



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Record of the Beginning of Jesus' Reign

Chapter Nine

INTRODUCTION

NOTE: Avoid being led off track by the traditional church approach to Scripture. Churches promote the mystical and the mysterious. They not only miss the truth, they invent stories which hide the truth.

This book is not mysterious. It shows a government man (Saul) doing government work (oppressing people).

Most men like Saul remain government men for life. Saul didn't. He repented. Jesus turned him around, caused him to abandon a lucrative government career, and set him on a new course.

THIS CHAPTER takes us through the exciting account of Saul's encounter with the living Jesus, and Saul's subsequent conversion. We will reveal several points therein that usually go unnoticed. A miracle occurred for Saul (i.e., Paul), personally, and some lessons are there for all of us.

We will witness the chemistry that occurred between the supernatural (Jesus) and the natural (Paul). The resulting reaction infused energy into Paul, broadened his horizons, enlarged his vision and changed his life along with the course of history. You will see some of those things in this account. However, this insight is lost to those who look only for *religion* in their Bibles.

There are also those who reject Paul and label him a false apostle. Their rejection is generally based upon claims that Paul: a. was a Pharisee, b. persecuted the Christians, c. taught that the laws of God were done away, and d. claimed that salvation was taken from Israel and given to non-Israelites (whom churchgoers call "gentiles"). However, as we will see, Paul repented of his Pharisaism and his persecution of Christians – as one would expect – at the time of his conversion. Furthermore, Paul did NOT teach against the laws of God. Neither did he EVER give the slightest suggestion that salvation was taken from Israel. Indeed, Paul devoted much time to showing how Jesus came to save Israel (as written in the law and the prophets) and that Jesus is King, and we must obey the laws of His Father.

Jesus was glorified through Saul's miraculous transformation. "Saul," the government agent and persecutor of Christians, was changed into "Paul," the most eloquent and prolific writer of the apostles. Herein we also learn that righteousness in man is due to God's grace and intervention. It seems that man, even when well-intentioned, tends to go off course unless he looks to God for help in navigating his life.

We will also learn that Paul was not instantly transformed into an apostle. Like the original 12 apostles, he had to spend time with Jesus – in person – before he was ready for his work. This little-known detail is verified by Scripture.

In the resurrection of Dorcas we will see a display of the power and mercy of God. Even though Dorcas was not raised immortal, her resuscitation from death was a miracle which accented the early days of Christ's reign.

Also, when Peter shared his faith with the bed-ridden man who then stood up and walked, we see how "mountains can be moved," and Christians can have a strong faith in Yahweh, and His Son, Jesus.

ACTS 9:1 AMAZING GRACE

And Saul, yet breathing threats and murders toward the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,

SAUL, before he became an apostle (before he was known as “Paul”), persecuted and murdered the disciples of Jesus! Now, think about this when you read later about the apostle Paul’s good works and inspired writings. Think about the kind of man Saul was before Jesus entered his life. He had willingly served the murderous Beast System that was bent upon destroying Christ’s Kingdom.

With Paul’s example in mind, think about man’s quest for justification. He wrestles with the question of whether or not he is qualified to be forgiven and become a child of God. Perhaps he has done something bad in his life – something “unforgivable” – as had Paul. He can’t face Jesus. He wonders how he could ever be justified and worthy of acceptance by Christ.

But, think about it. What would it have been like to stand in Paul’s shoes – having murdered and persecuted the followers of Christ? How would you have felt knowing you had been fighting against God? You may think your

own circumstance is bad, but you will see yourself in a different light once you compare your past sins with Paul’s past sins. The trouble with man is that he tends to think of his own limitations instead of God’s unlimitations.

Paul had been a sinner of sinners. He described himself thus: “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am foremost*” (1 Timothy 1:15).

PONDER THIS: Along with wondering if you are good enough to become a Christian, you may also struggle with the concept that you don’t have a choice in the matter of being called. Saul certainly wasn’t seeking Jesus when he was called while on the road to Damascus.

ACTS 9:2-9 SAUL’S UNSOLICITED VISITOR

And requested letters from him (the high priest) to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he (Saul) might find any men or women of The Way, he could arrest them and take them to Jerusalem.

But it occurred that as he journeyed, and came near to Damascus, suddenly there flashed around him light from the heaven:

And having fallen to the earth, he heard a voice calling to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” (And the voice said), “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting:

“Now arise and go into the city, and it will be told to you what you must do.”

And the men traveling with him stood speechless, hearing a sound but seeing no one.

And Saul arose from the earth; but when his eyes were opened he could see nothing: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

And he was three days not seeing, and he neither ate nor drank.

PAUL, a government agent of oppression, asked for letters (papers) from the high priest authorizing him to arrest and extradite to Jerusalem the people of “The Way” (the way of Christ’s Kingdom). He obtained the authorization and proceeded with his band of church/state thugs threatening and oppressing those of The Way ... who were enemies of the government. The reason they were enemies is because they rejected church/state rule, and instead recognized the Reign of Christ.

In lesson eight we read about Saul persecuting the ecclesias (Christian communities – not churches) around Jerusalem. Now, we see him embarking on a campaign of terror in Damascus, with his conscienceless team of assassins (like the CIA), to wreak havoc on Christ’s disciples for purposes of “national security.”

But, as his “Homeland Security” team was enroute to Damascus, an amazing thing happened to Saul. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a blinding light from heaven shined all around him and his cohorts. The voice of Jesus then spoke directly to Saul. It unnerved Saul and his team of thugs.

Saul intended to break into more homes, terrorize more families, arrest and/or kill more Christians, and continue to persecute the Way of Christ. But, before he reached Damascus he ran into a major obstacle – Jesus. It was sufficient to get his attention to say the least. Suddenly, Jesus – whom Saul had thought was dead – appeared to him in a light so bright that it blinded him and knock him to the ground. Jesus asked Saul, “*Why are you persecuting me?*”

From the way these and subsequent verses read, we begin to get the feeling that Saul was, apparently, a man of misguided honor. He diligently did his work of oppressing and persecuting those who opposed the church/state system ... and he did it to the best of his ability. Although completely wrong in his actions, he sincerely believed that it was his duty to do the government’s bidding. But suddenly, when

confronted by the presence of the risen Jesus, Saul realized he and the government were wrong. Being a man of action and conviction, he instantly made a 180-degree change in his thinking ... right there on the road to Damascus.

The shock and surprise of having Jesus, in whom he didn’t even believe, suddenly appear and speak directly to him, was overwhelming!

An interesting point of fact for Bible students is that the best manuscripts do not have the addition at the end of verse five as in the KJV, “*it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*” Neither do they have the added beginning of verse six as in the KJV, “*... and he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him ...*”. All of that is, apparently, not in the original manuscripts. It was a “scribal addition” ... a church embellishment.

So Saul was not the only one that heard something. The men with him apparently heard something, but they were speechless. (Please read pages 4 & 5 for the three accounts of Saul’s experience).

Afterwards, Saul “saw nothing.” He was blinded. Apparently Saul had looked at this light and it had actually blinded him.

After this traumatic experience on the road to Damascus, Saul didn’t eat or drink for three days! Of course, that is understandable when you think about what just happened to him. He had just lost the use of his eyes. On top of that, he now had to accept the fact that he had been working for the Beast, hurting innocent people. He had been helping the wicked. His intentions may have been honest, but he had done wrong. Now he had to accept the guilty verdict. No wonder he couldn’t eat. No wonder he didn’t feel well.

As Saul fell to the ground, bathed in the blinding light of Jesus, he was faced with the terrifying prospect of reality being totally different than he had thought. How could he have been so totally wrong? Jesus did, indeed, exist! Jesus was risen from the dead and was truly King! Saul had been

persecuting Him and His people. Paul’s world, as he knew it, fell apart in a matter of seconds. His whole mental process was turned on its head when he came in contact with Jesus.

What did he do? He immediately repented. His world was different from that point on. He was baptized and began learning the gospel of the kingdom ... being taught by Christ, Himself. Saul, the deceived and sinful government man, became the Apostle Paul – the best known of the apostles.

QUESTION: You have shown that during the time covered in the book of Acts man’s governments were out to round up and eliminate Christians so as to squelch Christ’s Reign. In light of present government tactics against Christians, isn’t it possible and logical that current government would try to infiltrate Christian ecclesias by having one of their agents (a Saul) stage a phony conversion to try and convince Christians he was really on their side? Would he not then be in an ideal position to provoke and trap Christians and disseminate misinformation and false doctrines among The Way?

THE THREE ACCOUNTS OF SAUL'S ORDEAL on the road to Damascus

There are some who hold to the theory that Paul never repented, and remained a bad guy – a false apostle – who subverted the true record of the New Testament. Anti-Paul arguments are based, in part, upon assumed contradictions among the three accounts in Acts which tell of his encounter on the road to Damascus.

The three scripture passages in question are:

Acts 9:7. And the men traveling with him stood speechless, hearing a sound but seeing no one.

Acts 22:9. And the ones who were with me observed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spoke to me.

Acts 26:13,14. At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round about me and them which traveled with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew tongue, and saying...

The Paul bashers claim there are contradictions in these verses. They claim that 9:7 says the men heard but did not see. Then, 22:9 says they saw but did not hear. And, in 26:13,14, Paul's companions all fell to the earth ... while in the former verses only Paul fell to the earth.

Paul bashers draw the hasty conclusion that these assumed contradictions prove that Paul was a liar and a fraud, and that whenever he related the story of his conversion he told it differently and with contradictions each time.

However, their arguments are not accurate. Paul's companions were not all blind in 9:7, or all deaf in 22:9, as their argument would lead you to believe. The Anti-Paul people offer flawed evidence to

support their prejudices. These three passages show no contradiction.

The alleged contradictions supposedly have to do with the men – what they saw, what they heard, and what they did. Let's analyze each one in turn.

WHAT THEY SAW

Acts 9:7 says the men with Paul saw "no one," but does not say whether they saw a light. 22:9 does say they saw a light but says nothing about whether they saw someone. Acts 26:13-14 says nothing with regard to what they did or didn't see. There are no contradictions here. The men saw "no one" ... but did see "the light."

WHAT THEY HEARD

Acts 9:7 says the men with Paul heard something. The KJV renders it "a voice," but the Greek indicates it was only "a sound." Acts 22:9 says they did not hear the voice of him (Jesus) that spoke with Paul. The Greek word [*phon-ay*] means "sound," and takes its inference (in terms of what kind of sound) from the sentence in which it is used. The "sound" can be anything including a voice. If it is a voice, then the sentence will infer it. In Acts 22:9, Paul obviously heard a voice for speech is inferred. In Acts 9:7, there is no inference at all – thus, leaving it just "a sound."

It is very probable that Paul's companions heard indistinguishable voice sounds that they did not understand.

Furthermore, Jesus states that people often hear and yet hear not:

13. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and HEARING THEY HEAR NOT, NEITHER DO THEY UNDERSTAND.

Matthew 13:13

In the Old Testament, this account was recorded at Mt. Sinai:

9. And Yahweh said to Moses, Lo, I come to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you for ever.

Exodus 19:9

16. And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.

Exodus 19:16

Even though the people heard the voice of Yahweh, it sounded like thunder and trumpets. Moses was chosen to understand Yahweh's voice while the rest of the Israelites were not ... just as Paul was chosen to understand Jesus' voice while his companions only heard a sound.

HOW THEY REACTED

Acts 9:7 says they stood speechless, and Acts 26:13,14 says they fell to the ground. Even though 9:7 says they stood, it does not say that they never fell to the earth. In other words, they might have stood speechless one moment and fallen to the earth another. Neither verse 9:7 nor 22:9 address the question of whether or not they fell to the earth. Thus, no contradiction is here.

Furthermore, the phrase "stood speechless" is an expression which focuses upon speechlessness – not upon physical position. For example, the expression "sit and do nothing" does not necessarily indicate that a person physically "sits" the whole time. The point is that he is "doing nothing." The word "sit" is added only for emphasis, indicating the spirit rather than the literal position. Likewise, to "stand speechless" indicates speechlessness, not necessarily a literal standing position.

No honest researcher would find cause in this point to suspect Paul of inconsistency.

LANGUAGE

We must also take into account the form of speech at the time these three accounts were recorded. The common language and idioms did not use the legalistic exactness in style and grammar to which

we are accustomed today, with exact meaning in every word and phrase ... and its placement perfect so that detractors can discover no loopholes or passages that can possibly be twisted by an opposing lawyer.

After all, if we applied this type of reasoning to the gospels, we could dredge up evidence that Jesus, Himself, is a fraud and a liar. For example, the three accounts of the Gadarene demoniac all differ in their details. One account says there were two madmen and another says there was one. This account contains other points, also, that could be called contradictions ... just as gainsayers can find "contradictions" in the three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts. It is only logical, following their reasoning, that if they conclude that Paul was a liar, then they must conclude that Jesus was a liar, also.

Even as articulate as 20th-century English is, we still have trouble telling a story exactly the same every time we relate it ... unless we write it down and read it from a script, or memorize it word for word. This human trait does not make a person an enemy and a fraud.

LUKE OR PAUL? THE BIBLE OR NOTHING?

Another point overlooked is that Luke is believed to have written the book of Acts. To claim contradictions in Acts, one might just as well accuse Luke rather than Paul. How can detractors decide who to blame? Why pick on Paul instead of Luke?

If you logically extend this line of reasoning, then you should also start to suspect the book of Luke, just as you should start to suspect Jesus Christ, Paul and the book of Acts. As you can see, this defamation of the Apostle Paul indicates a spirit of rejection which will infect one's view of the whole Bible. Eventually, one can find excuses to throw out the entire Bible and faith in God as well!

When reading and interpreting the ancient records in the Bible, we must read them as such. They are ANCIENT RECORDS, written in the idioms and style of ancient cultures and ancient tongues. They must be read and appreciated for what they are. They cannot be read and interpreted as if they had been written in modern English and with modern idioms. To criticize and/or try to disprove Scripture based upon this amounts to intellectual dishonesty.

ACTS 9:10-18 PAUL: APOSTLE TO THE NATIONS OF ISRAEL

And there was a certain disciple in Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he (Ananias) said, "See, it is I, Lord."

And the Lord said to him, "Stand up, and go to the street named Eutheyman, to the house of Judas, and seek Saul of Tarsus: for, behold, he is praying,

"For he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hands on him, so that he might see again."

But, Ananias answered, "Lord, I heard by many about this man, how much evil he did to your saints in Jerusalem:"

"And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon your name."

But the Lord said to him, "Be on your way: for this man is my chosen vessel, to bear my name before nations and kings and the sons of Israel:"

"For I will show him all the things it is necessary for him to suffer because of my name."

And Ananias went, and he entered into the house, and having placed his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, that appeared to you on the way in which you came, has sent me so that you might see again, and you might be filled of holy spirit."

And immediately it was as if scales fell from his eyes: and he saw again, and stood up, and was baptized.

VERSES 10-14 make it clear that Ananias knew of Saul's reputation as an enemy. So, you can imagine Ananias' surprise when Jesus told him to do a seemingly unthinkable thing: go and help the enemy! Ananias probably wondered if he was hearing right. But, he did as the Lord commanded.

Also, please note, that Jesus did not say that Saul was being sent to the heathen. Rather, He plainly said that Saul was to bear His name before "nations, kings and the sons of Israel." God's word was to be taken first to Israel expressly ... and in the process it would be heard by nations and kings too.

Verse 15 is interesting. You would do well to remember this one when churchgoers want to argue with you about whether Paul was sent to Gentiles or Israelites (as if the terms were mutually exclusive). The word "Gentiles," as used in the KJV, does not correctly translate the Greek word in this case. The Greek word is *ethnōn*, from which we get the word

"ethnic, and which means literally "nations." "Nations" and "Israelites" aren't mutually exclusive at all. In fact, they often refer to the same people. History students are aware that the Israelites had been dispersed abroad, and they formed nations. Paul, therefore, was sent to the nations of Israel located in Asia Minor, Europe, and the isles of England, Ireland, Scotland, etc.

Jesus told Ananias to go to Saul and tell him that he would receive his sight and be filled with holy spirit (i.e., he would receive inspiration). Not only was Saul's physical sight returned to him, but he also received a SPIRITUAL sight he had never experienced before. This is corroborated by the second point – the fact that he received "holy spirit."

This was not the so-called "Holy Ghost" of church myth. Church people have been indoctrinated to believe in a phantom: an invisible supernatural being with traits similar to those they attribute to God Himself. They believe this "ghost"

moves around and has its own will and does supernatural things. This fantasy is largely the result of a wrong definition of the word "spirit" (awkwardly rendered "ghost" in the KJV). In reality, a "spirit" is not an invisible being, but rather a MOTIVATION; a DISPOSITION. Thus, when Paul was filled with spirit, he was inspired (motivated) by Jesus. He received the MOTIVATION and DISPOSITION to be "holy" (which means "separate"). Operating under this new motivation of holiness, Saul definitely saw the world through new spiritual eyes.

Even though he received back his physical sight, Saul's eyesight was never as good as it once was. We find clues to verify this in his other writings. In Galatians, he infers that his vision was so poor that his handwriting was in large letters (symbols) so he could distinguish them correctly:

11. You see how large [letters] I

wrote to you with my own hand.

Galatians 6:11

And in 2 Corinthians he writes:

7. *And lest I should be overly exalted because of the abundance of my revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of the adversary to buffet me, in order that I would not be overly lifted up.*

8. *Over this I entreated the Lord three times, that it might depart from me.*

9. *But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you: for in weakness strength is completed. Gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weakness, that the strength of Christ may dwell upon me.*

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

Paul's physical "thorn" (weakness; infirmity) was his poor eyesight.

QUESTION: Why would Jesus specifically tell the original twelve apostles to "Go not into the way of the nations..." (Matthew 10:5) and then reverse Himself and tell Ananias, in Acts 9:15, that Saul was to be sent to the nations? It's things such as this that tend to make people distrustful of a Pharisee suddenly turned Christian.

ACTS 9:19 THREE YEARS OF PERSONAL TRAINING

And having received food, he was strengthened within. Then for some days, he was with the disciples at Damascus.

VERSE 19 is actually a clue which leads to more of the story about Paul. It is something you wouldn't ordinarily notice, but if you make a note here in your Bible, it will help you follow a trail of related Scripture verses which reveal an interesting segment of Paul's new life in Christ.

In the book of Galatians, while talking about the gospel, and his conversion, Paul touches on "the days" he spent at Damascus, and Arabia:

11. *I declare to you, brethren, that the good news which was declared by me is not according to man.*

12. *For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the disclosure of Christ Jesus.*

Galatians 1:11,12

Paul claimed to be BY JESUS, PERSONALLY! Of course, Paul had not been there with the original 12

apostles during their training. He hadn't witnessed first hand the things that Jesus did at that time. And yet, Paul claims that he didn't receive his teaching from man. HE SAYS THAT HE RECEIVED IT FROM JESUS – as did the original 12. Paul continues in Galatians:

15. *But when it pleased God, having separated me from my mother's womb, and having called me by His grace,*

16. *To reveal His Son in me, in order that I might declare the good news of Him in the nations; IMMEDIATELY I CONFERED NOT WITH FLESH AND BLOOD:*

17. *Neither went I up to Jerusalem to the apostles which were previous to me; BUT I WENT INTO ARABIA, AND THEN RETURNED AGAIN TO DAMASCUS.*

Galatians 1:15-17

Paul reviews the traumatic and

wonderful experience of his conversion. He says that his first order of business was NOT to confer with flesh and blood (other men), nor did he go up to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles. Instead, he went into Arabia, and then returned again to Damascus. So, Paul is referring to a period of time where he retreated from the company of men.

In the next verse Paul tells us approximately how long he remained secluded in Arabia and Damascus before returning to Jerusalem:

18. *Then after THREE YEARS I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and stayed with him fifteen days.*

Galatians 1:18

Paul did not instantly become an apostle. He dropped out of circulation for THREE YEARS before starting his ministry! Paul had three years with Jesus – approximately the same length of time given to the other twelve.

But what was he doing for three

years in Arabia? To find the answer to this question turn back to 2 Corinthians 12. If you understand that Paul is referring to his own early experience, you shouldn't have any trouble with this passage:

1. I am bound to boast, albeit this is not my purpose. I shall refer to sights and revelations of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 12:1

It is human nature to revere anyone who has had a vision or a revelation. So Paul is letting his readers know that this is not his motive. He was not boasting about himself to be revered by men. Rather, he was explaining that he took no credit for the things the Lord was doing *though* him. Instead of boasting of himself, he was boasting of Jesus.

2. I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not: God knows), him having been caught away to the third heaven.

3. And I have known this man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not: God knows)

2 Corinthians 12:2,3

Paul, here, refers to himself as "this man." In fact, he speaks of his past, just after his conversion on the road to Damascus. We know that the time period is after his conversion because He speaks of himself as a "man in Christ." Obviously, he was not "in Christ" when he was a government agent murdering and persecuting Christians.

The phrase, "Whether in the body, or out of the body ...," is NOT an occultic reference to "astral projection" – more commonly called an "out-of-the-body experience." The Bible does not teach or agree with such deceptions of the Occult! "In the body, or out of the body ..." is merely an idiom which meant he could not tell if the experience was "literal," or was only "in a VISION." All Paul knew was that he

experienced it - one way or the other. Whether he experienced it mentally, or physically, only God knew. But, it was very real to Paul ... and he will tell us what he learned from it.

With an active imagination you can visualize all sorts of things when you read the phrase, "... caught away to the third heaven." If you visualized him floating off into the sky or outer space to visit a Utopia, you would probably fit in with traditional church thinking. However, you would be in error, and you would miss the important point Paul was conveying.

We discovered in Acts Chapter One that "heaven" can refer to the whole expanse above ground level. It implies height ... i.e., above ground level.

The Bible is about God's Kingdom and man's interface with that Kingdom. If you understand that the Kingdom is the theme and foundation of the Bible, then you can shed the myths about fantasy lands and focus on God's Creation/Kingdom.

The term "heaven" is also used in scripture to symbolize authority and power. High buildings are more impressive than short ones. High mountains are more glorious than low ones. High thrones seem to command more attention than lower ones. Thus, "heaven" (high) infers some amount of power or advantage over "earth" (low).

"Height," "government" and "power" go together. The US Government sits on "Capitol Hill." Rome sat on 7 hills. Kings have traditionally ruled their kingdoms from thrones which are usually atop a platform called a "dais." This places them (their seat of power) higher (in heaven), and symbolizes their power and rule over their subjects (in earth).

Thus, in the Bible, the word "heaven" often means "government" or "power" – not an imaginary location above the clouds ("somewhere over the rainbow"). Government is the seat of power in human society. Therefore what more accurate analogy is there than "heaven" – a high place – to symbolize the seat of power?

But, Paul also speaks of the "THIRD" heaven in verse two. Here he simply means that he was shown the THIRD SEAT OF POWER or the THIRD KINGDOM (Third in time, not in distance of elevation above earth). What was "the third kingdom"? It may be debatable what the other two kingdoms or governments were, but obviously, the last one (the third one) was the Reign of Christ. Paul was "caught away," or shown a vision. Christ's Kingdom was revealed to him some 14 years earlier, during his three years in Arabia when he was being tutored and instructed by Jesus, personally.

Paul continues:

4. How that he was caught away into paradise, and heard unexpressed concepts, which are not natural for a man to utter.

2 Corinthians 12:4

The word "paradise" is from the Greek PARADEISOS (*para* = around, *deisos* = dais), and the Hebrew PARDACE. It means, literally, a pleasant protected area (a guarded place) with walls (hedges) around.

The paradise figure is used in Scripture in connection with cities, kingdoms, etc., as pleasant areas "kept" and "guarded" as a **garden**. Such terms for cities have carried over to modern languages: e.g., *Suttgart & Weingarten* in Germany; *Leningrad & Novogardia* in Russia. Israel is "a vineyard," a garden surrounded and guarded by God's laws called walls or hedges. "Kindergarten" means "child keeper; or child guardian."

The "paradise" kingdom of Eden was figuratively called "a garden" (kept and surrounded by God's laws). In Genesis 3:4, angels "kept The Way" of the tree of life (God's laws) in Eden. Again, in Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4, "The Way" refers to Christ's Ecclesia System, in which Jesus is the Husbandman of the "vineyard" (paradise; kingdom) of God.

Paul's "paradise" was Christ's Kingdom that is pleasant and protected. It is not a mythological

Utopia in outer space.

Also, the King James Version's "unspeakable words" (2 Cor. 12:4) is, more accurately, "unexpressed concepts." Paul heard concepts previously unexpressed, which had not been "lawful" (not natural) for contemporary man to utter. This means that during his three-year tutelage, Paul learned concepts that were beyond those previously known. The concepts had been unexpressed because they were higher and different than the ways of man. So man would not have naturally arrived at them on his own.

Paul became immersed ("caught up") in a learning experience about the Kingdom of Jesus. And remember, Jesus trained him in person! The concepts, and doctrines that Paul later taught in the nations were learned directly from Jesus Himself. Paul didn't go up to Jerusalem to ask what other men had learned. Instead, he obtained his teaching directly from the Source! He was commissioned and taught by Jesus, Himself.

Continuing in verse five:

5. Of this one (Jesus) I will boast: but of myself I will not boast except in my weaknesses.

2 Corinthians 12:5

Here, Paul reiterates that his experience was not glory for himself. Rather, he is happy in his own imperfection because it reserves the glory to Jesus.

The idea that Paul had seen Jesus in person and studied under Him for three years is a crucial truth in light of the anti-Paul doctrine which claims he was a fraud. The anti-Paul people claim that Paul couldn't have been a true apostle because, unlike the true apostles, he didn't learn directly from Jesus. They claim that Paul was never commissioned personally by Jesus, therefore, he couldn't be an authentic apostle. However, the verses we have just read prove that wrong, and confirm that Paul was indeed commissioned personally by Jesus. PAUL SAW AND

STUDIED UNDER JESUS, IN PERSON, FOR THREE YEARS BEFORE COMMENCING HIS TEACHING!

Furthermore, there are three more Scripture passages which verify this:

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day. He explains how the raised Jesus was seen by many people, including the original apostles. And then continuing in verse eight:

8. And last of all of them, He was seen by me also, as born out of due time.

1 Corinthians 15:8

1. Am I not free? am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

1 Corinthians 9:1

In this verse, Paul asks "rhetorical questions," (questions with obvious answers requiring no responses). In this case, the obvious answers are all "yes." Yes, he IS free. Yes, he IS an apostle. Yes, he HAS seen Jesus.

In Acts 22, Paul describes again how he was converted on the road to Damascus. Then, after the incident, he describes what Ananias said to him:

12. Now Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good witness of all the Judeans which dwelt there,

13. Came to me, and stood, and said to me, "Brother Saul, see again." And I looked upon him that very hour.

14. And he said, "The God of our fathers chose you, to know his will, and to see that Just One, and to hear the voice out of His mouth.

Acts 22:12-14

These verses show that Paul was, indeed, an authentic apostle sent from Christ.

QUESTION: You cite this "evidence" that Paul met Jesus in person, but aren't you forgetting that these are merely Paul's claims that this happened? There were no witnesses; we only have his word that it actually took place.

QUESTION: You work overtime to detract from the glories of Heaven by claiming it is not a divine paradise up in the clouds or in outer space. You seem to boil it all down to a mere code word for something as mundane as government. Doesn't this trivialize the power and glory of God?

MAN'S CONVERSION

Some people have questioned the plausibility of Saul, who was so hated and feared by the followers of Christ, suddenly turning and becoming a great and holy man.

The key is this: Paul changed ... because Jesus caused him to be reborn. The strength Paul acquired was not his own, but Christ's. And, as you can see in second Corinthians 12, Paul is very careful not to glorify himself.

The truth is, none of us are naturally "good" or "great" or "holy." None of us, on our own, can be what Paul became. Paul couldn't have changed if it hadn't been for the direct intervention and influence from the Lord. Paul became what the Lord made him. It is the same with any man. All are lost and blind until Christ opens our eyes.

When we see "good" qualities in a man, we are seeing Christ's traits manifest in him. It is not man himself that is good. Man is born with the natural tendency toward sin. Sin eventually dominates his life unless Christ steps in and imbues him with his own spirit. Our goodness and strengths are not our own.

ACTS 9:20-31 SAUL GETS A NEW IMAGE

And immediately he began declaring in the synagogues, that Jesus is the Son of God.

But all who heard him were amazed, and began saying; "Is this not the one that destroyed them in Jerusalem who called upon this name, and came here for that intent, that he might arrest them and take them to the chief priests?"

But Saul increased in strength, and confounded the Jews dwelling in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ.

And after many days were

fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to do away with him: but their plot became known to Saul.

And they closely watched the gates day and night that they might do away with him.

But his disciples took him by night, and let him down through the wall in a basket.

And when Saul arrived at Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples: but they all feared him, not believing that he was a disciple.

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles,

and declared to them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He (the Lord) had spoken to him (Paul), and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

And he spoke and conferred with the Grecians: but they conspired to destroy him.

So when the brethren realized this, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus.

Then the ecclesias in all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, had peace and were edified; and continued in the fear the Lord, and in greater assurance of the holy spirit.

AFTER his time out with Jesus, Saul began his ministry in Damascus by teaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. But his past reputation for persecuting Christians hindered him.

Saul's ministry did, however, become stronger as he taught the gospel of the Kingdom. Yet it was not without some difficulty. As soon as his new Christ-centered position became public, Judeans in government in Damascus began conspiring to destroy him. Fortunately, the disciples came to Saul's aid and helped him escape through the wall in a basket. Paul then moved on from Damascus to Jerusalem where he tried to join with the disciples, only to find that his previous reputation was still a problem.

As a former government agent, Saul had done most of his damage there in the area of Jerusalem. And, while it was true that he had become a different man, the people who had been “burned” by him were still not eager to trust him. But Barnabas saw his sincerity and became an advocate for him with the other disciples, and he was eventually accepted.

Then again, as in Damascus, trouble came at him from the establishment. His disputations with the Greek-speaking Jews caused them to plot to kill him. Again, the brethren came to Paul’s aid like they did in Damascus and escorted him safely out of Jerusalem, to Caesarea. He then went on to Tarsus. Saul eventually went also to the island of Cyprus.

Saul must have been the main persecutor of the ecclesias in Judea because when he stopped, the ecclesias “had peace” for a while.

From this point we hear no more about Saul until chapter 13 where he reappears as “Paul” – still working on the island of Cyprus.

Now remember, ecclesias are Christian communities – not churches. They are autonomous Christian communities existing by authority of Christ, not the state. The King James Version, and most churches, erroneously translate the word “churches.” But, the word “church” is nowhere in this passage!

QUESTION: Years after his “conversion” Paul says in Acts 23:6 that he is a Pharisee. Paul never renounced his belief as a Pharisee. Since Jesus told us to beware of the Pharisees, shouldn’t we continue to distrust and beware of Paul?

ACTS 9:32-35 MORE TURN TO THE LORD

Now, as Peter was passing through all parts, he happened to come down also to the saints dwelling at Lydda.

And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, having been paralyzed.

And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ is healing you: stand up, and make your bed.” And he stood up immediately.

And all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon who turned to the Lord saw him.

HERE, the scene changes. We now follow Peter as the Lord works with him. First, Jesus works a miracle through him on behalf of the paralyzed Aeneas ... who was healed and able to walk away from his sick bed. Aeneas had been bedridden for eight years. Apparently, this miracle was witnessed and/or carried to all those in Lydda and Sharon who had turned to the Lord.

The King James Version, verse 35, erroneously makes it sound like every person who lived in Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord:

35. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and turned to the Lord. (KJV)

The correct translation says that every person who had turned to the Lord came to see this man – apparently to witness his healing.

ACTS 9:36-43 DORCAS REVIVED BACK TO LIFE

Now in Joppa there was a certain female disciple named Tabitha, who by translation was called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and gifts of mercy which she did.

And it occurred in those days, that she fell sick, and died: and having washed her they laid her in an upper room.

Now, since Lydda was near

Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to ask him that he would not delay to come to them.

So Peter arose and went with them. When they arrived, they brought him into the upper room where all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them.

Then, having put everyone outside, Peter got on his knees and prayed; and turned to the

body and said, "Tabitha, stand up." And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

And he gave her his hand, and helped her to stand up, and called for the saints and widows and presented her alive.

TABITHA" was her Hebrew name. The Greeks apparently called her "Dorcas."

The disciples in Joppa summoned Peter when Tabitha died. Upon arriving at the scene, Peter went to the upper room where the mourners were gathered around Tabitha's body.

Peter asked them to leave, and then he prayed. He then told Tabitha to arise, and she revived and stood up. Now, this was quite an event – no ordinary miracle. Note that this was not a "raising" in the same sense as Christ was "raised." Christ was

raised immortal. Tabitha simply revived back to mortal life again. She was still mortal ... like Lazarus.

Thus, ends Acts chapter nine. But there are more interesting things coming up as we continue into chapter ten. We'll scrutinize the account of Peter's vision where he saw animals descend out of heaven upon a sheet. Was Peter trying to abolish the food laws of the Old Testament? We'll explain what the vision really means ... next time. And we'll read more about the acts of the apostles as Christ sent them to teach the good news of His kingdom.

And it became known throughout Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

And it came to pass, that he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain tanner named Simon.

QUESTION: If Jesus Christ's government is so important, why is it that we are always reading in Acts about health miracles as a means to convert people to the reign of Jesus? Why didn't the apostles focus more on performing miracles associated with government, such as overthrowing tyrants, etc.?

END OF LESSON NINE

FOR ANSWERS AND NOTES, SEE ENCLOSED "ANSWER SECTION."

Notes:

ANSWERS & COMMENTS

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CHAPTER NINE:

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. Saul was raised and trained in the religion of the Pharisees. His religious indoctrination made him equivalent to modern-day members of churches, synagogues, and fraternal orders (like Masonry). In Jerusalem, at that day, being a member of the Pharisee sect insured a better chance of success in business or politics – much like being a Mormon in Utah, a Mennonite in Pennsylvania, or a Baptist in Texas.

2. It is not clear what Saul's official position was with the government, but he was certainly a government man. His activities seemed to indicate that he operated somewhat like an FBI agent or a bounty hunter ... like an agent for "Homeland Security."

3. Saul's office seemed to be focused mainly upon stopping civil unrest ... the greatest of which were the dissidents who followed the martyred Carpenter from Nazareth. Saul called their movement "The Way."

4. The followers of "The Way" (i.e., the way of Christ) were NOT members of churches/synagogues. They were Ecclesians!

5. Christ did not lead the people into churches or synagogues. He led them AWAY from the established religions and politics. Those who followed "The Way" were separate from synagogues, churches, governments, and the establishment. Their "government" emanated from God ... not from the state.

6. The reason the religious/political establishment authorized Saul to attack "The Way" was because the rulers wanted to suppress the anti-government movement.

7. The government's reasons for

hating Jesus and "The Way" had nothing to do with church. It had to do with GOVERNMENT! The Jerusalem government had no problems with churches, synagogues, cults, fraternities, etc. ... any more than does modern-day American government. What bothers government – both today and back at the time of the Book of Acts – is GOD'S TRUTH. Governments lie and trick the public for support to survive and prosper. Jesus, and His Way, undermined public support for central government. For that reason, Jesus was murdered, and "The Way" was suppressed.

8. "The Way" was the movement of the followers of Jesus who were establishing ecclesias in the communities of Israelites (not Jews) in Judea, then in Samaria, and then in the outlying Israelite communities in the nations.

9. Saul was commissioned to destroy "The Way" (i.e., the movement to establish ecclesias) in and around Judea. Jesus, in order to show the power of His reign (to both His disciples and His enemies), singled out the enemy's best man (Saul), drew him from the ranks of the government, and changed him into the ruler's greatest enemy: an organizer of ecclesias. Paul became the mortal enemy of the Jerusalem government, and all governments outside the reign of Christ.

10. The conversion of Saul is not a witness to the greatness of a man. Rather, it is a witness to the greatness, mercy, and salvation of Jesus. If Jesus can rescue the "Sauls" of the world, He can save ANYONE!

ANSWERS:

pg.3

This question is somewhat rhetorical in that the answer is obviously, YES. Any movement of consequence is naturally infiltrated by government agents. This is as true in our day as it was in Paul's day. And, yes, "Saul" would have been a likely candidate for such a mission. But, the record simply does not indicate this was the case with Paul. NOTHING in his teachings indicate it. Nothing in his actions indicate it.

But, in terms of modern-day enemy agents ... what can we do to prevent them invading our privacy and violating our trust? The answer today is the same as it always has been: pray for THE HOLY SPIRIT and discernment. Discernment of spirit is a skill acquired through the gift of holy spirit when we are followers of The Way of Jesus. An enemy agent will exhibit a wrong spirit which will expose him to those with this discernment ... thus warning us not to trust him. In the mean time, reserve judgment and don't be too quick to affirm new comers. Don't refuse to listen to them, but let them earn your trust.

pg. 7

At the time Jesus told the original 12 apostles not to go into the nations their work was not yet done in the local area (Jerusalem and Judea) proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom. Not until that local area was covered were they to carry the gospel out to the other nations. By the time Paul was commissioned to teach the gospel the time had come to carry it into the nations.

Paul was not the only apostle to go to the nations. Peter went also. In fact, lesson 10 will show this in relation to a vision he received concerning clean and unclean animals.

pg. 9

a) Paul's claim of being personally trained by Jesus must stand or fall along with the rest of his works. If one stands, the other must stand as well.

The teachings of Paul, and his claim to apostleship, are corroborated by other apostles (Peter, Timothy, Titus, etc.) in the fact that they all accepted him and his ministry. If Paul was a fraud, then the other apostles were either fools or co-frauds.

b) No! On the contrary. Recognizing the real work of Jesus and His apostles to raise mankind from depravity, slavery, oppression and political and religious conspiracies, and save us from our inherent weaknesses, is the very heart and soul of God's salvation to man. It is the highest level of spiritual ground attainable to man. It is the essence of God's glory!

On the other hand, to try to pervert such a great and noble cause, and change the message into nothing more than one more addition (a new version) of the old paganisms of Babylon, India, Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, etc., truly "trivializes the power and glory of God." That, in essence, is precisely what has happened in the churches.

Truth is not only missing in the churches ... it is avoided, confused, and suppressed. Instead, they promote their own adapted versions of Mithraism and other paganisms.

pg. 11

This question insinuates that since Paul was never quoted saying "I renounce Pharisaism" this means that he remained a Pharisee. Although Paul didn't recite those exact words, he certainly renounced the Pharisees in many other ways obvious to both the public and the Pharisees. If that were not the case, it would be hard to explain why the Pharisees became his foremost enemies.

Paul's statement in Acts 23:6, claiming to be of Pharisee birth and

training, was made by a man standing trial before Jews. It was a tactical move intended to trip the adversaries up and get Paul out of a desperate situation. He certainly was NOT attempting to uphold Pharisaism, or convert anyone into that religion or political persuasion. His statement to his prosecutors in that setting would have been no different than me stating today that I had been born and trained in the ways of Judeo-Churchianity – which is true, but certainly NOT the way I choose to follow or recommend now.

pg. 12

The miracles performed to heal the saints of health problems were done within the company of believers. They denote the power and mercy of God. However, those miracles do not detract from other miracles against government and tyrants.

For instance:

1. God miraculously opened the prison doors allowing the apostles to escape unmolested (Acts 5:19);
2. The conversion of Saul demonstrated God's ability to invade enemy ranks and spoil them by converting their best agent into a Christian defender (Acts 9);
3. Paul was protected and allowed to escape his pursuers by being let down a wall in a basket (Acts 9).
4. Peter was miraculously delivered from a jail cell (Acts 12:7-8);
5. God struck Herod dead and he was eaten with worms (Acts 12:23);
6. God caused a sorcerer to go blind, and a government officer to be converted to Christ (Acts 13:9-12);
7. The apostles were described, in Acts 17:6-7, as "Those who are turning the world system upside down," in that they proclaimed the Reign of Christ and announced that

"there is another King ... Jesus."

The fact that the apostles were able to successfully establish ecclesias throughout many areas was itself a miracle which overthrew establishments and tyrants.

Since the days of the apostles the tyrants, and pagan religions, have recovered and prospered ... not due to the lack of accomplishment by Christ and his apostles, but due to modern idolatry and stiff-necked Israel people (our race) who are following the age-old pattern of their ancestors who rejected God many times and chose the way of the heathen.