs 11-12).

Simon’s reaction was a little different than the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin said to get rid of the problem and kill them. Simon said, ‘I like this; let me have a part of this.’ He probably came feigning up to Philip and says, ‘I want to be baptized.’ And, of course, Philip wanting to do the will of God, baptized him.

Verse 13: “Then Simon himself also believed...” *This is the wrong kind of belief, but he was baptized!*

Have we seen that there have been people who have been baptized who really didn’t believe? *Yes! What happens? When they’re in the Church, years later, things happen that you wonder how on earth did that happen!* Because they had the wrong kind of belief to begin with.

“...and after being baptized, he steadfastly continued with Philip...” (v 13). ***Politically near, let’s get close to this; proximity of power is the way the infiltrators always do!***

We can see all of this here. You’d be surprised how much intrigue the Bible really has in it. These are some classic accounts.

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We can look back and we can see where there were high-powered people that came in, got close to the proximity of power, feigned that they believed, even baptized—maybe in a bathtub in Hong Kong. *Yes!*

“...and as he beheld *the* signs and great works of power *that were* being done, he was amazed. Now, when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God...” (vs 13-14).

This is a crisis! Someone came back and said, ‘You won’t believe what happened! Simon Magus was baptized!’ It would be like if someone today said, ‘Guess what, I went to Rome and baptized the pope.’

“...they sent Peter and John to them who, after coming down to *Samaria*, prayed for them, that they might receive *the* Holy Spirit... [all those who were baptized] ...for as yet it had not fallen upon any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid *their* hands on them, and they received *the* Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of the hands of the apostles, he offered them money” (vs 14-18).

This is where you have the account that is known as ‘Simony’—that is buying of a religious office.

Why couldn’t Philip lay hands on for the receipt of the Holy Spirit? I would say he could, with no question, but I think that God inspired not to do it, because this was a crisis of major proportion. This was real major threat to reaching out with the Gospel out beyond the confines of Judea. I think God inspired him not to do it. Also, they were probably made aware of it, too, with the message coming back.

Verse 19: “Saying, ‘Give this authority to me also...” *He wanted power/authority; he wanted to buy a religious office!*

Again, God hates religion! Why? *You’ve got it right here!* It all degenerates into this hierarchical type of thing that oppresses people.

“...so that on whomever I lay hands, he may receive *the* Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘May your money be destroyed with you because you thought that the gift of God might be purchased with money’” (vs 19-20). ***Very important! The gift of God comes with repentance!***

What did Peter say on the Day of Pentecost? *Repent and be baptized and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!* That’s how it comes. Not with might! Not with money! Not because of who you are or what you are or what you’ve done!

Verse 21: “‘You have neither part nor lot in this matter...” That means *in the apostleship*. He was trying to buy an apostleship! They drew lots to chose Mathis to replace the fallen Judas.

Acts 1:22: “Beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up from us, one of these shall become a witness with us of His resurrection.’ Then they put forth two... [select out someone who had been with them all along]

...Joseph, called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus; and Matthias. And they prayed, saying, 'You, Lord, *the* Knower of the hearts of all, show which one of these two You have personally chosen to receive the part... [Greek: 'meros'] ...of this ministry and apostleship... [that's what he's talking about here *you have no part in this matter*] ...from which Judas *in* transgressing fell, to go to his own place.' Then they cast their lots; and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (vs 22-26).

Acts 8:21: "You have neither part nor lot... [what Simon trying to do is set himself up to be an apostle; buy an apostleship] ...in this matter, for **your heart is not right before God.**"

Again, it doesn't matter who you are, what you are, how rich you are, how poor you are, how old you are, how young you are, how strong you are, how weak you are, male or female, Jew or Greek, free or bond, however you want to put it—IF your heart is not right with God then it really doesn't count. That's why it's so important.

Verse 22: "Repent, therefore, of this your wickedness, and beseech God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." *It's so bad he's saying IF it's possible to be forgiven!*

Verse 23: "For I perceive *that* you are in the gall of bitterness and *the* bondage of unrighteousness."

We could do a whole sermon on that. That means bound up in idolatry and bound up in hatefulness to God. Here he is running this demon ministry over here, which is 'gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.' That's quite a description.

Verse 24: "But Simon answered *and* said, 'You beseech the Lord on my behalf... [no, Simon, you've got to do it yourself] ...so that **none of those things which you have spoken may come upon me.**'"

So, he probably said more than just the words here. We're just getting a summary. I imagine Peter just gave him everything that there was.

Verse 25: "So then, after they had earnestly testified and preached the Word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem; *and* they preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans *as they went.*" *And then an angel led Philip to the Eunuch and so forth!*

This is all important to understand how God's way is Scripturalism and that Judaism is separate from the Word of God. *Judaism is a pagan religion cloaked in the guise of being the Word of God!* It is not! A lot of people have accused me of

being an anti-Semite. I am not anti-Semitic. I am as Christ is, anti-Judaism! As well as Christ is anti-Catholicism, as well as 98% of Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism and any other religion of the world, because Christ said that 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.'

The reason that the Jews spew out anti-Semitism against anyone who would say anything against them is because they feel they are above the reproach. They feel that anything they do or say is lawful and legal because they are the chosen people. If you don't believe that then what you have to do is read parts of the Talmud and you'll find out. It will be quite an education for you.

That's why Christianity did not come out of Judaism! It was entirely separate and God had to sever it. Now then, God does something marvelous here, beginning with Acts 9, with Saul. Here is the coup de gras against Judaism. Here is there highest Gestapo officer out doing his nastiest work! Saul! Saul means *destroyer!*

Acts 9:1: "Now Saul, still breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, asking him *for* letters *to take* to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who were of that way, he might bring *them* bound, both men and women, to Jerusalem" (vs 1-2).

They were determined to get rid of this—right? Here is the most zealous one! Here is one here who out really doing Satan's work. Can God call someone just like that? *Yes!* Right in the midst of the most heinous Satanic activity possible: killing those in the Church! God doesn't think like we do. We wouldn't think of calling someone like that. But God did, and for a purpose!

Let's understand something about Saul. There are two Sauls in the Bible that are noteworthy. One is King Saul from the tribe of Benjamin who was a failure and rebelled against God. He was replaced with King David, a man after God's heart.

The other Saul is the Saul right here of Acts 9 who was the enemy of God, hater and destroyer of the faith, whom God called and healed the breach caused by Saul the Benjaminite who was the king. Saul here also was of the tribe of Benjamin. Very profound when you see both sides of that coin.

Breach: In other words, Saul rebelling against God, now God is calling Saul who was rebelling against God and converting him and changing him to now working for God. That's what I mean. Instead of going against God, now he's going for God. One was redeemed, the other was not.

The reason I say this is because King Saul when he first started out knew God! Then he left God and rebelled (1-Sam. 15)—where he was told to go and he didn't do the will of God. He said that 'to not obey is the sin of witchcraft and rebellion.'

Here is someone who started out for God and sinned and rebelled and was rejected. Now with Saul, the Benjaminite who becomes the Apostle Paul, starts out as an enemy of God not knowing God—not really to begin with—then is called to *know* God. That's what I mean.

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Someone brought up that Rachel, the mother of Benjamin, died when he was born. Today, just in the world, they could have done a partial-birth abortion and saved her life and we would not have the Apostle Paul. It's amazing!

Acts 9:3: "But it came to pass while he was journeying, as he drew near to Damascus, that suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him. And after falling to the ground..." (vs 3-4). *That's startling!* Apparently he was going along on his horse or donkey and fell to the earth.

"...he heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting. *It is hard for you to kick against the pricks*'" (vs 4-5).

In other words, just like these long thorns that they have on some of the bushes in the Middle East and they become very sharp. That's what he's talking about. If you kick against those, you're through! He's saying to Saul, 'Look, you're not going to succeed in this. Do it all you want, but you're not going to succeed; now I've called you.' Notice his change; notice how quickly he changed; this is amazing:

Verse 6: "Then, trembling and astonished, he said, 'Lord, what will You have me to do?'" *Instead of saying, 'Well, I've been on an important mission here to kill all of Your followers. NO!*

"...And the Lord *said* to him, 'Get up and go into the city, and you shall be told what you must do.' Now the men who were traveling with him stood speechless; *for* they indeed heard the voice, but they saw no one" (vs 6-7).

They didn't even see the light. Only Saul saw the light. Apparently they just saw him fall off his horse.

Verse 8: "Then Saul arose from the ground; but when he opened his eyes, he saw no one. And they led him by the hand and brought *him* to

Damascus."

That's going to give him a lot to think about. All of a sudden you have an encounter with Christ Himself. I don't know if Christ came down and knocked him off the horse or whatever it may be; or an angel did it and Christ spoke to him. But now he's blind; he's being led by the hand, whereas, before he was up and about and strong and threatening all of this sort of thing.

Verse 9: "But *for* three days he was not *able* to see, and he did not eat or drink." *He was fasting, seeking the will of God!* You can be guaranteed that's what he was doing here.

Verse 10: "Now there was in Damascus a certain disciple named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Behold, *I am here*, Lord.' And the Lord *said* to him, 'Arise *and* go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in *the* house of Judas for *one* named Saul from Tarsus; for behold, he is praying" (vs 10-11). *That's what he was doing, I imagine for most of the three days and three nights!*

Verse 12: "...and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming and putting *his* hands on him, so that he may receive sight."

God was communicating with Saul immediately. Answering the prayers immediately! Giving him answers!

Verse 13: "Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many *people* about this man, how many evil things he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And *even* in this place he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go...'" (vs 13-15).

Just go and do what I say; sometimes we don't need to know the reason why, as long as we know it's from God.

"...for this *man* is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before *the* Gentiles... [*Jesus Christ* written in Greek] ...and kings, and *the* children of Israel; for I will show him what great things he must suffer for My name.' Then Ananias went away and came into the house; and after laying *his* hands on him, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me, *even* Jesus, Who appeared to you on the road in which you came, so that you might receive sight and be filled with *the* Holy Spirit'" (vs 15-17).

Someone asked me if this was when Paul was ordained. I suppose that he had hands laid on him when he was chosen, so I would say that at that time, yes.

Verse 18: “And it was as *if* scales immediately fell from his eyes, and he instantly received sight; and he arose *and* was baptized. And after eating food, he was strengthened. Then Saul was with the disciples in Damascus *for* a number of days. And in the synagogues he immediately began to proclaim Christ, that He is the Son of God” (vs 18-20).

This was an astounding thing. Here is Heimlich Himmler of Judaism of that time coming with arrest warrants, with bonds and chains, with ropes to take them all off and bring them down to be killed or executed or thrown in prison, and now he’s standing up there saying that Jesus is the Christ. You talk about a total turnaround! Boy! That is something! That’s why the Apostle Paul, I think, was so profound in what he wrote. I imagine that the thing that really solidified in his mind was that three days of fasting and prayer when he was seeking the will of God and trying to know what was happening to his life.

Verse 21: “And all who heard *him* were amazed...” *I guess so!* I mean, if you heard that Saul was at the synagogue, you might not want to even go. You might figure that some of his lieutenants are there with arrest warrants to get you.

“...and said, ‘Is not this the man who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and who came here for this *purpose*, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?’ But Saul increased *even* more in power, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, **proving** that this is the Christ” (vs 21-22).

He knew the Word of God! He could turn here and there in the Scriptures and prove it. He had to be some kind of real preacher to do that. We’re going see that almost every synagogue that he went into there was a riot. I mean, he had a tumultuous life. He had a life filled with pain, sorrow and agony, as well as joy, love, hope and all of this. He had quite a life and resulted in 14 epistles in the New Testament, and actually was the one whom God used to formulate the Truth of the Gospel in doctrinal form. No one else did that, just the Apostle Paul.

In the book of Galatians Paul recounts this. Notice how he held to this without wavering. That’s what’s so important, because we are going to learn that the Apostle Peter was temporarily a victim of Judaism. He was the apostle to the circumcision and the circumcision political party got to him.

Galatians 1:6: “I am astonished that you are so quickly being turned away from Him Who called you into *the* grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which *in reality* is not another *gospel*...” (vs 6-7).

There is one and only one Gospel—not any other gospel. Some can call it the gospel, but it’s really not. If you have a counterfeit \$100 bill, do you have \$100? *No!* You’ve got a counterfeit \$100 bill. If you have a counterfeit gospel, do you have the Gospel? *No! There’s only one!*

“...but there are some who are troubling you and are desiring to pervert the Gospel of Christ” (v 7).

Change it a little bit. Notice how fervently, just as fervently as he was against the Church, he was for God.

Verse 8: “But if we, or even an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel to you *that* is contrary to what we have preached, LET HIM BE ACCURSED!”

The reason I’m going through this is because it’s very important to understand, the separation between Scripturalism vs Judaism, or the Gospel vs Judaism, because he defines it here in the next few verses.

Verse 9: “As we have said before, I also now say again. If anyone is preaching a gospel contrary to what you have received, LET HIM BE ACCURSED! Now then, am I striving to please men, or God? Or am I motivated to please men?...” (vs 9-10).

That’s where the Church always gets in trouble! Always, when you seek to please men, especially those in the world!

- Didn’t it happen?
- What did they want to do?
we had the two fine colleges and
- What happened? *We wanted to be accredited!*

So, we run out to the world and say, ‘Oh, we want to be accredited.’ *That’s fine! We have standards of accreditation. And the big hang-up was the ‘trinity’!* They told them right at the get-go, ***if you believe in the trinity!*** ‘We will not accredit you as is.’ What happened? *They:*

- changed God
- changed belief in God
- changed all of the other doctrines

Now the colleges and the church is no more!

Can there be any greater punishment? Granted, there were some things that were not good that came out of the colleges, that is true. But there were many things that were very good that came out from it.

This was back in the 70s when they first

approached and Herbert Armstrong said, *'NO way! We're not going for the trinity. We don't need to be accredited.'* He didn't say 'trinity' but he said *'If they won't take us as we are, we don't need the world.'* Well, if they would have stuck by that it would have been a different story! What happened? *They waited until he died!* What happened? *Two years after they started, they started adopting the trinity!* How did they start it? *I remember very clearly, I heard the tape by Mike Snider, a radio program, he was asked: How do you view the Godhead? Well, we have the Father and the Son, and we believe that the Holy Spirit is Divine!* As soon as I heard that, I said that they're going for the trinity. *First step!* I came back and told someone that they're going for the trinity. *No! Yes, they are! No! Yes, they are! No! Did they? Yes!* That's why the Apostle Paul was so fervent in this.

"...For if I am yet pleasing men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (v 10). *Important lesson!*

All ministers and teachers, important lesson! You have to please God! Do the things that are pleasing in His sight, by yielding to Him! Not that you're going to do and go out do something that is so great and mighty that now God is pleased with you, because you've gone above and beyond. You can't do anything greater for God than what Christ has already done. If you love Him, believe Him and follow in faith then you're going to be pleasing to God.

Verse 11: "But I certify to you, brethren, that the Gospel that was preached by me is not according to man; because neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught *it by man*; rather, *it was by the revelation of Jesus Christ*. For you heard of my **former conduct when I was in Judaism**, how I was excessively persecuting the Church of God and was destroying it" (vs 11-13)—*wasted it and profited it*; meaning he was climbing the ladder of the hierarchy of Judaism.

Verse 14: "And I was advancing in Judaism *far* beyond many *of my* contemporaries in my *own* nation, being more abundantly zealous for the traditions of my fathers." *That's why it's so important that we do not follow Judaism. He made it clear right here!*

Verse 15: "But when it pleased God, Who selected me from my mother's womb, and called *me* by His grace, to reveal His own Son in me, in order that I might preach Him as the Gospel among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus" (vs 15-17).

When he went away, he had to be let down in a basket out of the city wall so he could escape by night. Immediately, his life was fraught with all kinds of problems. He was in Arabia and apparently for three years.

What did Christ teach him? *I do not know!* But he was taught by revelation. I do not know if Christ manifested Himself in a way that Paul could see Him, or what it may be. But he was taught by revelation.

Verse 18: "Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter, and I remained with him fifteen days." *I imagine that was a shock to Peter!* 'Hello, I'm Saul!' *Where have you been?* 'Well, it's a long story, I need 15 days to tell you.'

Verse 16: "But I did not see *any* of the other apostles, except James the brother of the Lord. (Now the things that I am writing to you, behold, before God, I am not lying). Then I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. But I was unknown by face to the Churches in Judea which *are* in Christ; they only heard, 'The one who once persecuted us is now preaching the Gospel—the faith which he once destroyed.' And they glorified God in me" (vs 18-24).

There's the calling of the Apostle Paul. He being a formerly high-ranking official in Judaism now became the one to do the final separation between Scripturalism and Judaism.

Scriptures from *The Holy Bible in Its Original Order, A Faithful Version*

Scriptural References:

- 1) Acts 5:27-42
- 2) Acts 6:1, 9-15
- 3) Acts 7:1
- 4) Galatians 3:26-29
- 5) Isaiah 66:1-4
- 6) Acts 7:44-52
- 7) Matthew 10:16-20
- 8) Acts 7:53-60
- 9) Acts 8:1-4
- 10) John 4:17-24
- 11) Acts 8:5-21
- 12) Acts 1:22-26
- 13) Acts 8:21-25
- 14) Acts 9:1-22
- 15) Galatians 1:6-24

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Acts 11
- 1-Samuel 15

Also referenced:

Sermon Series: *Why God Hates Religion*

Books:

- *The Christian Passover* by Fred R. Coulter
- *Josephus*

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