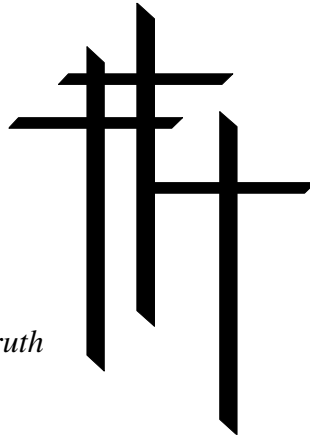


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

Volume 66 No. 7

July 2006

PAUL — AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

by Gregg Bing

Continued from last month

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”

The last two months we have been looking at the ministry and apostleship of Paul, a ministry that was distinct from that of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus during His earthly ministry. We saw Paul’s dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, and his distinct calling to be God’s apostle to the Gentiles. We continue this month with:

Paul’s Diverse Commission

What was the purpose and nature of Paul’s commission? To answer this question, we must consider two different aspects to his ministry: 1) his ministry during the Acts period, and 2) his ministry after the close of the Acts period.

Paul’s Acts Period Ministry

The early chapters of the book of Acts record the ministry of Peter and the

Twelve to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. The majority of the Jews, led by their religious rulers, rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning Jesus Christ, “crucifying again for themselves the Son of God, and putting Him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:6).

Things came to a head when Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, was falsely accused of blaspheming the temple and the law. During his defense before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Stephen accused the Jews of lawlessness in crucifying Jesus Christ and now resisting the conviction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51-53). When they heard this, these Jewish leaders were cut to the heart. They stopped their ears, cast Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death (Acts 7:54-60).

Those who stoned Stephen laid their coats down at the feet of Saul of Tarsus, a young man who became the chief persecutor of all who believed in Jesus as the Christ. A few years later, while traveling

to Damascus to continue his persecution of “the Way,” the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul and saved him by His grace. Saul was commissioned by the Lord for a new ministry: apostle to the Gentiles. The Lord told Ananias, “He (Saul) is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). The next twelve years of Saul’s life were spent in preparation for this special apostleship. Then, in Acts 13, we read that Saul (who was also called Paul) and Barnabas were separated by the Holy Spirit for the work to which God had called them. While the first twelve chapters of Acts centers on the ministry of Peter and the Twelve, the remaining chapters are devoted to the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Though Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles (2 Tim. 1:11), during the Acts period he was sent to the Jew first. The ministry of Peter and the Twelve was limited to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea; Paul was sent to the Jews of the dispersion who

were scattered to “the uttermost parts of the earth.” The nature and purpose of Paul’s ministry to the Jews during this time is pictured in the first recorded miracle performed by Paul. Paul and Barnabas left Antioch and sailed to the island of Cyprus.

“Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the

Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” (Acts 13:6-12)

Paul encountered a Jew named Bar-Jesus who was a sorcerer and a false prophet. He was with a Gentile named Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man who desired to hear the Word of God. When the Jew withstood Paul and Barnabas, and then tried to turn the Gentile away from the faith, Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, pronounced blindness upon the Jew “for a time (season).” After seeing these things, the Gentile believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

These events give us a pattern for Paul’s Acts period ministry to the Jew first, then the Gentile.

Every time Paul visited a new city, he went to the Jews first, most often ministering to them in their synagogue. When the majority of the Jews of that city rejected and opposed Paul's ministry of the Word, Paul was used of God to pronounce spiritual blindness upon them. As was the case with Bar-Jesus, Israel's blindness was to be temporary, as Paul described it in Romans 11:25:

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

Paul would then turn from the Jews to preach the Word of God to the Gentiles, who were more eager to receive it. This is why we find the qualification at the end of Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who

believes, **for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Gentile).”**

Though we see this same pattern in each city where Paul preached, there are three significant turning points recorded in the book of Acts. The first of these takes place at Antioch in Pisidia, which is in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). After Paul preached in the synagogue to the Jews, the next Sabbath, the whole city, including Gentiles, came together to hear the Word of God. When the Jews saw the multitudes,

“... they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you as a light to the
(Continued on page 4)

TIMELY MESSENGER

Published monthly by:

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

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6:00 PM Evening Worship

Mid-Week Services:

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(Continued from page 3)
Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth. Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." (Acts 13:45-48)

Paul's subsequent travels brought him further west to Corinth, a city of Greece. While there Paul "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks (Gentiles)." When Silas and Timothy joined him there,

"Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (Acts 18:4-6)

The final turning point occurred in Rome, and is

recorded in the final chapter of the book of Acts. Paul, a prisoner confined to house arrest and chained to a Roman soldier, could not go to the synagogue, so he called for the Jewish leaders at Rome to visit him.

"So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, Go to this people and say: Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their

ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them. Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (Acts 28:23-28)

This was clearly a significant turning point. Having preached the Word to the Jews at Rome, Paul had now taken God's message to the Jews in "the uttermost parts of the earth," and everywhere he had gone, a large majority of the Jews had rejected the truth. Paul's quote from Isaiah 6 looms as a final pronouncement of blindness upon the entire nation of Israel. It seems evident that at this point Israel, as a nation, was set aside by God. The promised earthly kingdom was no longer being offered; it was not even "at hand" any more. God's prophesied program for Israel was being post-

poned, at least “for a time.”

Paul’s public ministry to the Jews throughout the Acts period was limited to “no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23). Even to the Jews in Rome, Paul “explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

While God’s purpose for Israel was clearly the subject of prophecy, God had another plan and purpose, a purpose which was ordained before the foundation of the world, but which had been kept secret from men of other ages (Eph. 3:9). This purpose was made known to Paul by direct revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:3). There are mentions of this truth in Paul’s earlier epistles, written during the Acts period (Rom. 16:25-

26, 1 Cor. 2:6-8), but now, with the setting aside of Israel in Acts 28, it was time to fully unveil this secret purpose of God. Paul, “the prisoner of the Lord,” was led by the Holy Spirit to write letters to the saints at Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse, as well as a letter to his friend, Philemon. In these “prison epistles” Paul made known the truth of the mystery of God’s will (Eph. 1:9, 3:5).

Next month we will continue this study by looking at

Paul’s Post-Acts Ministry.

To me, who am less
than the least of all
the saints, this
grace was given,
that I should
preach among the
Gentiles the
unsearchable
riches of Christ.

IN CHRIST

*“Ye are Christ’s, and Christ
is God’s.” (1 Cor. 3:23)*

What a privilege, what an honor it is to belong to the Lord Jesus, and to be one with Him in the Father’s love, in the Father’s joy, in the Father’s home. Chosen together, loved together, justified together, sanctified together, glorified together. Oh; what a bond is that of the heavenly family! It is indissoluble. It is eternal.

He is ours, and we are His. We belong to Him. We can, therefore, well wait with confident and restful hearts until He comes to take us home. We are as safe here as at home, though not as happy. As safe, for He is with us always; not as happy, for we see Him not; as safe, for He guards us as “members of His body”; not as happy, because we are strangers in a strange country; as safe, for we are one with Him, and because He lives we shall live also; but not as happy, for we are not yet “made like unto Him.”

We wait then for going-home time to see Him, to be with Him, to be like Him for ever and ever.



ALMOST RIGHT IS WRONG

by Beverly Wages

A *Almost Right is Wrong* is a little motto that I used to see each time I went into the local bank where we used to live. I'm sure that the banker was thinking of material things when this motto was put up. However, I have thought a good bit about this concerning spiritual things, and concerning our study of God's Word. Too many times, boys and girls, as well as adults, listen to others tell of certain happenings in the Bible or of Bible stories and take what someone says concerning the subject and many times these things are "almost right, but wrong."

There are many things

that we could bring out that we have noticed recently about things that writers add to the actual account of Bible stories. We won't go into all these things, however. My purpose of this lesson is just to get you boys and girls to go to the Word of the Lord for your final authority before accepting any Bible teaching. The Lord surely tells us that He gives teachers and preachers to help guide us into the studies of His Word. We are all weak, however, and prone to make mistakes, so it would be good for us all to look into the Bible to see what we should accept. A sincere teacher may follow along with what she has heard from others and give out something that is not exactly right. A sincere boy or girl may take this and give it to others; when all the time it may be "almost right, but wrong." Then, too, there are those that are false teachers and would purposely misrepresent the truth to take glory from the Lord. As you study with me in each of these lessons, I surely hope that you will always look into the Bible

and check everything with God's Word.

In Acts 26 we find the apostle Paul talking to King Agrippa concerning the Lord and how to be saved. The King said to Paul, "Almost thou persuadedst me to be a Christian." This man was almost persuaded to be saved and yet refused to do so. In this case being almost right, but wrong meant eternal death and separation from the Lord for this man. So, we may see from this account how tragic it would be to be "almost right, but wrong." One could be almost true to the Word of God, and yet may add something to it, or leave something out that could change the meaning a good bit. For instance, in most cases the stories will say that three wise men came to worship the Lord Jesus when He was born. As far as I can find in the Scriptures, there is no recording of how many wise men came. Also, we find as we read the newspaper stories that the authors speak of December the 25th as the day that Christ was born. We find in Luke, chapter 2,

“For unto you is born ‘this day’ in the city of David a Savior” Once again I will say that as far as I can see in the Bible it doesn’t tell us the exact date of His birth.

I know that some of you are saying that these things are so small and unimportant. That may be true in this case, but remember that the devil is very clever and smart, and if he can get us to take someone’s word for details instead of going to the Word and taking God’s Word, then he may succeed in getting us mixed up on things that will greatly affect our lives for Christ.

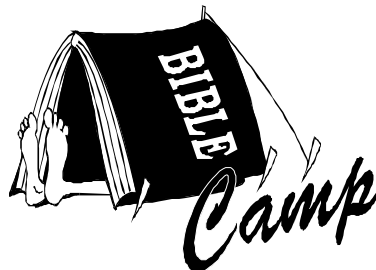
In the first place, Satan will try to get unsaved people confused on how to be saved. This is most easily done by ministers who will give out the plan of salvation almost right, but wrong. Some will say that you must accept Christ and then be baptized and join some church, then you are saved. This would be partly right, partly wrong. The Scripture surely teaches us that we must accept Christ (believe in our hearts), but nowhere does the Scripture

tell us that today we must be baptized in water and join a church to be saved. So, you can see how Satan can use even a minister who will preach the Word almost right, but wrong. Search the Scriptures!

This article is from the book, *Spiritual Thoughts for Young Minds*, by Beverly Wages. If you would like a copy, write or email us at Grace Bible Church. We will be glad to send it to you.

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen.

—2 Tim. 6:20-21



Follow-Up Report

The Family Bible Camp is history. It was held this year at Camp Arrowhead on the Brazos River near Glenrose, Texas. This is a camp we last used about 30 years ago, but one that has seen many improvements over the years. It is a beautiful campground with plenty of nice shade trees, a quiet place to get away from the distractions of the world and experience a time of real spiritual renewal. Not having to share the campground with any other groups made it an even better experience. We enjoyed a wonderful week of Bible study and fellowship, and we thank the Lord for the blessing of being together. Even the food was better this year. Next year’s camp is tentatively scheduled for

July 2-6, 2007.

BIBLE STUDY BOOKS

The following Bible study materials are available free of charge for your personal use or for use in teaching a Bible class.

by Charles Wages

- Written for Our Learning
- Stepping Stones to Truth
- Past Pentecost to Paul
- Points to Ponder
- The Ages
- Saved by Grace
- Ministry of the Church
- The Perfect Will of God
- Once in a Lifetime
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- Thoughts on Vision
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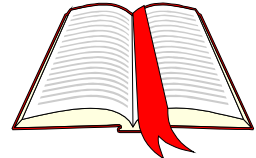
- The Book of Acts
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- It is Finished!
- Conformed to the Image of His Son
- The End of the World
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