

Through diligent examination of the Scriptures we have found that the Gospels and Acts were not the beginning of anything new but the ends of the ages. The Lord's return to the earth was expected in the lifetime of the believers.

On the road to Emmaus two downcast disciples had hoped that the Lord was the One who was about to redeem Israel:

[Luk 24:21](#) But we had trusted that He was the One who was about to redeem Israel.

The Lord did not contradict the hope they held but explained from the Scriptures that suffering came before glory. See Luke 24:25-27, 44-48.

The Lord had previously spoken plainly about His return in power and glory to sit upon the throne of His father David, this they had all understood. For 40 days (Acts 1:3) the Lord spoke about this Kingdom. One question was asked at the end:

[Act 1:6](#) Then, indeed, these coming together, they asked Him, saying, Lord, do You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

This is the great theme of the book of Acts. The suffering was past and now understood and the restoration of Israel's kingdom was now in view.

Peter proclaimed this great Kingdom to the Jews in Acts 2. He declared plainly that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel's Messiah who had been raised to sit upon David's throne. See Acts 2:22-36. The "church" did not start with Peter in Acts 2. What about Paul did "the Church" start with him?

The apostle Paul is the only one in Scripture referred to as the apostle of, and teacher for the Gentiles, see Romans 11:13, Eph.3:1 and 2Tim.1:11. Because of this many assume that "the Church" started when Paul came on the scene at either Acts 9 or 13. We remember however it was Paul who wrote in those days about the ends of the ages, not the beginning of anything.

Drawing the conclusion that the church started with Paul they find comfort in an idea that Paul was the first in the "body of Christ" assumed from a misunderstanding of this passage:

[1Ti 1:15](#) This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

[1Ti 1:16](#) Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. (KJV).

We notice first of all Paul does not say he was first in the "body of Christ". He tells us God made choice as to the Church which is His Body before the foundation of the world in Eph.1:4. Ephesians was written after the book of Acts. After Israel was put aside at the end of Acts Paul received revelation regarding it but not once does the humble apostle suggest he was first in the Church which is His Body. He certainly could not have been the first in the Church which is His Body in Acts because it had not been revealed at that time.

Paul said he was a pattern of mercy to all those believing thereafter. He contrasts the depravity of his trespasses with the heights of mercy of the Lord. He uses the word "first" to emphasize degree, not rank. I doubt such folk would dare suggest Paul was the first sinner since the word "chief" in verse 15 is the same original word "first" in verse 16. This passage has nothing to do with "Church" membership. Such teaching is out of context and modern versions bring out Paul's meaning, further showing the impossibility of the "Paul was first in the body" theory from this passage

[1Ti 1:15](#) Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (first):

[1Ti 1:16](#) howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief (first) might Jesus Christ shew forth all his longsuffering, for an ensample of them which should hereafter believe on him unto eternal life. (RV).

[1Ti 1:13](#) In the past I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. But I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in my unbelief,

[1Ti 1:14](#) and the grace of our Lord overflowed toward me, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

[1Ti 1:15](#) This saying is trustworthy and deserves complete acceptance: To this world Christ Jesus came, Sinful people to reclaim. I am the worst of them.

[1Ti 1:16](#) But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the worst sinner, Christ Jesus might demonstrate all of his patience as an example for those who would believe in him for eternal life. (ISV).

We must not assume that because Paul was saved during the Acts period the ends of the ages ceased and a new church age began or was gradually unfolded or progressively revealed. Acts is not a

transition book but an ends of the ages book. The Church did not start with Paul in Acts 9 or 13 simply because Paul was converted during Acts.

Others believe that Paul started the church in the Acts period because they fall into the word trap of Galatians chapter 1. They assume that just because Paul received his gospel by revelation that this was "grace" put loosely for the present dispensation of the grace of God, also given by revelation;

[Gal 1:11](#) And, brothers, I make known to you the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not according to man.

[Gal 1:12](#) For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it except by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul received many revelations (2Cor.12:7) and we must not assume all were the same. The gospel given by revelation as per Galatians 1 is not the dispensation of the Grace of God also given by revelation in Ephesians 3. Before seeing exactly what Paul taught during the Acts period, let us examine the theory that the gospel given by "revelation" in Galatians 1 automatically means the Mystery of Ephesians 3.

The word "revelation" in Gals.1:12 is "apocalypses" which means an unveiling, an uncovering; a disclosure, nothing more (Word Study, E-Sword). It does not in any way tell us what was disclosed, except that it was good news. This same word is used of the book of the Revelation and we would be unwise to assume Paul taught all the book of the revelation as his gospel simply because the same word is used. Paul spoke of many mysteries they are not all the same.

In Galatians Paul goes on to say that the Christians were now rejoicing in the glorious change in him and that he was preaching the faith he once destroyed;

[Gal 1:23](#) But only they were hearing that he who then persecuted us, now preaches the faith which he once ravaged.

How can Paul be preaching the "faith" (doctrine) he once destroyed if it was completely new and unknown prior to Paul? Paul received his gospel by revelation, but it was preached by others before his conversion.

The revelation given to Paul as described in Galatians was the good news which contained the doctrines he once destroyed, not a new dispensation given to him alone. Let us turn to 1 Corinthians 15 to confirm this:

[1Co 15:1](#) And, brothers, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you have received, and in which you stand;

[1Co 15:2](#) by which you also are being kept safe, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

[1Co 15:3](#) For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures,

[1Co 15:4](#) and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures;

We notice immediately that the gospel Paul preached was "according to the Scriptures" but of course, the Mystery of Ephesians can not be found in the Scriptures. Paul, like the two on the road to Emmaus and the other disciples, did not understand all the Scriptures. Just as the Lord opened the minds of the disciples He likewise gave Paul an unveiling, a revelation as well. The disciples were taught by the Lord for 40 days and I wonder how long Paul was in Arabia? Please read Galatians 1:17-18 carefully. Paul's gospel of the Acts period was found in the OT Scriptures and was not the mystery of Ephesians which was also given by revelation. We must distinguish things differing, Phils.1:9-10.

Reading further into this chapter we find Paul affirming that he did preach the faith he once destroyed;

[1Co 15:11](#) Therefore whether it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed.

Note well friends, "so WE preach" says Paul. It is an easy task to determine who the "they" are from the preceding verses. Others before Paul had taught the "faith" he was now preaching and many had believed. Peter was one Paul mentions who preached before him and folk heard and believed. Perhaps the two apostleships of Galatians 2:7-8 are apostleships of direction rather than evidence of substantially different gospels.

Paul wrote in 1 Cor.4:17 that he was their father, but he acknowledges they had many instructors. Since Paul says they had many other instructors we are again assured that Paul was proclaiming, during the Acts period, the faith he once destroyed.

Righteousness reckoned by grace was certainly more fully written by Paul, but even this wonderful doctrine was "according to the Scriptures" as a reading of Romans and Galatians will show. Peter

knew about righteousness reckoned by grace since he had been taught by the Lord as well, see Acts 15:7-9. Peter refers to Cornelius, an event more than likely before Peter had met Paul. It is outside of Scripture to teach that Paul taught Peter "grace". Peter wrote of the "manifold grace of God" and "the grace of God in which you stand", see I Peter 4:10 and 5:12.

The gospel of Paul during Acts was given by revelation but is not the mystery, the present dispensation of the grace of God of Ephesians 3. It was the "ends of the ages" when he preached that gospel. Paul preached the return of Christ to the earth and the coming kingdom on the earth during Acts as we shall see next lesson.

So what happened? Why didn't the Lord return back then? What happened to the "ends of the ages"?

The book of Acts was a further opportunity for the nation of Israel to accept their Messiah who would then come back and restore their nation and bless them with His personal presence as Peter says in Acts 2:17-22.

This gracious offer Israel rejected and they were put to one side at the end of Acts.

Israel remained God's people right through Acts as Romans 11:1-2 says and the Lord was waiting for the nation of Israel to repent and turn back to Him at that time;

Rom 10:19 But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses says, "I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you."

Rom 10:20 But Isaiah is very bold and says, "I was found by those who did not seek Me, I became known to those who did not ask after Me."

Rom 10:21 But to Israel He says, "All day long I have stretched forth My hands to a disobeying and gainsaying people."

When the dispersed Jews at Rome also argued amongst themselves about the offer before them, Paul announced Isaiah 6, a judgmental prophecy against Israel, see Acts 28:17, 20, 23-29.

In Acts 28:25 we have this simple statement;

Act 28:24 And some indeed believed the things that were said, others did not believe.

Act 28:25 And disagreeing with one another, they were let go,

The Word translated "let go" is found first in this New Testament verse;

Mat 1:19 But Joseph, her husband to be, being just, and not willing to make her a public example, he purposed to put her away secretly.

Joseph was prepared to put away his wife and at the end of the book of Acts Israel were "let go", put away for a season and the hope of Israel was put to one side with them. The "ends of the ages" were postponed and the imminent return of the Lord was also postponed.

Then the Lord descended and gave to Paul the present dispensation which has been running for nearly 2000 years.

Next lesson we look further at Paul's Acts period ministry.