

74 YEARS -
THE SUMMIT OF HUMAN HISTORY

BY

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2024

GLOSSARY

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74 YEARS CHAPTER ONE

THE INDISPENSIBLE WORD

“Dead in the water.” This is a nautical term referring to a sailing ship with no wind, or a crippled ship with no power. The vessel is inoperable, incapable of functioning, and, if in war, vulnerable and useless.

Without the written Word of God, the Bible, we Christians would be “dead in the water.” Where would we go to learn about Yahweh? Who is Yahweh, you ask? He is God. He is the Lord. He is the Almighty. He is the Creator of all life in the universe and the Father of His Son, Christ. His Hebrew language name is Yahweh, which makes Him personal to us. We would know none of this without the Bible. This book is in two parts – the ancient part is written in Hebrew, the language of Israel; the later part is written in Greek, the written language at the time of Jesus’ birth. Jeshua is His real name but has been transliterated into Latin and carried down to this day as Jesus. I’m tempted to use Jeshua in this treatise, but it may be distracting so I’ll defer to the modern usage.

If we didn’t have the Bible (considered by fundamental believers as the “Word of God”), how could we possibly know anything concerning divine and eternal things? We certainly can’t rely on our imagination. That could lead us to a Star Wars bar scene. *Only* the written Word can inform us of His character, His desires, and His plans. And why the *written* Word? Because the spoken word is past and gone.

Yahweh spoke directly at first to Adam and Eve and Cain; then to Noah, Abraham, and Moses. He spoke to and through the prophets all the way to the last prophet John the baptizer, Jesus’ cousin. He spoke through His Son, who spoke to His twelve apostles, and to Saul of Tarsus on the road, and through John the apostle to the seven assemblies in Revelation. After that silence. No sign, no miracles, no wonders, nothing! And now almost two thousand years later, not a whisper. We are left with His speaking written down, sitting in our hands, begging to be read and begging more to be understood.

Why did Yahweh decide to go silent after the early part of first century AD? Why, after being so demonstrative and audible in the history of Israel did He disappear? Would you talk to people who murdered your son? His own chosen people, represented by their leaders, refused His offer of His Son as their King. He also offered them the kingdom promised them long before they rejected Him. He offered to make them a kingdom of priests to rule in that kingdom, but no thanks, they said. “We will not have this man rule over us,” they said. No wonder He went dark.

But before He assumed invisibility and silence, He made sure we had plenty to get us by. He gave us the stories and events and instructions that make Him known in a book. We don’t have to guess; we don’t have to imagine. It’s all here between the covers. Now it’s up to us to read it and understand it, but before we get into that big project – trying to make sense of it – it would be well to explore the mechanics of how the Word came to be and why.

Genesis 1:1 says, “*God created the heaven and the earth.*” How? Hebrews 1:2 tell us that the Son “made the worlds.” John writes, “*In the beginning was the Word;*” and, as the Word, “*all things were made by Him.*” In other words, creation came to be through *language*. Language is

the conveyer of information. Information in the brain, no matter how brilliant, is useless unless it is brought forth to a hearer or reader, and that can only happen through language, the door of communication.

Suppose four hundred years ago you had the brand-new idea for a train. Say you had thought about it for ten years and had conceived of a machine that could pull heavy loads on two tracks using steam power to drive massive wheels. Would any amount of thinking move the heavy load? Of course not. You would have to formulate your thoughts into words that others could understand. You would have to utilize language to communicate your idea and make it a practical reality.

It is no different with the Lord. For Him to transfer His ideas from nothing into something required a mechanism of some sort. He had to have some way to make a “train.” The Father’s “train,” that idea in His mind, was centered on His Son. What He conceived was for His Son to have a body and a bride mystically comprised of believers. Two great plans mulling around in His mind, but how to make all this happen – that was the great challenge.

He set about to implement His plans. First step was to create helpers, messengers, administrators, a.k.a. angels. Second step was to create matter and make a universe. How? Information transferred in language. He spoke! He spoke matter into being out of nothing! And there was the universe! How loudly and how quickly this occurred is for *true* scientists to determine through observation. What we know is the Earth was His choice to carry out His twin plans. It is the perfect place for human life, the reason for the whole operation.

To summarize, what was in Yahweh’s thought is now Yahweh’s universe, His Earth, and His creatures, all because of language, the means of communication! He spoke His thoughts and it was done! Simple, right? Not so fast. Yahweh’s creation of angels was an expression of Himself. He has free agency to decide what He wants, and so do His creatures. They are not automatons. They were created with the same characteristics as their Creator. He thinks; they think. He emotes; they emote. He can freely choose; so can they. And wouldn’t you know it! Yahweh’s highest and brightest angel, His trusted ally, the one wielding the greatest power and influence went south. Whether his status corrupted him, or Yahweh’s plans offended him, we don’t know. What we do know is that this angel rebelled and led an insurrection with a third of the angels in tow. They attempted to usurp Yahweh’s sovereignty over His own creation. Amazing! What brass! Given the highest status and the most access and the unique responsibility of any creature and he blows it! He ruins creation, including the perfect Earth and its inhabitants.

Yahweh had a problem. He goes to all the trouble of creating His angels, His universe, then the perfect conditions for His Earth to support plant, animal, and human life; only to have a rogue angel inspire a revolt. Now what? What is Yahweh to do? He has only one option – destroy the Earth with water and start over. Will He still rely on language? Does information still need to be conveyed in this situation? Absolutely! Language it will be because it must be. Yahweh’s ideas and plans need a way to become reality. Information still needs words, and words need language, the tool of communication.

Yahweh looked out on the damage to creation and set about to restore it. Though the damage was

catastrophic, language came to the rescue. He, as always, moved on words. Words convey Him as the grand solution. Genesis 1:3 says, “God said . . .” And so does verses 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, and 2:16-18. What He thinks He speaks; what He speaks is language. What is language? Information in understandable form that produces tangible results. The Lord speaks, restores the Earth, creates a new man, and moves forward with His plans. Simple. He intervenes. He intervenes to solve the problem through speaking.

Yahweh’s speaking is Yahweh’s intervention in His creation. Being the Creator, He has every right to do what He wants. How can we gripe about that when we are simply along for ride? Our best course of action is to get as close as we can to the Creator to enjoy all He has for us. So what is it He has for us? We must know if we are to make the most of our brief sojourn on Earth.

Before we begin, it would be well to set some terms and names in order that will figure heavily in what is to follow. Some of the terms may not be familiar, the players should be. First the terms:

- **74 years** is that critical period in world history that stretches from the birth of Messiah in 4 B.C. to the destruction of the Jewish city Jerusalem and her Temple in 70 A.D. No other period rivals this one in significance. The tectonic shifts in focus and direction impacted the human experience then and will persist to the end of time itself.

- ***Ekklesia*** is the Greek word for a gathering or an assembly or a congregation of any kind, from a town meeting to a coliseum chariot race. It has no religious overtones of any kind. Scribes deliberately mistranslated the word. In English the word “church” – true meaning of which is a temple of pagan idols – replaced *ekklēsia* in the New Testament, and it remains to this day as meaning a religious group or a worship building. For our purposes here *ekklēsia* will always mean a gathering of the Lord’s people.

- **Economy** comes from the Greek word *oikonomia*, which means household management, or stewardship, in which the steward of the house dispenses those items the household requires. Yahweh is the household manager of His universe, and as such dispenses distinct ways of doing things to accomplish His purposes in creation. Economy is a synonym for dispensation, but is a closer translation to the Greek word, which is why I prefer it, though both words are interchangeable. Neither has to do with time, but rather with ways of doing things. They are tools in the Creator’s hand to accomplish His purposes.

- **Little flock** is the term Jesus used to describe Jewish believers saved under His ministry and the ministries of the twelve disciples. They would lead the nation into the kingdom. Here are Jesus’ words:

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)

We can substitute “a remnant of believers in Messiah” for little flock; or the “remnant believers;” or “remnant congregation;” or “remnant assemblies.” All are synonymous.

- **The body of Christ** follows the little flock in the progress of the 74 years. It is comprised of people of no distinction, whether Jews or Gentiles. The ascended Christ is the Head and together they make up the “one new man,” who is the fulfillment of the Father’s eternal purpose.

- **Gentiles** are referred to in scripture as “nations.” They are not Jews and are derisively called “uncircumcision” by circumcised Jews. When the door opened to them by Peter to enter salvation and the remnant congregations, they took the back seat to Jews. Jews always regarded them as second-class citizens. Most of Paul’s problems came from the antagonism between the two groups.

- **Kingdom** refers to the Messiah’s millennial (1000-year) reign on the Earth at the end of history. This kingdom is promised to Israel, and it was for this that Jesus came, ministered, and died. It was for this that the twelve apostles preached and founded assemblies. It was for this that the Lord commissioned Paul in his early ministry.

There is also Yahweh’s overarching realm, or kingdom, that incorporates heaven and Earth. But for the purposes of this writing, the earthly kingdom promised to Israel is meant, unless otherwise noted.

- **The Temple** is the Lord’s house built in His city Jerusalem, originally by King Solomon. It was comprised of an outer court, an inner court (the Holy Place), and an inner chamber (the Holy of Holies). It was central to Jewish society and the destination of four annual festivals. The temple priests handled all the animal sacrifices brought by the children of Israel. No other place did the Lord allow sacrifices.

- **Gospel** means “good news,” particularly good news about Christ regardless of economy. Each economy has its own gospel. Peter’s gospel preached at Pentecost was designed to shepherd Israel into the kingdom. Paul’s gospel involved the secret of the body of Christ after Israel rejected the gospel of the kingdom. Peter’s gospel was called the “gospel of the circumcision;” Paul’s the “gospel of the uncircumcision.”

The four gospels, or biographies of Jesus, are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each views Jesus from different angles, matching that four-faced creature in Ezekiel chapter 1 – the face of a lion, the face of an ox, the face of a man, and the face of an eagle. Matthew depicts Jesus as the king, the lion, with a confirming pedigree. Mark presents a slave as an ox, a beast of burden, with no genealogy. Luke gives us a perfect man with a genealogy stretching back to Adam, the first man. John shows Jesus as the Son of God, the soaring eagle far above all.

Now the players:

- **Jews.** In the Hebrew scriptures they are called Israelites, and occasionally mentioned as Hebrews. They are the chosen people because they came out of faithful Abraham. The terms Israelite, Hebrew, and Jew are synonymous.

- **Gentiles.** Any person who is not a Jew is a Gentile, known also in the Bible as “nations.”

• **Abraham** was the father of the Jewish nation, the Hebrews. Yahweh counted him righteous because he exercised faith and believed and obeyed when Yahweh approached him about leaving his home and relocating to Canaan, a land of promise. He was the first “Hebrew” which means “river crosser.” In her early history Israel, in Abraham, crossed the Euphrates, the Jordan twice, and the Red Sea. His son Isaac was the son of promise. Abraham’s name will pop up regularly as we go along our way.

• **Moses** was Israel’s guide out of Egypt and the law giver. The law set Israel apart from all other nations, but the law became a big problem after Jesus, as we shall see. Jews highly venerated him at the expense of the nation.

• **John** the baptizer was Jesus’ herald, a radical prophet who announced to Israel the coming of their King, and the need to get ready through repentance and water baptism. He was a cousin to Jesus and was nearly the same age. His home was the wilderness, and his diet was honey and bugs. He was the last of the old prophets and the first to announce who Jesus was:

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

• **Jesus** is Christ incarnate. Incarnation means the divine became human. Christ the Son of Yahweh left his home above to be born as a human child, live a human life for 33 years, die as a sacrifice for sin. His human name is Jeshua, also known as Jesus.

He is Israel’s promised Messiah, the anointed King, exiled in heaven until Israel repents and receives Him.

• **Peter** was the colorful leader among the disciples – impetuous, passionate, and prone to inserting his foot in his mouth. He was the recipient and keeper of the keys of the kingdom, opening the door of salvation to the Jews at Pentecost and to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion.

• **John** was one of two scribes (Matthew) among the disciples. Probably the youngest and the one most favored by the Lord. He wrote a unique and beautiful biography of Jesus, and a treatise of the final seven years of Israel’s history.

• **James** of the book of Acts was the Lord’s flesh brother, not one of the twelve, who acted as the leading elder in the congregation at Jerusalem. He wrote a short letter to the Jews scattered throughout the empire. He had the final word in conferences dealing with problems. He encouraged Paul to take a Jewish vow and enter the Temple with other Jewish men under vow. More than any other, he was rigidly Jewish.

• **Paul** was a highly educated and prominent Jewish leader who persecuted the remnant believers. He was confronted by the ascended Jesus and graciously converted. He received from the Lord a commission to minister unto the children of Israel, unto kings, and unto the Gentiles, a commission he fully carried out though it cost him much. He had an early ministry to Israel, to the remnant flock, and a later ministry devoted to the body of Christ.

• **Luke**, the beloved physician, was Paul's personal assistant at the end of his life. He looked after Paul's physical needs and provided him with valuable advice and fellowship. He wrote the book of Acts and his own gospel regarding Jesus as the perfect man.

This brings us to a vital question:
How does Yahweh accomplish His purposes?

ECONOMY OF DIRECT FELLOWSHIP

At the beginning of history, Yahweh communicated by *direct speaking* – to Adam and Eve, to the serpent, to Cain, to Noah, to Abraham, etc. This was His way of operating. To convey His thoughts and to make them real, He had no other way. He had to speak. Not to diminish his forbears, Abraham is particularly important to our purpose here and worth a deeper look.

Without any warning or indication, Yahweh spoke to Abraham through a language Abraham understood while he sat in Babylon, the idolatry capital of the ancient world. Yahweh provided him with seven promises. Now Abraham could have refused Yahweh's overture but think about it. Think what he would have missed. Abraham was not stupid. He saw a huge opportunity just dropped into his lap, and he knew only an idiot would refuse the offer. Here's why.

Genesis 12:1-3 explains the seven promises Yahweh served up to the surprised Babylonian:

- 1 – I will make of you a great nation;
- 2 – I will bless you;
- 3 – I will make your name great;
- 4 – You shall be a blessing;
- 5 – I will bless them that bless you;
- 6 – I will curse them that curse you;
- 7 – In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

What was he to do? Turn it down? Keep living an empty and worthless life surrounded by idolatry? Give the man some credit! Abraham willfully obeyed, and set his course to become the original Hebrew, the patriarch of Yahweh's chosen people through whom He could further His two purposes. And make no mistake, Yahweh needed this man to cooperate with Him.

We tend to overlook the Lord's need for us, but His original purposes – a bride and body for His Son – require people, willing people who will obey Him and allow Him to occupy them and use them as His vessels. For Yahweh to obtain such vessels is not simple. He seeks the willing few amidst an unwilling multitude.

Some may protest, "The Lord doesn't need anything!" Technically that's correct. However, He has put Himself in a box. He proposed to fulfill His plans using people with their own ideas and agency. Now it's up to Him to make His purposes so enticing and rewarding, that some perceptive humans will willingly sacrifice their own preferences in favor of His. I can't think of a greater handicap, but He only needs a remnant. Nothing I know of is more heartening than

having the privilege of being a small part of Yahweh's remnant.

Critics challenge Yahweh's direct speaking and intervention in human affairs, but why? He made the place after all, and people to populate it. He's the architect who drew up the plan in His own mind; He's the builder in pursuit of His purposes, so why can't He intervene? When I used to build homes, I "intervened" all the time, changing this and changing that. Detractors may counter by accusing Yahweh of not getting it right the first time. Fair criticism until you consider His "building material." The wood and drywall and cabinets of my homes were static and stiff and thoughtless. They just sat there until needed. Not so Yahweh's. His material is human, and humans are nothing like floor joists. They think; they get offended; they're happy; they're sad; they seek comfort, advantage, revenge – they are all over the map. In other words, they have a will of their own and make tons of independent decisions all the time. Wow! This is His building material? And you question why He intervenes in His creation? Please! He has every right to make moves to further His purposes. But remember this. His interventions *never* involve coercion. He never forces any one to do anything they don't want to do. Freedom to choose is paramount; it stands supreme over everything else. Why? Because creatures are like their Creator. Humans are made in His image and that image includes the freedom to make a choice. Only Satan would take away that freedom; Yahweh never would. And besides, what pleasure or enjoyment would He derive from soulless creatures?

THE ECONOMY OF BLOOD

Let's leave Abraham here and look at this from another angle. Going back to Adam we can see how Yahweh interacts with people in different ways. Adam had no rules to follow at first because there was no sin at the time. But once sin came in to corrupt His creatures, Yahweh required blood sacrifices for His contact with humans. He would dispense His fellowship to the household for those who dealt with their sins by slaying a lamb or a goat and offering it on an altar. This was His *economy* – His way of dealing with human beings at that time. Sin forced Him to change the way He treated His human creatures. At first, He walked and talked with the original couple in the evening, but they ruined all that. Still, Yahweh wanted fellowship, so He introduced blood sacrifices into the equation, and that allowed His direct speaking, His presence, His fellowship to continue.

But Cain refused to go along, and the Word says,

“And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord” (Genesis 4:16).

That opened the door to extreme evil on the Earth, until Yahweh couldn't stand it anymore and had to destroy it by water once again. Only Noah, his wife, and their three sons with their wives survived. Eight souls! Satan had come that close to thwarting Yahweh's plans. But *“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord”* (Genesis 6:8). Either Noah was looking in the Lord's eyes and found grace or Yahweh was looking at Noah and extended grace to him and his. Either way eight souls came through the flood to restart the human race.

This was the end of the first economy, a word that means Yahweh's way of dealing with human

beings. Let's say that creation is like a house and that Yahweh is the master of the house. Humanity occupies the house and is under the care of the master who dispenses what the household needs at any given time. This is the meaning of the Greek *oiknomea*, the English "economy."

THE ECONOMY OF PROMISE

With Abraham, Yahweh's direct speaking increased. Through their many conversations, Abraham became the friend of Yahweh and Yahweh was able to make many promises to him which have persisted even to this day (2 Chronicles 20:7). We can label this dispensation, or economy, "*the economy of promise.*" This is why.

"Hebrew" means "river crosser." In Abraham's lineage was a man named Eber the "river crosser." When Yahweh called Abraham out of Babylon, his obedience required him to cross over the Euphrates River on his way to the promised land. After years in the land and after many episodes of obeying Yahweh, Abraham earned the name "Abram the Hebrew," a tribute to his great ancestor and his own obedience. People knew him as "the river crosser."

As the obedient river crosser, Abraham secured many promises from Yahweh regarding his family and future. He heard seven promises in his first conversation in Genesis 12:1-3. After he settled in the good land, Yahweh came to him with more promises concerning him and his seed – they would become slaves, they would sojourn four hundred years in Egypt, he would die a peaceful death, and his seed would occupy the promised land. Unfortunately, following this set of promises Abraham sired Ishmael.

After the birth of Ishmael, Abraham suffered mightily because he hadn't trusted Yahweh for his promised son. Yahweh disappeared and went quiet for thirteen years. When you consider how Yahweh conveys Himself on words and the consistency of His conversations with Abraham, what must have Abraham felt during that time? What kind of depression overcame him we can only imagine. What kind of sucking vacuum characterized his life? He surely knew Yahweh was displeased, and maybe would never return despite all the promises. Abraham just didn't know.

However, Yahweh did not forsake His servant. He came again to Abraham, but this time it would cost Abraham dearly, not because of judgment, but because of love. Genesis 17:1-8 tells us that after vanishing for thirteen years Yahweh returned to Abraham with another set of seven promises, all beginning with "I will:"

. . . make my covenant between Me and you;
. . . multiply you exceedingly;
. . . make you exceeding fruitful;
. . . make nations of you;
. . . establish my covenant between Me and you and your seed;
. . . give unto you and to your seed . . . the land;
. . . be their God.

However, these promises come with a huge obligation on Abraham's part – he had to undergo surgery. The flesh he used to sire Ishmael had to suffer by cutting, a constant reminder that human strength had to undergo reduction by circumcision and to submit to Yahweh and His will. This was not a metaphorical cutting, but a literal, physical cutting signifying a profound truth in Abraham's relationship with Yahweh – human strength and ability had to be eliminated to allow Yahweh full access and use of the human vessel. It was from this position of weakness and dependence that Abraham produced the promised son Isaac.

From Isaac followed Jacob, and from Jacob twelve sons and the nation of Israel – Jacob's name after a lifetime of divine work (interventions) on his life. A brief look here at the following example will reveal Yahweh's direct speaking to him.

Jacob was a real character, not in the good sense. He was a conniver, and he tricked his brother out of something priceless. Years later, the night before he was about to meet his retribution, the Lord came to him as an angel for an all-night wrestling match. Jacob was so strong, so stubborn, so determined that neither man prevailed. The morning after that match Jacob acquired a new name – Israel – and the Lord touched Jacob's strongest part, his thigh, and weakened it permanently, a condition Jacob had to live with the rest of his life as a reminder of how strong his human strength was and how the Lord dealt with it.

Yahweh always moves on language, depositing Himself into human affairs at every turn. Many of His words regarded promises, the leading characteristic of the economy of promise extending from Abraham to Moses and the Ten Commandments.

It is here that many Christians need a big dose of clarity regarding the Lord's people Israel. By selecting Israel as His own special people, Yahweh is giving notice that everything He does and will do in His dealings with humanity will, in some very important way, involve Israel. We simply cannot understand history unless this fact is firmly established in our minds.

Our 74 years show the career of the Messiah, the demise of Israel, and the rise of the predominately Gentile body of Christ. These are game-changing events that exalt the 74 years far above any other period. At the end of the 74 years, the Jewish Temple is in ruins, the city overthrown, and the children of Israel in the process of dispersion from their land. But never think Israel is finished or replaced. Far from it. When the body of Christ finishes its course and is taken off the Earth during the resurrection of the righteous (or in the call upward), Israel's interrupted history will resume and after seven tough years will consummate in the millennial kingdom over which she will rule. This will fulfill the promise made to Abraham before the nation ever existed. The point is: do not disparage or diminish Yahweh's people. Bless them and you will be blessed. Curse them and be cursed.

Never was language more evident than in Yahweh's dealings with humans through Moses. This was Yahweh at His most active and most outward. His speaking and acting upon the people enslaved in Egypt reveals His intimate concern for them. He displayed His power through many signs and wonders and miracles to and through Moses to prod the people to follow and obey Him. He also intervened in Pharaoh's life ten times, until, finally, he let the people exit to the wilderness. In the wilderness, free will of the people raised its ugly head. had unleashed on the

world. Rather than be grateful for deliverance from slavery, the nation grumbled constantly. For forty years they groused and balked, even though Yahweh led them by a pillar of fire by night and pillar of cloud by day. Did that impress them? Maybe at first, but only until they got hungry and started clamoring for food. They were nonstop trouble.

THE ECONOMY OF LAW

After wandering many years in the wilderness, Yahweh introduced a massive change in His dealings with His people – He gave them the law, beginning with the Ten Commandments. This law was Yahweh written down on tablets of stone and on parchment. Yahweh knew the people were hopelessly contrary and needed a schoolmaster to demand and specify obedience to His instructions. With it came an elaborate sacrificial system guided by the priesthood. This was a sea change from the economy of promise. This we call *the economy of law*. Obedience to the law would issue in the kingdom of Messiah. This signals a change in Yahweh’s method of speaking. He hereafter confined most of His speaking to the leaders of the people, and that speaking was recorded for future reference.

In the law are Yahweh’s direct words to Moses put in language and codified. His thoughts and plans and aspirations for the people are there to convey His life and nature and purpose. By these words, the Israelites would know who their God was and what His plans were. There was permanent light on the Earth because Yahweh’s timeless words were written in the scrolls and tablets.

As privileged as Israel was, they were still disobedient and immoral. He had delivered them from Egypt, nursed them through the wilderness, brought them to the promised land, given Himself to them in the law, convinced them with signs and wonders, and would they fall on their faces in gratitude? Hardly! They preferred to worship idols instead of the invisible One they couldn’t see except by faith, though He was apparent everywhere. Their history in the land was checkered to say the least. Designed to be a kingdom of priests, the people preferred a king, though thoroughly warned of the pitfalls ahead for them. Saul was terrible; David was great and cleared the land of the foreign enemies and wrote most of the praising and prophetic Psalms. Solomon started out well, built the temple, prayed all the right things, and then cratered; leaving in his wake a handful of good kings and a bunch of worthless leaders that eventually split the nation in two. It was a sad mess that led to the destruction of the temple and the city and the exile of the people into foreign lands. It was so pathetic that it drove Yahweh to declare they were not even His people any longer. His speaking to the obstinate people came mainly through the prophets until even that faded away into dreadful silence. The promised land passed to the Babylonians, then to the Persians, then to the Greeks, and finally to the Romans.

When the so-called Old Testament ended circa 400 BC with the writing of Malachi, the promise of a Messiah King and a kingdom encompassing the Earth was in play awaiting the nation to take control of the land, the city, and the temple. During the span between Malachi and the birth of Messiah, Israel endured oppression from the Greek Empire and the Roman Republic and Empire. They threw off Greek rule and were independent for about a century beginning in 164

BC until the Romans subjugated Judea in 63 BC. The Romans allowed the Jews to practice their religion, including temple worship, while keeping a lid on Jewish society in general.

Before we discover how events played out for the favored nation, let's unlock a treasure for which every Christian should be thankful. There is divine truth, hidden like a vein of gold in scripture, that reveals the way Yahweh moves through human history and how He changes methods of dealing with humans. When we know this secret, we can align our lives accordingly and live under His blessing. We no longer must guess what the Bible is saying and to whom. Confusion walks; context reigns. When the written Word is clear, our minds are clear, our spirits are strong, and our commitment to Christ can be rock solid.

The enemy of our souls fears the Word of God. He knows the power of words. He witnessed the universe materializing through speaking. He knows the written Word describes his end through words. In Revelation 20:12, John says: "And the dead were judged by the things which were WRITTEN in the scrolls." He shudders at the Word, especially when that Word is clear and understandable to the Lord's children. They know their place in creation; they know their place in His plan; they know how to conduct themselves in regular life and in life with other saints; they are not surprised by world events; they know their Lord and His ways; they are not influenced by the world; they know how history ends; and they know how to prepare for it. In other words, they are unshakeable and have peace of mind because their minds are filled with the Word and their minds are set upon Him.

This is why we need to understand the written Word. If we can't understand it, we won't devote ourselves to it and little of the above will be practical in our lives and we'll be tossed about, never anchored, always uncertain. I hope this booklet will help turn things around and give the Word its prominent place in the hearts of His people.

This ends the prelude to the task at hand – to explore and explain the ultimate segment in human history. More happened to change the course of the world in this 74-year period than in any other, hands down.

HUMBLE BEGINNING

This exciting segment of time (4 BC to 70 AD) was by far the most profound, unique, and intriguing in all of world history. Nothing else comes close. And for one reason: Within those parameters the Messiah of Israel was born; lived His life; ministered to the children of Israel; gathered around Him twelve disciples; died as the Lamb of Yahweh; resurrected from the dead; and ascended to the right hand of His Father.

That's a rather bold statement considering how many 74-year segments make up history. But consider how much is packed into the time between the Lord's birth in 4 BC and the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70AD.

- The birth of Israel's Messiah circa 4BC
- The life of Israel's Messiah, Jesus

- The ministry of Jesus
- The selection and training of the twelve disciples
- The death and burial of the Lamb of God in 30AD
- The resurrection of Jesus
- The ascension of Jesus
- The descent of the Holy Spirit
- The emergence of the “little flock” congregations
- The inclusion of Gentiles (Cornelius and his household) in salvation
- The conversion of the apostle to the Gentiles (Saul)
- The continual and final rejection of Messiah by Israel’s leaders
- The temporary setting aside of Israel
- The unveiling of the mystery of the grace of God and the body of Christ
- The compilation of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures
- The Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70AD

By themselves these are world-altering events. Together they make up my premise: this period in history stands far above any other in importance to Earth and heaven. A firm grasp of these 74 years will elevate our view of our activity on this Earth, and cause us to live meaningful and fruitful lives, without confusion and doubts, and with utmost confidence.

THE YOUNG BOY

The children of Israel possessed the promise that they would rule the Earth in the millennial kingdom. For that promise to be fulfilled they had to have a king to rule over them and a sacrifice to cleanse them from wickedness, both individually and corporately. Their Messiah would satisfy both requirements.

Israelites were living in their land of promise as subjects of Rome, and for the first time since Moses, they were rid of idols. Their experience as exiles in Babylon had purged the nation of foreign gods. They had just passed through 90 years of having jurisdiction of the land, having thrown off the yoke of Greece and the evil Antiochus IV, desecrator of their temple. But their freedom was short-lived. The Romans rose up and conquered the Greek Empire, including the land of Israel. So, when Jesus arrived in incarnation, Israel was the feeling boot of Rome firmly planted on her neck and she resisted it at every opportunity. She detested Roman occupation of her land and proved herself a difficult people to govern. But the Romans kept the land secure from foreign invaders and that gave Jesus a politically peaceful life and unrestricted movement. He was free to present Himself to Israel as the prophesied Messiah.

For four hundred years before Messiah came, Israel heard no word, no sign, saw no wonder, no miracle. They sat in darkness with no apparent divine activity. It was the second 400-year test of their faith in Yahweh, the Egyptian slavery being the first. The second test, after Malachi, seemed hopeless and the heavens seemed like brass. At this bleak low point in Israel’s history, the universe stirred with anticipation. Angels sat up and paid rapt attention. Yahweh became active again and began to move.

His stirring began around 4 BC at the end of King Herod's life when Israel's Messiah was born. Angels threw a party! Light! Sounds! Proclamations! Pure excitement! Heaven had come to Earth, and all was alive and different and full of light! Even foreign dignitaries came to see what it was all about.

Looking back on the whole process, every step of the way was agonizingly difficult for Mary and Joseph. The Lord's life itself was fraught with danger. Making the trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem was hard enough, but adding a pregnancy was brutal. Plus, there was no place to stay except in a stable. Once Jesus was born the evil Herod tried to kill what he saw as a competing king. It was a close call, but the warning angel and cooperating Joseph saved the child by fleeing to Egypt.

After this the record goes dark except for Jesus' circumcision and the brief story of 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple. At age 26, Jesus began His ministry to Israel with a tepid reception from the leaders but joyful acceptance by the people. Three years later, Jewish leadership in concert with a feckless Roman governor conspired to destroy the Son of Man. They beat Him raw, attached Him to a pole by pounding a spike through His wrists over His head, jammed a spear into His side. Only one disciple out of twelve stayed with Him. He returned by resurrection and spent His remaining time on Earth training His disciples before ascending to His Father.

The Messiah came into the world with very little recognition except for some astronomers (whose knowledge probably originated with Daniel) from Babylon who followed the King's star to a backwater town called Bethlehem. Only a few in the Temple knew who He was.

They named the child Jeshua after the famous leader who led the people into the promised land after the death of Moses. We know him as Joshua, one of two faithful spies who had to spend forty valuable years in the wilderness with a rebellious people unwilling to enter the promised land despite his urging.

Jesus grew up with at least six siblings – four brothers and two or more sisters (Mark 6:3). His dad was a carpenter, and He was known as a carpenter, a tradesman, a man who worked with His hands and was used to hard work, able to negotiate with demanding and fickle customers. His brothers may have worked for Him in the business, honing Him to live with twelve disciples.

Such was His background before He began His three-year ministry around 26 AD, at the age of 30, the age when Jewish priests began service in the temple.

THE MAN'S MINISTRY

True to His speaking strategy, Yahweh returned, not in the booming voice of Sinai, not in fire or thunder, but in a distant voice of a humble man crying out in the wilderness next to the Jordan River. John the baptizer signaled the return of Israel's divine Speaker, making him (John) the final prophet before the Son. John spoke loud and clear – "Behold, the Lamb of God!" – calling Israel to repentance in anticipation of the King and the kingdom promised to them years before. This radical forerunner introduced Jesus to Israel as the Lamb of God – proof that His mission

was to end in death.

Through the baptizer Yahweh presented His Son to Israel for a three-year examination of His worthiness to bear their sins. Not only did the Messiah come as king, but He also came as the sacrifice of Yahweh in fulfillment of all the animals slain in the past under Moses for the sins of the people.

John baptized Him in the Jordan River, itself a departure from the Jewish way of Temple practice. Of course, so was John, the antithesis of a religious Jew with his perfectly ordered robes and shawls and headdress. John wore a camel hide for clothes, ate honey and locusts for food, and slept under the starry sky for a roof. He called out for Israel to repent because their King and His kingdom was at hand. Everything about John was offensive to the pretentious Jewish leaders, whom he called snakes. He took his job seriously and cut the way through the jungle of Judaism hijacked by the Pharisees and Sadducees. Only the commoners responded to His message. That was fine with John.

Jesus was more than a humble tradesman. He was even more than a King. He was the Word of God. All of Yahweh's thoughts and plans, the great flood of information coalesced in a single man who is called the Word of God. This man spoke! For three plus years He spoke, releasing into the world the divine life and nature of the Triune God. Yahweh meant for these words to be heard, recorded, dispersed and understood. But truth is hard to take, and Jesus spoke nothing but truth. That was too much for the Jewish elite, who saw in Him a competitor for the peoples' hearts and minds. John the scribe and disciple, not the baptizer, wrote later that His own people "received Him not."

HIS MEN

This was the scene when Jesus began to call around Him His band of followers. The battle was set – Jesus versus religion, a gutted form of Judaism that featured a corrupt priesthood profiting from illegal commerce in the Temple. It was into this odious mix of Roman oppression and Jewish corruption that Jesus entered, bearing the task of drawing His people to the truth. He succeeded with the people. They felt His blessed healing hand and heard His comforting voice and soon turned into multitudes wherever He went. The leadership? Far from it. They hated Him and sought every opportunity to get rid of Him, not knowing that in their eagerness and passion to destroy Him and to protect their position, they were handling Yahweh's Passover Lamb. Though this examination had to be done at the hands of legitimate priests, Yahweh was not happy. Some have likened the tearing of the thick curtain in the Temple from top to bottom to the tearing of the garment in ancient Israel by a grieving father. This was Yahweh expressing His sorrow over His Son's treatment at the hands of His own people. Only their repentance and water baptism could assuage Yahweh's grief. Again, many common Jews responded, the leadership did not and turned vicious.

His ministry sought out the poor, the sick, the destitute. He never turned aside the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He healed them; He fed them; He raised them from the dead; He cast out their demons; He comforted them. They viewed Him as one of their own, since He was reared by a tradesman and was known as the son of the carpenter. They loved Him. The leaders did not.

THE GRAND PROCLAMATION

During His ministry Jesus gathered His disciples in northern Galilee (Matt. 16:13-20) close to Mt. Hermon where the Jordan River originates, and where, according to the heathen, the entrance to the underworld (Hades) existed. That Jesus brought the apostles to this place is not a mistake or coincidence. It's as if Jesus wanted to get as close to Satan as possible so His enemy could hear every word. It was in this setting that He spoke a simple, sage, and enduring word. Here's the conversation:

Who do men say that the Son of Man is?

And they said, Some say John the Baptizer; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

He said to them, But who do you say that I am?

Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my ekklesia; and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Greek *ekklesia* is a word that has erroneously been translated "church." It has no religious connotation, but it simply means a called out gathering. It could be a city council meeting, or a football stadium full of fans called together for a game; or Israel called out of Egypt to gather in the wilderness. Any assembly for any purpose defines *ekklesia*.

The most vital of all is the Lord's *ekklesia*, or assembly of believers, and it began when in Matthew 16 Jesus asked His disciples,

"Whom do men say that I am?"

Peter was quick to reply:

"You are the Christ (the Messiah) the Son of the Living God."

That was, of course, the right answer, to which Jesus added:

"And I say also unto you, that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My ekklesia."

Upon the revelation that He was the Son of God, He promised to build His congregation. What He did not say was that His *ekklesia* was Jewish only and separated from Gentiles. It was not plural but rather singular. With two antagonistic people groups – Jewish and Gentile – how would He accomplish this? These are simple words, with an eternal promise:

However, it was not enough that the little flock congregations popped up throughout the empire who genuinely loved their Messiah. The religious leadership was stubborn and rebellious, and continued to resist their Savior King "David," Jesus of Nazareth.

Though Jesus was the incarnation of the Triune God, the leadership of Israel never did accept Him, and they were the key component of the nation's future. Only one member of the Sanhedrin (the governing body) – Nicodemus – became a follower, and that a bit tepidly at first, but when he helped bury Jesus' body it was in full view, and that act probably ended his religious career. Of the ruling elite, only Gamaliel had any sense about him, and it's not certain that he was anything other than a highly respected teacher in his own religious school in Jerusalem. So, because Jesus represented a threat to power and status, the leaders monitored Him carefully, trying to undermine Him, resisting Him at every turn, plotting to do away with Him. At all costs, they were about protecting their cushy collusion with the Romans and their sweet commercial arrangement on the Temple grounds that kept them flush.

But Jesus pressed on. He knew the purpose of His incarnation and ministry was to save His people from their wickedness, and to establish the promised prophetic kingdom from the capitol Jerusalem. For this task, Jesus gathered about Him twelve subordinate kings to rule this kingdom. In Matthew 19:28, He explained:

“Verily I say unto you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration (kingdom), when the son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Peter, the rough fisherman, led the apostles. Three were special – Peter, James, and John. Peter wrote two letters and John wrote three plus a biography of Jesus, and the Revelation. Matthew contributed a biography. Satan filled and controlled one disciple; the rest were support and learners. They were a diverse crew for sure, but they changed the world. A sizeable group of disciples and faithful women made up His entourage and provided practical support for His ministry. This is the group that came together about 26 AD in Galilee, a hybrid region of Jews and Gentiles.

The question was: would the leaders of the nation agree to such an interloper like Jesus injecting Himself into their affairs? He would do what He could to convince them, but in the end, it was their choice. His teachings were described as “having authority, not as the scribes.” This inflamed the religious Jews. They were forever trying to catch Him in His words, never successfully but always shamefully.

HIS DEATH

The Jewish leaders were never far away from Jesus no matter where He went. Always listening for a flaw or a misspoken word or a violation of their law, they hounded Him with ill-intentioned questions. Even at the end they never let up. They insisted on another sign to prove His authenticity. He told them they would receive one more sign, the sign of the prophet Jonah. They didn't get it; instead, they pursued His death through a betrayer and a rigged court full of false witnesses. They conspired with the Romans to do their dirty work of hanging Him on a pole until dead.

Can we fathom it? At the very pinnacle of Yahweh's speaking – His speaking in and through His

Son – His own chosen people rejected Him and His message. Not just rejection, but rejection by murder! Yahweh’s own Son murdered by His own people!

The Passover Lamb had to be flawless according to Moses’ law. Of course, the priests didn’t know what they were doing, or why. They were trying to tie capital crimes to Jesus, but all the while they were examining the Lamb of God. Rather than embrace His life as being acceptable for sacrifice, they rejected Him and colluded with the Gentiles to murder Him. Using the Romans, the priests performed the sacrifice and one of their own, a faithful detractor, helped lay Jesus in a new tomb.

It should be said here that Jesus’ death was multifaceted, not just a murder of the innocent Lamb. He truly laid down His life as the sacrificial Lamb, to pay for the sins of human beings. He was our substitute, and without Him, we would have nothing but perdition ahead.

He took care of our sins, but so much more. According to the apostle Paul, there was much more in this fallen universe than our sins. So many things had to be put to death, had to be laid on the one innocent sacrifice to be erased forever. The Father laid on His Son the sum of all negative, contaminated, ruined aspects of creation. Among them:

- Our human nature
- The world system
- Satan, fallen angels, and demons
- Religious systems
- Human governance
- Death

His death was inclusive of everything from Lucifer’s rebellion to the thrusting of Death into the lake of fire. As believers, we are totally free from evil and, if we so choose and so dare, can live in the reality of what Jesus accomplished for us.

After three days and three nights in the Earth, He presented the critical Jews another chance with the most extraordinary and compelling sign of all the signs of His career among them. He rose from among the dead, just like Jonah figuratively did. After three days and three nights in the Earth (like Jonah was in the belly of the sea creature before the poor creature spit him out), Jesus rose from among the dead! For forty days He remained with His apostles before He ascended to the Father, out of sight of Israel. And here is where it gets very interesting.

This Messiah then resurrected and ascended, leaving the work of building His *ekklesia* (assembly) to the Holy Spirit who empowers His followers. The work is now inward because the Lord is exiled to heaven waiting for the nation’s purging and preparation as His bride. Once she is inwardly ready, He will return, marry her, and establish His kingdom. It was all so simple then and is still simple today. Rebellion complicates everything, and Israel is nothing if not rebellious.

Israel’s poor behavior forced the Father to put His favored nation under a 40-year test like their wilderness journey after Egypt. We find this test in the book of Acts, where Yahweh continually

offers the nation salvation, and continually they reject it until the offer is taken away and He sets the nation aside for a future time.

The nation should have sincerely repented in remorse for killing their promised one and should have embraced the blessed of Yahweh. To those Israelites who repented and received this sacrifice, the Lord forgave and cleansed and brought them into His company of believers. Had the nation (leaders) followed and repented of their sins, and especially the sin of slaying their King, a seven-year period (Daniel's 70th week) of trial could have purged them in preparation for the return of their King, their Bridegroom, and for the establishment of His kingdom. This is what should have happened, and everything was in place at that time for it to have happened this way. It did not.

Even the murder of His Son did not turn away mercy from Yahweh. His Son's prayer on the death tree echoed in His ears: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." For three decades after He still provided speaking, signs, wonders, and healings to convince them to repent and embrace their Messiah.

How can we wrap up this section of the narrative? Jesus is so complex with so many angles, all rich with divinity and humanity in equal doses, but let's try anyway. Necessarily, it dominates into the book of Acts, our next segment:

Israel's Messiah was born; escaped death; grew up learning carpentry with His dad; submitted to John's baptism at 30 years; gathered twelve trainees; ministered to the children of Israel with signs and wonders; suffered death as Yahweh's sacrificial lamb; resurrected after three days internment; trained the disciples for 40 days; ascended to the Father; returned as the Spirit at the festival of Pentecost; and captured the soul of His avowed enemy Saul of Taurus in a crucial confrontation. Then Jesus began the greatest project ever undertaken, and we've seen what it is: "I will build my *ekklesia*."

It is well that we suffer through a little repetition, which, in affairs dealing with the Bible, is never time wasted or brain cells lost. It will provide a good segue into the book of Acts.

A RECAP

It wasn't easy to transition from heaven to Earth. As the prophesied Messiah of Israel, Jesus was in enemy territory, and the enemy was aware of His every move. He was at risk of death from the time of His infancy. Should we be surprised? The fact He was even born is a miracle. Consider: Satan from the time of his first rebellion in the ancient past has intended to frustrate Yahweh's twin purposes with human beings, and he goes to extremes to do it. He has tried contamination of the pure human stock with the slimy Nephilim, reducing humanity to eight pure souls who rode the ark.

Satan has tried deception, murder, and conquest. One time in Judah (read 2 Chronicles 22:10-12) during the time of the kings, the line of David (the line through which Jesus would come) came down to one infant boy who had to be hidden in the Temple for six years to survive the mania of

Jezebel's daughter who had killed all but the infant of the royal seed. Jesus was no different than the infant king. When He was an infant, King Herod heard about this newborn king from the magi of Babylon and ordered the slaughter of all the males two and under in the region around Bethlehem. Only Yahweh's intervention and Joseph's obedience saved the child.

What are the prophecies surrounding the incarnated Lamb of God?

- He will be born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2 (Matthew 2:1-5)
- He will be the Son of God – Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 9:6 (John 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:5)
- He will be from the tribe of Judah – Genesis 49:10 (Hebrews 7:14)
- He will be born of a virgin – Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:18-22)
- He will be a prophet like Moses – Deuteronomy 18:15 (John 7:15-17)
- He will be the King of Israel – Zechariah 9:9 (John 12:12-15)
- He will come riding on a donkey – Zechariah 9:9 (Luke 19:28-40)
- He will be rejected – Isaiah 53:3 (John 1:11)
- He will be beaten – Micah 5:1 (Mark 15:19)
- He will be betrayed – Psalm 41:9 (Mark 14:17-20)
- He will be tried and sentenced – Isaiah 53:8 (Mark 15:1-15)
- He will be pierced – Psalm 22:16 (John 19:28-29)
- He will be slain – Isaiah 53:3-10 (Mark 15:33-39)
- His garments will be divided – Psalm 22:18 (John 19:28-29)
- He will be offered vinegar and gall – Psalm 69:21 (John 19:31-36)
- His bones will not be broken – Exodus 12:46 (John 19:31-36)
- He will be our sacrifice – Isaiah 53:5-6 (1 Peter 2:24-25)
- He will be resurrected – Psalm 16:10 (Luke 24:1-7)

74 YEARS CHAPTER TWO

When Jesus turned thirty (the age of priesthood), He began His ministry, starting with baptism at the hand of John the baptizer, His forerunner and herald. The gospel (good news) preached by John was basic: repent and be water baptized because the kingdom was at hand. Jesus and His twelve trainees taught this: Repent and be baptized in water for the remission of sins. This was the gospel of the kingdom and was accompanied by three years of affirming signs and miracles designed to impress, convict, and convert Israel. Had the nation in general and the leaders in particular, obeyed, they would have embraced their King Messiah. This was the thrust of Peter's message at Pentecost after the Holy Spirit made such a dramatic and fiery appearance. He called the Jews wicked murderers for slaying their Messiah. Many were sick to death for what they had done. They repented and were baptized for the remission of such horrible sins against Jesus. It was a wonderful response by these new Christians, whom Jesus had labeled "the little flock" (Luke 12:32), and were those whom Jesus spoke of in Matthew 16:18 when He said to Peter:

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My congregation; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

But the leaders stood firm against the truth. Had they repented as did many of the common people, the nation would have entered the last seven years of her preparation as the bride of Christ, and upon its culmination would have ushered in the 1000-year kingdom of Messiah. Sadly, for Israel it wasn't to be at that time.

Jesus' arrival on the scene brought into sharp focus the cohesive elements of Judaism. These elements were intended for just such a time when the Lamb of God would walk the Earth. The sacrificial system of animal slaughter pointed directly to the ultimate sacrifice of Yahweh's Lamb as payment for the sins of the people and of the world. The Temple was Yahweh's house when it was built, but at Jesus' time had been corrupted by commercial and religious interests. The nation of Israel coalesced around the seven yearly feasts, all of which existed for the coming Messiah who would be the very reality of what the feasts celebrated. Jesus' life and ministry was inextricably entwined with the feasts of Israel.

It's important to put Israel in the proper historical context to understand the timeliness of Jesus' appearance. If you recall Nebuchadnezzar's image of a large, multi-metallic man came to him in a dream that Daniel explained to the king. It was a history lesson of Gentile governments in direct contact with the Lord's people Israel. Each successive form of Gentile government, starting with Nebuchadnezzar's golden head, was superior to the next. Babylon's gold degraded to Medo-Persian silver; and it degraded to Greek brass; and last it degraded to Roman iron, leaving only clay/iron feet for the future. When Jesus was born, Rome controlled the world around the Mediterranean with an iron fist.

The corrupt Jewish elite from the beginning tried to eliminate the Incarnated One. Herod was first up, learning about the young king from the Babylonian astronomers. He issued an edict to kill all the male toddlers in and around Bethlehem. Joseph took Him and His mother to Egypt until Herod was dead and gone. He grew up uneventfully and began His mission at age 30. He caused a stir among the people in a good way and the shameful Jewish leaders colluded with the Romans to murder Him, not realizing that they were, in fact, executing their Passover Lamb who

had proven Himself sinless before the high priest and the Roman governor.

HE DID IT ALL

His death on the tree was the fulfillment of the **Feast of Passover**, whereupon the flawless Lamb was slain for the sins of the people.

The **Feast of Unleavened Bread** was fulfilled the day after the Lamb's death, and it lasted for seven days. The nation was to purge its houses of all leaven – representing the fermenting rot of inward corruption – for seven days. Once the blood of the Lamb was applied to cleanse sin, the nation was obligated to rid itself of the corruption of the heart typified by the leaven. For Jesus the fulfillment was the last supper with His disciples when he offered His body and His blood as the new covenant to His believing people, those who would believe at Pentecost. As His spiritual congregation, they were His new covenant people – the first fruits of the nation – until the nation itself would believe.

The third feast – the **Feast of First Fruits** – was fulfilled on the day after the Sabbath, the day the Lord resurrected. The priests were to wave a sheaf of barley before the Lord, the first grain to ripen. He was the first to ripen in resurrection, and His ascension to His Father fulfilled this feast.

The fourth feast – the **Feast of Pentecost** – happened fifty days later when the Spirit fell on the disciples in Jerusalem in the upper room. The Feast of Pentecost required the priest to wave two wheat loaves before the Lord (Leviticus 23:17). Some believe that those two loaves represent Israel and the body of Christ; however, throughout history Christians tend to take from Israel and make it their own. They can't do that here. The two loaves are the two houses of Israel – Judah and Benjamin, and the ten northern tribes – that split because of idolatry and exile.

Those children of Israel who did receive Jesus, who did experience the fulfillment and reality of the feasts, and who knew regeneration as announced to Nicodemus (John 3) became the fulfillment of this feast. These new believers labored to rid themselves of corruption to follow Jesus, endeavored to live in the reality of the resurrection, and were meeting together when the Spirit gave birth to the congregation of Christ He promised He would build.

Now there are three feasts yet to be fulfilled – the **Feast of Trumpets**, the **Feast of the Day of Atonement**, and the **Feast of Tabernacles** – but would they be fulfilled at that time? Would the nation pass the test of forty years of probation (from 30 to 70 AD) and receive the Messiah? The feasts waited fulfillment by an obedient people. The kingdom waited, and the exiled and waiting King watched from heaven. They had just murdered the Prince of Life. Would they repent in shame and mourn for their Firstborn? This is the question the book of Acts answers, and it covers the bulk of the forty years of probation and testing, from 30 AD to 70 AD.

The setting was in place and history moved forward toward some truly momentous events that touch us directly and personally. The little flock (Jesus' description of believing Jews and Gentiles) have believed in and have embraced their Messiah and await the national leaders to do the same. The second advent of Messiah and His kingdom hinged on this.

From the time of His birth to the middle of His ministry, the focus had been on Him, and rightfully so. There had been no concept among the people that He was anything other than an extraordinary human being, and, to the enlightened, the Son of Yahweh. But when these words flashed forth into the darkness there was a truth expressed that reverberated throughout the universe, even to this day, a truth that makes the forces of darkness shiver with dread. This proclamation revealed that He, the Son of Man, the incarnated Yahweh, was not then, nor ever would be alone. He would always have a select few who would stand and move in concert with Him and in obedience to His word. In this select few These few of the little flock were the mystical enlargement of Himself. But it required a national repentance, not just the remnant, to move Him out of heaven.

After Jesus ascended, His faithful followers gathered (*ekklesia*) in the upper room in Jerusalem. It was there that the Holy Spirit descended upon the participants and created a giant stir with signs and wonders. This drew a large crowd of Jews from all over the empire who were assembled in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. Peter stood up and preached, invoking the prophecy of Joel to explain the phenomenon, and accused the Jews of slaying their Messiah. This pricked their hearts and led them to ask: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” To which Peter answered: “Repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) Three thousand Jews responded to this message and were saved. This began the wonderful journey of the Lord’s promised congregation that would result in the Messiah-ruled millennial kingdom and the bride of Christ.

THE ECONOMY OF THE KINGDOM

The purpose of the *ekklesia* of Jews who responded to Peter’s message was to bring the Messianic kingdom to Earth. Their exiled Messiah waited in heaven for a national response of repentance and shame for what they had done to him. Many in the nation did respond and did repent and were baptized; but the nation, represented by the leadership, rejected Peter’s message. We could say this “kingdom *ekklesia*” (a.k.a. “the little flock”) existed to deliver the kingdom to Israel, its rightful possessor: but everything changed after the rejection.

Rebellion on Israel’s part forced a change in economies. The Lord “dispensed” to His Jewish congregation the Gentiles, represented by Cornelius and his family. Peter had used the keys the Lord had given him to open the way to the kingdom for the Jews; and now he used another key to open the way to the Gentiles to join with the Jews in the little flock assemblies. This was not a different or separate *ekklesia*, but the same with an added dimension. This propelled the emergence of the recently saved apostle to the Gentiles, Saul of Tarsus.

Saul the Pharisee was the chief persecutor of the kingdom (little flock) believers until the Lord Jesus knocked him down near Damascus around two or three years after He ascended. It was a remarkable beginning for a special apostle.

Paul, the chosen apostle to the Gentiles, was the first person saved by grace without works, directly by Jesus. The episode blinded Saul. In this weakened condition, Ananias, though fearful, took Saul and baptized him, though it was after his salvation experience. This baptism,

unnecessary for salvation, was divine sovereignty. It included Paul in the economy of the kingdom so he could take his place with the twelve in reaching Israel first, and then the Gentiles according to the Lord's commission.

There is some resistance among Christians concerning the distinction between the remnant saints and the body of Christ. I don't know why. Everything in our universe has a beginning at some point in time and space. Humanity as we know it began with Adam. The nation of Israel began with Abram the Hebrew. Jesus began with a physical conception in Mary's womb. The little flock began at Pentecost in response to Peter's preaching. Is it too farfetched to say that the body of Christ was added into the *ekklesia* (that began at Pentecost) with Jesus' confrontation with His enemy Saul? He was after all saved by grace and not by works, and in response to Jesus' direct words to him. This was unprecedented. Read carefully Paul's explanation:

However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (1 Timothy 1:16)

If indeed Paul is a pattern, should we not ask a pattern of what? He told Timothy he was the first to whom Jesus showed "all longsuffering." Well, no one can dispute the awful legacy of Saul the oppressor in his pre-conversion life. He had gone well beyond the Lord's warning of blaspheming the Holy Spirit by incarcerating and consenting to the murder of those Christians upon whom the Spirit fell at Pentecost. And yet the Lord extended to him "all longsuffering" in converting him and calling him into His service. This was unprecedented because this was Yahweh's new way of dealing with people. This was no longer an economy of works (repentance and baptism), but of grace. No one needed grace more than Saul.

That a man who had violated the limits set by the Lord in the economy of the kingdom could be tapped as Jesus' bond slave in the economy of the mystery was a powerful demonstration of pure grace on the Lord's part. Saul became the first person to receive salvation by grace and not by works. It was an altogether new breakthrough, a unique way of salvation never known or experienced in the past. Remember, Jesus himself initiated this salvation, and by it ushered in a new economy. Could this have been the beginning of the Lord's body in seed form? If not here, where? Because of the pattern laid down by Paul, we who follow his pattern are called and regenerated by the glorified Head himself. This new method of salvation is distinct from that of the little flock. Two economies, each with their own unique salvation. One by faith/works (repent and be baptized); one by faith alone (For by grace are you saved through faith).

Though Saul's salvation experience was so different from what preceded him, there does not appear to be a definite line of demarcation between him and Peter in the years leading up to the watershed year of 62 AD. The features of the kingdom economy – supernatural sign gifts healings, miracles, tongues, casting out of demons, etc. designed to convict Israel – would persist into the third decade of the forty-year trial of the nation. In fact, Paul himself exercised these gifts in his ministry and on his journey to Rome. The Lord selected him as the apostle to the Gentiles, and as such he preached another gospel - the gospel of grace without works. Peter's gospel demanded faith/works - repentance and water baptism. Not Paul's. He wrote,

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13).

Take note that these brothers were not in conflict. Peter's ministry was to the Jews and his message was always repentance and water baptism for salvation and for the kingdom. Paul always tried to reach his Jewish brethren, first visiting the Jewish synagogue in every city and arguing for their embrace of the Messiah. Peter's ministry always included signs and wonders, and until the final rejection in 62 AD, Paul's ministry did too. He was still operating under the arc of the economy of the kingdom. It's not surprising that miracles followed him as signs to the Jews. The kingdom economy would finally be set aside in Acts 28 in 62 AD at the nation's final rejection of her Messiah and the kingdom offer. Signs and wonders and miracles ceased at that point. Paul could not even heal his closest co-workers after this.

THIRTY-YEAR STRUGGLE

The book of Acts contains the bulk of the 40-year probation period for the nation – 30 AD to 62 AD. Profane history fills in the final eight years of Yahweh's longsuffering. That period includes Paul's temporary release from his first incarceration, Peter's death; Paul's second imprisonment and death; Israel's revolt against Rome in 66 AD; the siege and overthrow of Jerusalem; the total destruction of the Temple; and the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora (dispersion to the nations).

It is the beginning of Yahweh's punishment upon His chosen people. "To whom much is given, much will be required." Yahweh gave them His Son and they abused Him. They are still paying for that sin and will continue to pay until the Son puts His feet on the Mount of Olives to save them from annihilation.

The substance of the book of Acts is the continuation of Jewish hatred for the Man and His believers. Even though Yahweh's patience for this attitude waned badly, He couldn't dismiss His Son's prayer when hanging near death – "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do."

Acts painfully chronicles the decline of the favored nation, leaving us eight years short of her destruction in 70 AD. The rejection of the Judean Jews began with the death of Stephan in chapter 7 and ends with the rejection by the scattered Jews in Rome at the end of the book. Once those two decisions came down, Yahweh had no choice but to set Israel aside for a time, and now it has been a long time. That interruption cost Israel dearly: the 7-year purging of Israel, the return of the King, the destruction of Antichrist and his armies, the establishment of the millennial kingdom, the evangelization of the Gentiles, the marriage of the bride and Bridegroom, the ushering in of a new heaven and new Earth, and the final judgment of evil. Yahweh put all this on hold, and no one knows for how long.

However, for us Gentile dogs, nothing could have been better. The double rejection ushered in a new economy, a new way of divine dealing with people in general and His believers in particular. The economy of the law and the kingdom fell into dormancy and has remained so to this day. I said "dormancy"; it is *not* dead.

Israel's continual rejection caused a major shift in the Lord's treatment of His people Israel. Through Peter the Gentiles entered the kingdom economy, or program. This was an earthquake to the Jews who had long despised the Gentiles (the Roman Empire especially), and now they

had to accept them into their assemblies. A bitter pill indeed! The first Gentile to enter in was a Roman military official representing the hand that directly oppressed them!

To add to their discomfort the Messiah also confronted and converted His worst enemy and made him (a prominent Jew of the ruling sect of the Pharisees) the apostle to these Gentiles. This man Paul received revelations that had been hidden in the Father from before creation. Those visions and Paul's immense knowledge of the law and the prophets brought to the scene surrounding the *ekklesia* a vast treasure of divine light and purpose. Would it be enough to compel Israel to repent? Fat chance.

These brothers – Peter, John, and Paul – are primary in the history of the promised *ekklesia*. The Lord gave the keys of the kingdom to Peter, who used them to open the gospel to Israel at Pentecost, and to open salvation to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. It happened like this.

At the Feast of Pentecost after the resurrection, those Jews who obeyed Peter's message of repentance and water baptism became at that moment Jesus' own assembly of which He had prophesied in Matthew 16. But compared to the Jews of the nation, it was a small company looking for the coming King. Rightfully, Jesus called them the "little flock." But this remnant did not include the leadership of the nation, and until it did, there would be no king or kingdom. The offer remained to the nation until the forty years of probation expired.

When the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea murdered Stephen around 34 AD, the Lord saw the continuation of the perilous trajectory of the nation. He sent Peter to the Roman Cornelius, a Gentile, and used a key (Matthew 16:19) to open the way of salvation to him and his household. Peter brought Cornelius into the kingdom economy begun at Pentecost. The door to salvation swung open for the Gentiles and they became members of the little flock, the remnant of believers.

The inclusion of this Gentile into the *ekklesia* was a game changer for Israel. What had been the exclusive domain of Jews now included an uncircumcised Gentile, and a Roman official at that. This was surely the Lord dispensing into His *ekklesia* a brand-new feature, and an uncomfortable one to the believing Jews. It was the harbinger of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

THE TROUBLED CAPTAIN

Who could even begin to describe this colorful apostle? I'm not sure where the term "putting your foot in your mouth" originated, but Peter would be a good place to begin research. How many times we see this disciple fall from a mountaintop into a "slough of despond" because of something he said without thinking. But quit was never in him. He could waffle, but he would never quit the fight.

The gospel accounts have Jesus calling him out of his fishing boat with two others of his business partners. In John's gospel Peter's brother Andrew convinces him about Jesus. That could indicate a couple of encounters with Jesus were necessary to capture him.

As far as we know, Peter was the only married disciple, and the only one who headed up a business. He was a leader of his family and of men. Jesus tapped him to lead His team, knowing well the disciples were in for a wild ride.

The record proves all of this, starting with the healing of Peter's mother-in-law in his own home.

In every list of disciples Peter came first. This indicates Jesus' confidence in him. His credential as undisputed team leader came when he alone walked to Jesus during a driving storm on the lake. Though the others had much to criticize in Peter, they would never forget how fear kept them in the boat. Not Peter. He defied his own fear and trusted Jesus, at least for a while.

Once when Jesus spoke a parable and no one understood the meaning, Peter piped up and asked Him the meaning. It wasn't a particularly gentle answer, and I think the others were glad Peter took the heat.

In the most famous interaction between Jesus and Peter, Peter went from heaven to Hades in a few short moments. It happened this way.

Before the Lord's transfiguration, Peter answered the Lord's question about who He was. According to the Father's revelation, Peter boldly answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus told Peter he was a stone and upon the rock of that revelation He would build His *ekklesia*. Then the Lord shared how He must go to Jerusalem and die, but Peter would have none of it and rebuked the Lord for such thoughts. Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan." What did Peter think of that? Did he grasp the enormity of the rebuke? I wonder because six days later when Elijah and Moses appeared in the transfiguration with Jesus, Peter offered the suggestion of building a tabernacle for each man. Even as he made the ill-advised suggestion, the Father interrupted him mid-sentence – "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!"

This is Peter – extremely up or desperately down, riding his emotions like a worn-out steed. He is a walking, talking object lesson for the other apostles, but not just negatively. At one point in His ministry, Jesus talked of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Many of His followers said, "No way!" and took off. Jesus asked the twelve if they, too, would leave. Peter, as captain of the team, played his part well and replied, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." A perfect answer to hold his men together. Only then did Jesus open the truth of the Spirit to destroy any thought of cannibalism.

Peter also shined when Jesus washed His apostles' feet. Peter balked and said he wasn't worthy. Jesus said, "Okay. Then you have no part of me." To which Peter responded, "Then Lord, wash all of me."

One time he made the bold claim that even if others were offended by Jesus, he would *never* be offended by Him. Jesus then told Peter of his coming triple denial, and Peter, rather than be humbled, doubled down and said he would *never* deny Him, even if it meant dying with Him. Never say never, Peter.

Then in Jesus' hour of need in the garden before His arrest, Peter, James, and John fell asleep

three times instead of keeping watch. But that was only the beginning of Peter's troubles that night. Just as Jesus predicted, Peter denied knowing Him while His trial was underway. Not just once, but three times. At this low point in his relationship with Jesus, he went out of the courtyard and wept bitterly. The rough and rugged fisherman was reduced to tears. Who would have guessed?

At breakfast on the beach before the ascension, Jesus made sure Peter was on board and all in. He asked him if he loved (*agape* – highest) Him more than the other brothers. Peter answered, “Lord, you know I love (*phileo* - lesser) you.” Jesus tried a second time to lift Peter to a higher level, but no change. Jesus tried a third time, but instead of *agape*, He used *phileo*. Peter answered with *phileo* for the third time. Not his best performance.

The last words between Jesus and Peter brought him more exposure. Jesus admonished him to “Follow Me”; but Peter diverted his attention to John and asked what would happen to him. Jesus, in so many words, said “Peter, it's none of your business. You follow Me.”

This snapshot of Peter reveals a man not unlike us. Flawed, emotional, confused but devoted to his Lord. There is more to see about Peter, but we'll let his interactions with others speak for themselves.

In the kingdom economy Peter and the apostles laid upon the believers certain requirements for salvation – repentance and water baptism (Acts 2:38) – and certain requirements for securing that salvation, like perseverance (2 Peter 1:10). Endurance and faithfulness were necessary all the way to the end of a person's life. This is a big distinction between Peter and Paul. The original gospel to ancient Israel required the hard work of keeping the law. After Pentecost Peter's gospel required repentance and water baptism and continued faithfulness to the Messiah. Animal sacrifices in the temple were fulfilled and terminated at Jesus' death. Faith in Messiah's work and endurance to the end was critical to the believers, because there was no assurance of salvation under that economy.

For example, Judas Iscariot did not endure. Ananias and Saphira did not endure. The wealthy young ruler did not endure. Many disciples who followed Jesus and were offended by His requirement to eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6) did not endure. Those who failed to abide in the vine of life (John 15) did not endure and were cut off and burned. There were requirements to endure to the end and to abide in the vine of Jesus to escape being burned and discarded. This is Peter's gospel of the kingdom, a gospel of conditions. Those Christians who think they are destined to inherit Israel's kingdom would do well to consider carefully the requirements for participation, or the punishment for failure. They might not be so eager.

What was the purpose of the *ekklesia* of Jews who responded to Peter's message? Their exiled Messiah waited in heaven for a national response of repentance and remorse for what they had done to Him. Many in the nation did respond and did repent and were baptized; but the nation generally, represented by the leadership, rejected Peter's message. This “kingdom *ekklesia*” existed to deliver the kingdom to Israel, its rightful possessor. But would the remnant assemblies be enough to tip the scales without help from the leadership of the nation? To answer that

question is to understand the book of Acts and Israel's probation. By studying the dynamics between the leading characters, we can confidently say the answer is a resounding "NO!"

WHOM THE LORD LOVED

John was a major player in the Acts period but was hardly mentioned. However, his writings (written during this period) provide a clear window into his ministry and provide the possible context for the activities of this disciple whom the Lord loved.

A severe persecution arose following the martyrdom of Stephen and scattered the Judean Christians throughout the empire. I think within a few years after this dispersion, the apostle John received his revelation of the end times (the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy – 9:24-27) preceding the establishment of the millennial kingdom. John knew well that a time of trial and purging and preparation of the bride of Christ had to precede the kingdom and the return of the King. This seven-year time of trouble is called the Tribulation and John's revelation deals exclusively with it.

It is critical for Christians to understand that nothing in John's Revelation concerns the body of Christ simply because, if I'm right about the early date of writing (around 40 AD), it didn't exist when he wrote it. But that doesn't hinder many Christians from jumping into that which belongs exclusively to Israel. Some Christians even think that the Lord ended His relationship with His chosen people at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD– a diabolical doctrine that destroys the integrity of scriptures. It leaves Daniel's prophecy incapable of fulfillment. It destroys all the promises made to Abraham in the beginning and should be rejected vigorously. It also dismisses the historical fact that Israel became a nation state in 1948 and gained jurisdiction over Jerusalem in 1967 – two facts that show the Lord laying the groundwork for the future.

John likely knew many of the saints who had to flee for safety from Judea at the death of Stephen. The Spirit instructed him to send the Revelation to those seven assemblies in Asia, and John was no doubt eager to obey, especially after seeing that the visions pertained to the end of time prior to the establishment of the kingdom. The saints had to be ready for what was coming. This makes the timing of his writing crucial to the context of the two decades that follow Jesus' death – 30 through 50 AD.

Many scholars think John wrote the Revelation in 95 AD or in 67 AD. I protest. Surely John was deeply concerned for those scattered believers of the remnant, perhaps because he knew many of them personally. He received from the Lord the commission to write the Revelation to seven of the assemblies in Asia (modern day Turkey). His message: "Get prepared! Overcome the pagan, evil world! Everything is in place and ready to transpire. All the players are living right now and are ready to fulfill Daniel's prophecy." And it was not a hollow admonition. The Roman emperors at that time could have fulfilled the role of the Prince, and the Beast - the Antichrist – just as Daniel predicted. There was in place a one-world government known as the Roman Empire. The nation of Israel had micro jurisdiction over the Temple and Jerusalem under the macro jurisdiction of Rome. The Lord's word in Revelation was valid and vital during the time succeeding Stephen's murder and the persecution of Jewish believers. Everything was ready to

fulfill Daniel's famous prophecy, and John was faithful to present it carefully and urgently.

Is it farfetched to suggest that John wrote the Revelation around 40 AD? I say no. For one thing, there is no date given in Scripture for the Apocalypse, or Revelation. So, who's to say? Bible historians are all over the map, though none venture this early date of 40 AD. For another, the letters are obviously Jewish. Look at all the Jewish elements in the seven letters (Revelation 2 and 3): angels, repentance, works, lamp stands, synagogues, Balaam, manna, white stone, Jezebel, tribulation, morning star, white raiment, key of David, pillar in the temple, new Jerusalem, power over the nations, rod of iron, etc. Then compare the letters Paul wrote in 62 AD to some of the gatherings in the same region, especially to the Ephesians. There are no similarities at all. It seems obvious to this observer that John wrote to them *before* Paul ever wrote to enlighten them to the truth of the body of Christ. Therefore, it's not out of bounds to suppose John wrote the Revelation when it was most needed to propel the remnant congregations toward the coming kingdom – in the late 30s or early 40s.

What about John's gospel? Israel's final rejection of the kingdom offer in 62 AD (Acts 28) may have inspired him to write, or maybe to change what he had already written or was writing at the time. He did write about the Lord's own people rejecting Him.

He came unto His own and His own did not receive Him (John 1:11).

This gospel is the good news of life, the good news of the divine life, most eloquently expressed by our Lord's perfect human life. As a man He learned how to live His life by drawing upon the life of His Father. He let this life outside of Himself come in to rule His spirit and soul and be expressed through His words and His actions. This is the life that John taught in his writings, particularly in his gospel. He had learned the secret of living according to this life and he was burdened that the remnant saints would do the same. He knew it was the only way the kingdom could be realized. Kingdom people had to learn to live by the life of the King, so thus he wrote. But what he wrote is universal, transcending the two economies – the economy of the kingdom and the economy of the body of Christ. Those who call themselves Christians, whether as the remnant saints of the kingdom economy, or as the body of Christ of the grace economy later to come, must have the experience – the daily experience – of living by another life – the divine life of the Triune Yahweh.

When John wrote his gospel, he surveyed the landscape of the congregations of the believers to whom he wrote his Revelation, and realized what the saints needed for preparation was an intimate exposure of Jesus and a building up with one another as the Lord's assemblies. He did not know the future, but he did know the prophecies. If he wrote his gospel after the national rejection in 62 AD, he must have seen the treacherous path ahead of them. The kingdom was suspended, so what was to motivate them? Would they continue to meet? What would they do in their meetings if their goal of the kingdom was no longer? The king was not coming like they had expected, but in John's gospel, the Spirit *did* come because John was there when He did (John 20:19-22). This fact he had to impress upon the believers.

Another development John may have seen was the influx of Gentiles into the assemblies. They knew nothing but paganism and needed a crash course on who this Jesus was whom they

believed on and embraced. John's gospel served this purpose.

How do we know John wrote his biography to both Jews and Gentiles? The Jewishness is obvious; the Gentile portion is more subtle. There are several hints that make no sense if John were writing strictly to Jews. Why, for instance, would he in 1:41 feel the need to describe the Messiah if his audience was Jewish? They knew precisely who the Messiah was. Why would John explain what the Passover was to any Jew? He did in 6:4. In 5:1 he didn't even bother to name the feast, but in verse 2 he explains Bethesda which every Jew would know. In 9:7 John clarifies "Siloam," of which every Jew was familiar. In 10:22 he tells his readers that the feast of dedication occurred in winter. Why, if he was writing to Jews?

Let's say, based on this evidence, that John was writing to both Jews and Gentiles. Where were these Gentile believers located if not in the remnant assemblies? The body of Christ meetings hadn't gotten off the ground yet. It was a period of transition, and everything was in flux. Jewish believers were understandably anxious, and the Gentiles were pouring in. Paul was under arrest in Rome, and John was trying to keep the saints anchored to Christ, despite events swirling about them. His gospel displays his extraordinary effort.

To claim John was no stranger to Gentiles is not a stretch. In his third letter, addressed to Gaius (according to Acts 19:29 a companion of Paul), he blistered the Greek Diotrophes for misbehavior as an elder, and commended another Greek, Demetrius, for his good report. This shows that Gentiles were taking the leadership, however badly, of some of the meetings. This may have been in Corinth where Gaius began his Christian journey.

All this evidence of John's involvement with Gentiles may help explain the special characteristics of his gospel. It is simple and educational, exactly what Gentile believers needed at this time of transition between the rejection and the rise of the body of Christ.

As to the timing of the writing, we have an important hint. In chapter 1:11 he writes: "and his own received him not." How could John have made that statement *before* the final rejection in 62 AD when the Lord laid aside His chosen nation? It was then that the Lord's own brethren finally and conclusively "received him not." John, then, may have written his gospel *after* the rejection. If that is true, his gospel would have inspired the saints – Jew and Gentile – to move forward into the future regardless how tenuous it was.

John may have known from Paul that a new economy was afoot – an economy that did not distinguish between Jew and Gentile, that held Christ as the Head of the new body. Did his gospel reflect this new knowledge? Why is John's gospel so different from the others? Could John have seen something he had never seen before? We can only speculate, but we do know that the Christ he presented is universally pertinent for all time and for all people.

Paul's hope was that the remnant flock would follow Ephesus' lead and embrace the new economy of the body of Christ. We don't know if the saints did just that, or if they didn't. If they didn't, I don't know how they would have continued meeting. I think the Lord and Paul expected them to move into the new economy without issue and without hesitation.

Did John know the body of Christ was on the horizon? Did he have fellowship with Paul about that? John must have known Paul was the sole recipient and dispenser of the mystery of the body of Christ he wrote about in Ephesians. Could John have read that letter? Maybe. How much did he know about what was coming?

John did not know the future, but he saw what the national leaders had done with the offer of the Messiah and His kingdom. He surely knew that the Lord had suspended the offer and set the nation free of His constraints. That meant nothing but trouble. John knew the little flock was in jeopardy now that the kingdom was suspended. What would they do? Would discouragement set in and destroy what the Lamb's apostles had built up for over thirty years? Would they continue to meet without the motivation of a coming King and kingdom? Now that many of the apostles were gone, who would care for them? Were these questions boiling in John's mind?

Whatever was going on, John knew only a relationship with Jesus could keep them from flying apart, therefore he wrote a most intimate treatise of encouragement, revealing the gentle Galilean who went forth as the Almighty Word in chapter one and ended up as breakfast chef in chapter 21. Here was the perfect Man as the Son of Yahweh. John knew the Christian assemblies all over the empire needed this wonderful person to cling to. So, he presented Him to the anxious saints to strengthen them for the unsettled days ahead.

As Paul knew the Spirit's breath in his writings, so also did John. His gospel is devoted to the divine life and is extremely pertinent to all time. He begins it by saying:

In him was life . . . (John 1:4)

For twenty-one chapters he details the most beautiful human life filled to overflowing with divine life. This wonderful Man was truly the Son of Yahweh.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
(John 1:1)

This beginning word sets the tone for the entire gospel. Jesus was more than a man; He was the embodiment of Yahweh's thoughts. All the notes John penned during his journey with Jesus came down to this: Jesus was Yahweh, and, therefore, Yahweh's thoughts and words. This was critical to grasp at this juncture in history. The saints needed this transcendent view of Jesus to lift their eyes off the devastating effect of the rejection.

Matthew and Mark's writings strengthened the believing remnant in the beginning years when they needed the most help; Luke and John were there in the end after the fatal decision to reject Messiah. Matthew wrote of the king and His kingdom; Mark of the slave of Yahweh doing His work, serving as an example to the saints. Luke with the account of the perfect man and John with the record of the Son of God. The value to posterity (or the next economy) is evident. Now we of the economy of grace can say it, we are so blessed and encouraged knowing such a Savior through the writings of these dear brothers!

Then there is the matter of compiling the writings. Although we don't know and can't know

definitively, consider the possibility that John and Luke, another capable and meticulous scribe, compiled the writings of Matthew, Mark, Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and their own so that those first-century assemblies could go on in the truth. John outlived the destruction of Jerusalem by 25 years, so he was probably the only apostle able to collect and copy the priceless writings that make up our New Testament. If Luke was still alive with John, they conceivably could have colluded to accomplish the noble undertaking.

Without any doubt, if anyone could have been entrusted with the care and safekeeping of the apostles' writings, it would have been John, and possibly with the help of Luke. For argument's sake, let's say both worked together.

Consider this. All the writings were complete and available to them before the overthrow in 70 AD. They knew, as Peter did, that the history and letters and biographies were indeed the Lord's inspired volumes, and can we even think that they would do anything but exercise the utmost care to see to it that they were compiled, copied, and distributed to the assemblies for the saints' consumption, instruction, and practice? One thing is certain, however these writings came into our hands, we surely must admit that the Lord orchestrated it all.

John, the former net-mender, is here in this capacity, "mending nets" to hold the Word of truth for the dear saints. The lone survivor of the twelve apostles fittingly should be the one who gathers the truth from every source and binds it up so that not a single word is lost. This is John the keeper of the truth, the disciple endeared to the Lord Himself.

One more word about John. He was by any standard a responsible man, given to details. Without his gospel, how would we know Jesus called Nathaniel while he was under a tree, but not just any tree, but a fig tree, a type of Israel? Not just were he and his brother James fishermen with Peter, but they mended Peter's nets. Only John tells us how much and what kind of ointment Mary brought to anoint Jesus' feet - one pound of spikenard. He was the only biographer to record the touching scene of Jesus washing His disciples' feet at the last supper they ate together. We would never know the name of the high priest's young servant - Malchus - whose ear Peter cut off with a sword, if not for the pen of gracious John. Without him we would never know that only he stayed at the Lord's side throughout His final ordeal, from start to finish. John alone reports the spearing of Jesus' side, and the blood and water that poured forth from the wound. From him we learn that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea brought one hundred pounds of a blend of myrrh and aloes for the burial. But for John would we ever know about Jesus' face cloth rolled up and resting in its place in the tomb; or the beautiful and inspiring encounter between Jesus and Mary of Magdala; or the first breathing out of the Holy Spirit; or the number of fish (153) Peter dragged to shore before Jesus served the disciples their breakfast He had prepared? This is the apostle John, the young disciple "whom the Lord loved."

PHYSICIAN SCRIBE

Luke, the beloved physician scribe, is certainly worthy of our consideration. Truly, the Lord

placed him to care for his special apostle to the Gentiles, shepherding Paul's final writings and his own as well. Once Nero did his evil work of ending the lives of Peter and Paul, Luke and John *could have* found themselves together in a final collusion of compiling and shepherding the precious, written Word that has come down to us as a timeless treasure. It is a worthy and feasible speculation.

Does anyone really think the Lord would allow His new, inspired writings of the first century to languish? I refuse to accept profane history that says these words lay for nearly two hundred years until Athanasius took up the task of compiling them in the early 300s. This would have put them at risk of being lost or damaged or destroyed. We must concede that Satan would have tried to destroy these writings, for they are the very words of Yahweh, and when Yahweh speaks, He conveys Himself and where Yahweh is, Satan is defeated. These writings were too important to commit to men far removed from the sources and the times of the events. How appropriate it would have been had the Lord committed the compilation of the new scriptures to His two remaining disciples, one of whom He entrusted the care of His own mother. For what other reason would they be the last standing if not for this one purpose? The Word was too vital to be left to anyone but two trustworthy disciples. I see them engaged in a beautiful, if not frenetic coordination hastily collecting the writings before the Jews revolted against Rome in 66 AD and brought in untold chaos. They probably realized a dangerous situation among the people was coming to a head. Once it exploded, what restrictions would the Romans place on Jews, on their assemblies, on their movement throughout the empire? This could hamper their work.

Luke's gospel concerns the Son of Man, a perfect human being. It is appropriate that Luke has this task because he is a physician, a profession dealing with human beings. As a caregiver, he found himself responsible by the Lord's choice with the care of Paul in his later years . In our 74-year period, Luke is a large and vital personage. Though we have nothing from his lips, we have much from his pen, and his pen reveals who he is. Because of his training as a physician, he was attentive to details. His gospel (and Acts) attest to this. His careful treatment of facts made him an indispensable scribe for the Lord. We know much about Paul because of Luke.

UNBENDING

James. Though this man was not as important as the others, he certainly deserves a few words. He was the Lord's flesh brother and elder of the Jerusalem assembly and wrote his small letter of perfectly legitimate kingdom truths to the scattered saints of the dispersion, probably before Peter's encounter with Cornelius. Here are some of his teachings:

You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. (2:24)

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead, faith without works is dead. (2:26)

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.
(1:25)

So speak and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. (2:12)

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (1:12)

Regarding James, here is Luther's ignorance:

“What is the ‘perfect law of liberty?’ The epistle of James however only drives you to the law and its works . . . He calls the law a law of freedom (James 1:25; 4:15), although St. Paul calls it a law of slavery, wrath, death, and sin (Galatians 3:23; Romans 4:15; 7:10).”

Because of the kingdom economy and the remnant gatherings, James' letter was perfectly legitimate. That economy – the gospel of the kingdom – required works for initial salvation – repentance and baptism – and works for continued and final salvation. Peter wrote:

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.
(2 Peter 1:8-11)

These thoughts are in keeping with Jesus' ministry to the nation of Israel in general, and to the remnant of believing Jews. Before His arrest Jesus taught:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (John 15:4-7)

The economy of the kingdom preached by Jesus, by Peter, by James, by John, and by Paul of the Acts period was a conditional gospel. If you do this, then this will be the result; or you will receive this, if you avoid that. Certain conditions had to be met before certain results could be realized. We must not fault these brothers for obeying their mandate from the Lord to continue His ministry to Israel. This was the way of the kingdom, and it will be the same when the economy of Israel resumes in the tribulation.

The problem with James was his strict adherence to Judaism with its law. He could never break free of his background, and it was a continual problem, especially to Paul and the coming economy. It is strange that a brother who never was an apostle of Jesus, rose to assume the leadership of the first and largest congregation in Israel. Peter was the Lord's choice as leader of the team but found himself under James. In conferences in Jerusalem James had the last word.

When Peter went out, James sent followers to monitor him. James sent enforcers to track Paul from city to city. He urged Paul to go into the temple with other Jews to complete a vow. It's sad to contemplate James' adherence to tradition.

UNLIKLEY VESSEL

Saul (Paul) was the former chief persecutor of the kingdom believers until the Lord Jesus knocked him down near Damascus around two or three years after He ascended. This was a remarkable beginning for a special apostle. Some complain that Saul should have been Judas' replacement, not Matthias. That argument might hold water if there were no economies at play. But there were. Serious ones. The probationary offer of the kingdom to Israel had a forty-year lifespan and it had to play out. The conversion of Saul happened around three years in, so the probation had another 37 years to complete. Stephen had just been murdered (Saul consenting), the answer of the Judean Jews to the kingdom offer. This caused the Lord to respond by reaching out to Gentiles through Saul. Had Saul taken Matthias' place with the twelve who would have taken Saul's place? No one could have. He was a special vessel prepared by the Lord.

At Cornelius' home Peter opened the door of salvation as he had to the Jews at Pentecost. That Gentiles were now included with the Jews was a sure sign that major changes were afoot. Not only so, but the Lord also saw where His people were heading, so He intervened and raised up Paul to reach and teach Gentiles. As the appointed apostle to the Gentiles, he belongs to us in the body of Christ, and the sooner we recognize and embrace this apostle, the better off we will be.

THREE COMMISSIONS

His conversion is critical to study and to grasp. It is one of the key reasons our 74-year period is prominent in world history. If we know his conversion inside and out, we will understand the book of Acts, the demise of Israel's status before Yahweh, and the squandering of Yahweh's gracious offer of the Messiah and His kingdom. Acts 9 contains the story.

Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Trying to explain Paul's behavior up to his imprisonment in Rome in 62 AD without grasping this commission is impossible. A student of the Bible will find endless impediments trying to figure him out. For example, if we consider the early Paul to be speaking and acting as a member of the body of Christ, what can we say about his encounters with Jewish synagogues in every city he visited? Why did he circumcise Timothy in keeping with Jewish law? Why, in the Acts period, did he proclaim Jesus the man as Messiah the King rather than Jesus Christ the Head of the Body? Why did he take a vow, shave his head, and enter the Temple with four others? Did he

lose his mind? Or was this perfectly legitimate under the kingdom economy? Why were the letters he wrote during the period of the Acts (1 and 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans) punctuated with numerous Jewish references and allusions?

Note the Jewish character of the following partial and chronological list drawn from Paul's early writings during the Acts period:

- “With a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the *trump* of God” (1 Thess. 4:16)
- “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty *angels*, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God” (2 Thess. 1:7-8)
- “But *Jerusalem* which is above is the mother of us all” (Galatians 5:36)
- “A little *leaven* leavens the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9)
- “For all the *law* is fulfilled in one word, even in this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Gal. 5:14)
- “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace on them and mercy, and upon the *Israel* of God” (Gal. 6:16)
- “Purge out, therefore, the old *leaven* that you may be a new lump” (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- “Therefore let us keep the *feast*, not with old leaven” (1 Cor. 5:8)
- “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the *commandments* of God” (1 Cor. 7:19)
- “For it is written in the law of *Moses*” (1 Cor. 9:9)
- “Our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto *Moses*” (1 Cor. 10:1-2)
- “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the *last trumpet*” (1 Cor. 15:52)
- “Who also has made us able ministers of the new *covenant*” (2 Cor. 3:6)
- “Knowing therefore the *terror* of the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:11)
- “For you are the *temple* of the living God, as God says, ‘I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (2 Cor. 6:16)
- “Having therefore these *promises* . . . let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Cor. 7:1)

- “As it is *written*, ‘He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack’ (2 Cor. 8:15)
- “Are they *Hebrews*? . . . Israelites? . . . the seed of Abraham? . . .” (2 Cor. 11:22)
- “In the mouth of two or three *witnesses* shall every word be established” (2 Cor. 13:1)
- “Which he had promised afore by his *prophets* in the holy scriptures” (Romans 1:2)
- “What advantage has the *Jew*? Or what profit is there of circumcision?” (Rom. 3:1)
- “Therefore by the deeds of the *law* shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Rom. 3:20)
- “What shall we say then what *Abraham* our father . . . has found?” (Rom. 4:1)
- “For what says the scripture? *Abraham* believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3)
- “Even as *David* also describes the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputes righteousness without works” (Rom. 4:6)
- “And he received the sign of *circumcision*” (Rom.4:11)
- “As it is *written*, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’ (Rom. 4:17)
- “Death reigned from Adam to *Moses*” (Rom. 9:21)
- “The *law* is holy and the commandment holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12)
- “That the righteousness of the *law* might be fulfilled in me” (Rom. 8:4)
- “As it is written, ‘*Jacob* have I loved, but Esau have I hated’ (Rom. 9:13)
- “For he says to *Moses*, ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy’ (Rom. 9:15)
- “And as *Isaiah* said before, ‘Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom . . .’ (Rom. 9:29)
- “As it is written, ‘Behold I lay in *Zion* a stumbling stone’ (Rom. 9:33)
- “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for *Israel* is that they might be saved” (Rom. 10:11)
- “First *Moses* says, ‘I will provoke you to jealousy’ (Rom. 10:19)

- “But to *Israel* he says, ‘All day long I have stretched forth my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people.’” (Rom. 10:21)
- “I have reserved to myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to *Baal*.” (Rom. 11:4)
- “According as it is *written*, ‘God has given them the spirit of slumber’” (Rom. 11:8)
- “And *David* says, ‘Let their table be made a snare’” (Rom. 11:9)
- “Blindness in part is happened to *Israel*” (Rom. 11:25)
- “For it is *written*, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me’” (Rom. 14:11)
- “That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in *Judea*” (Rom. 15:31)
- And, finally, the entire treatise to the Hebrews.

This incomplete list of Jewish inferences in the early writings of the apostle informs us that Paul was here fulfilling his commission to the children of Israel according to the Lord’s word to Ananias concerning His new convert. Why is this important?

Saul was the first person saved by grace without works. He was saved by grace directly by Jesus, not by repentance and water baptism as Peter’s gospel required. Ananias, operating under Peter’s teaching, took Saul and baptized him, though it was *after* his salvation experience. This was divine sovereignty to include Paul in the economy of the kingdom so he could take his place with the twelve in reaching Israel first before the Gentiles.

Again, when the Lord from heaven asked Saul why he was persecuting Him, he responded, “Who are you, Lord?” This began the process of his grace salvation. He called upon the name of the Lord. The Lord came, spoke to him, and saved him from his errant course. The Lord didn’t require him to repent or be water baptized or perform any kind of work, though Ananias, operating under the kingdom gospel, baptized him. Paul became the pattern for all of us who have followed him in salvation by grace alone. He was first to be saved by grace without works, and all believers in the economy of grace (the economy of the body of Christ) follow his pattern (1 Timothy 1:16). It could be argued that the thief whom the Lord forgave at Calvary was first to experience grace-only salvation. This is true, but he was not our pattern. If he had lived on, he would have been included in the kingdom economy with its conditions.

Having turned away from his life of persecuting remnant Christians, Paul was baptized and ready to join the effort with the twelve for the little flock congregations of believing Israel and to reach out to the Gentiles. The very first activity after his salvation was to argue that Jesus the man was the Son of Yahweh. And who better? He was eyewitness to the ascended Son, and this encounter set his course for the next thirty years, as he persistently presented the claims of Jesus to the Jews in their synagogues and to the pagan Gentiles in markets, forums, jails, etc.

There is some resistance among Christians concerning the distinction between the remnant flock and the body of Christ. I don't know why. Everything in our universe has a beginning at some point in time and space. Humanity as we know it began with Adam. The nation of Israel began with Abram the Hebrew. Jesus began with a physical conception in Mary's womb. The little flock began at Pentecost in response to Peter's preaching. Is it too farfetched to say that the body of Christ was added into the *ekklesia* (that began at Pentecost) with Jesus' confrontation with His enemy Saul? He was after all saved by grace and not by works, and in response to Jesus' direct words to him. This was unprecedented, and up to us to understand it.

74 YEARS CHAPTER THREE

SO MUCH MORE

We can say of Paul that in the interim period between conversion and the final national rejection (the period of the book of Acts), he preached to the Jews at their synagogues a message urging upon them Jesus of Nazareth, their slain and resurrected Messiah; but then after the final rejection he preached a gospel of grace without works. In fact, salvation was so simple, a Gentile could be saved by simply calling upon the Lord's name (Romans 10:13). Paul's gospel required faith and faith alone. Salvation was by grace and not by any works (Ephesians 2:8-9), and it was made eternally secure by virtue of our heavenly position in Christ and by the sealing of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:3-14). These differences between the two economies are critical to understand and should never be conflated. Peter's message involved faith/works; Paul's of faith through grace alone.

However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (1 Timothy 1:16)

Paul brought to the game much more than a unique way of salvation. Through him the Lord unloaded an immense treasure of blessing on His *ekklesia*.

A good example is Paul's perception of the Lord's death. To the twelve, His death was a murder. To Paul, His death was the greatest gift to humankind. Note:

- We are justified by his blood (Romans 5:9)
- We are reconciled to God by the death of his son (Romans 5:10)
- For he (God) has made him sin for us. . . (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- . . . that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law; being made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13)
- In whom we have redemption through his blood (Ephesians 1:7)
- We are made nigh by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13)
- He has broken down the middle wall of partition (Ephesians 2:14)
- We are reconciled unto God in one body (Ephesians 2:16)

Paul's concept of the Lord's death is far more developed than is Peter's. Peter's view is negative; Paul's is altogether positive, the difference between works and grace.

The features of the kingdom economy – sign gifts, healings, miracles, tongues, casting out of demons, etc. – would persist into the third decade of the forty-year trial of the nation. In fact, Paul himself exercised these gifts in his ministry and on his journey to Rome. The Lord selected him as the apostle to the Gentiles, and as such he preached another gospel - the gospel of grace without works. Peter's gospel demanded faith/works - repentance and water baptism. Not Paul's. He wrote,

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13).

That's grace! That was it! There was nothing else required – no repentance, no water baptism, no circumcision – nothing but believing and calling on the Lord's name in faith.

Take note that these brothers were not in conflict. Peter's ministry was to the Jews and his message was always repentance and water baptism for the kingdom. Paul always tried to reach his Jewish brethren, first visiting the Jewish synagogue in every city and arguing for their embrace of the Messiah. Peter's ministry included signs and wonders, and until the final rejection in 62 AD, Paul's ministry did too. It's not surprising that miracles followed him as signs to the Jews. The kingdom economy would finally be set aside in Acts 28 in 62 AD at the nation's final rejection of her Messiah and the kingdom offer. Signs and wonders and miracles and tongues and water baptism ceased because Israel was set aside temporarily. Paul could not even heal his closest co-workers after this.

He labored for nearly thirty years to reach Israel for their Messiah. He hoped that his work with the Gentiles would provoke the Jewish leaders to accept their Messiah if for no other reason than jealousy. It didn't happen and this is the sad story of the book of Acts.

After Paul pronounced judicial judgment on Israel in Rome (Acts 28:25-28), water baptism, speaking in tongues, healings, the casting out of demons, etc. were suspended along with the kingdom economy. These features are absent in the economy of the mystery.

Paul never wavered in his commission to Israel, and in his final years when travel ended, he wrote the full revelation of the secret the Lord had entrusted to him concerning the Gentiles. This mystery unfolded in all of its fullness in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians and 1 and 2 Timothy. He had been faithful in life to reveal everything the Lord had shown him by revelation. He awaited the emperor's verdict and passage to the Savior.

Luke was the physician scribe and close associate to Paul; so it's fair to assume that he wrote his gospel and the book of Acts (written to the same friend, Theophilus) during downtime in Paul's ministry, say at Caesarea after the Jerusalem riot and before his trip to Rome, or at Rome during his house arrest. We could assume that although he had at his disposal the other gospels and written testimonies of eyewitnesses, much of what he wrote he could have gotten from Paul who had visited Peter in Jerusalem three years after his conversion. Surely their fellowship was all about Jesus and what it was that Peter witnessed of Him and how he interpreted it. At the time, Paul was playing catch up, learning all he could from Peter. This knowledge must have become the topic of conversation with any brother associated with Paul, especially the highly educated Luke. Who better than Luke to account for the perfect man Jesus than a physician? So, what Paul wrote to the Hebrews Luke embodied in his biography:

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:17-18)

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

It seems like Luke and Paul worked and wrote in concert, so during his confinement at Caesarea and Rome Paul could have dictated his treatise to the Hebrews and Luke could have written his gospel. The fellowship between the two could have produced a coordinated view of the Savior. Both wrote of the wonderful and divine man Jesus – Paul of the high priest who “sympathizes with our weaknesses,” and Luke of the Man tempted as we are, the Man full of sympathy, the Man of prayer, the Man perfected through sufferings, the Man resurrected, and the Man ascended. Together they portrayed the unassailable human life of the Son of Man who became one of us in all things except sin. His was the purest and fairest of all lives ever lived.

THE ECONOMY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

At the end of the kingdom offer to Israel in 62 AD, the Lord through Paul set Israel aside and dispensed His eternal purpose to His *ekklesia* by breaking down the middle wall of partition between the Jewish and Gentile believers. From that time on, *there was no distinction between the two*. This is the key to the body of Christ. The Jews and Gentiles were one body with Christ as the Head. They were “the one new man,” singular. Jewish trappings and Gentile paganism were no longer distinguishing factors, at least in doctrine, if not in practice. All differences of race, creed, and disposition were forever shattered. This expression of Christ’s gathering was straight from the Father’s heart, never seen by any ancient prophet, or any apostle before Paul. He explains in Ephesians 3:1-12:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

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, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

With the emergence of Paul this oneness of Jew and Gentile in one body under Christ the Head became the gold standard of the mystery economy that the Lord expected all saints to follow. It was His eternal purpose after all, and He wanted all His saints to be a part of it. This was a new

economy, or dispensation, that was added to the singular congregation of Christ, the one He promised to build in Matthew 16. The Father “dispensed” the oneness of two people groups under one glorious Head in one body. This is:

the economy of the body of Christ;
the economy of the grace of God;
the economy of the mystery.

These are synonymous.

There is no higher vision or calling than this for a believer. Here is the one New Man. Again, Paul explains in Ephesians 2:11-16:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

This is the pinnacle of the Father’s eternal purpose in creation. It doesn’t get higher than this. We cannot dwell enough on this. It will put full meaning and endless peace into our lives.

To recap: Christ’s congregation began with Jews at Pentecost in Acts 2; grew and developed with Cornelius in Acts 10 when Gentiles were added; was enriched by the conversion of Saul who brought with him a wealth of understanding and energy; suffered under the final national rejection of the kingdom offer; and thrived under the Head of the Body who abolished all distinctions. Another writer (R.L.B.) says it well:

“ . . . let us be quick to point out that the character and stance of Christ’s ‘gatherings’ changed after Pentecost as time progressed. What began as a kingdom-of-the-heavens “gathering” (Matt. 16:19; Acts 2 & 3) composed exclusively (by God’s design) of Jews only, took on a different characteristic when it became clear the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem were rejecting their Messiah (Acts 8), at which time God began to include non-Jews into the ‘gathering’ (Acts 10). And this ‘gathering’ changed again very significantly when the Jewish diaspora throughout the world and finally at Rome turned final deaf ears and sightless eyes to God’s offer of national restitution through the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:28) But even after Acts 28:28 when Israel had been shut up, the remaining ‘*ekklesia*’ was still Christ’s ‘gathering’ because the ‘*ekklesia*’ does not carry with it any doctrinal, dispensational, or moral description or distinctions. All such ‘gatherings’ of believers from Pentecost onward are Christ’s gatherings ‘built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone’” (Eph. 2:20).

CHANGES AFOOT

This one congregation of Christ – from His original promise in Matthew 16 to the time of His return to Earth at the end of Israel’s tribulation – contains in it two economies: the economy of the earthly kingdom of heaven (millennial) and the economy of the grace of God to the body of Christ. As this congregation moved through time from the day of Pentecost, it displayed certain features as the Father dispensed. The dispensation of Pentecost (to Jews only) demonstrated certain unique characteristics. There were sign gifts such as healing the sick, speaking in unknown tongues, handling of poisonous snakes, casting out of demons, various wonders and miracles – all for the purpose of reaching unbelieving Israel with the gospel of the kingdom. But when the Jerusalem and Judean Jews answered the Lord’s overtures by murdering Stephen, He moved on and added to His congregation another feature: the inclusion of the Gentiles, beginning with Cornelius.

The life of a caterpillar illustrates the changes in the Lord’s *ekklesia*. First we see a robust earthbound worm moving slowly about sporting a beautiful inward surprise. In the course of his life he sheds his skin and emerges a heavenly butterfly. In one lowly, nondescript creature, we have the earthly and the heavenly – remnant congregations and the body of Christ – one emerging from the other. This transformation is unique in world history, and it alone distinguishes our 74 years from all others. Here history pivots from Jesus the Messiah of Israel to Jesus Head of the body; from Jew to Gentile; from salvation by works to salvation by grace; from the twelve apostles to the apostle Paul. Regardless what happening in profane history, it pales in comparison to the work of the Father in establishing His eternal purpose with the body of His Son.

After Cornelius the Lord added another feature when He personally confronted His enemy and made him His apostle to the new group, the Gentiles. To this man Paul, the Lord gave a three-fold commission: to bear His name to the Gentiles, to kings, and to the children of Israel (Acts 9:15-16). But that was not all. Paul received from the Lord the revelation of the coming dispensation of grace without works upon which the body of Christ would be built. For nearly thirty years Paul joined with the twelve apostles in extending the Father’s kingdom offer to Israel, and their immediate future depended on their decision. But they waffled at the critical moment, and it was over. In essence they said, “No, we will not have this man rule over us.”

At that pivot point in history, the Lord reluctantly laid aside His chosen nation and another feature came forth from the pen of the apostle to the Gentiles. The former economy disappeared with its signs and wonders and miracles, and in its place the grace of the Father revealed itself in the coming together of two distinct groups of believers – Jew and Gentile – in the body of His Son. An eternal truth came alive: the combination of the body and Head produces the one new man capable of ruling and administering the universe for eternity. This hidden treasure in the Father’s heart is His eternal purpose, and we are participants in it! This is beyond pitiful language! Beyond *words*! That we could be a part of the highest, heavenly vision and reality is humbling and worthy of all our time and energy!

When the time comes for the Lord to call His body to Himself, the nation of Israel will enter the final seven years of her history. This will initiate the long-awaited seventieth week, a time of

purging that will produce the national repentance and the coming again of Messiah to establish His kingdom on the Earth. Israel's purpose will be complete at last. The bride will have finally made herself ready for her bridegroom. The Lord's promise in Matthew 16 of a singular *ekklesia* will finally reach its fulfillment, and the Lord Jesus will have His body and His bride, and the Father will be pleased.

Through His servant Peter, Yahweh extended His arm of mercy to His errant people and offered them repentance and water baptism for the remission of their corporate sin of murdering their King. Salvation offered to individual Jews required certain faith/works like repentance and water baptism. But there was no assurance of this salvation, no "eternal security." It was entirely conditional on both ends – beginning and end. Failure to abide in the true vine, as Jesus explained, would result in a cutting off and burning. Jesus told His disciples concerning the end time:

But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. (Matthew 24:13).

. . . by your endurance you will gain your lives. (Luke 21:19).

Some responded to Peter's message and became what Jesus referred to when He taught his disciples about daily life and the kingdom to come. In Luke 12:31-32 He said this:

But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.

This "little flock" was comprised of those repentant Jews who heard Peter and obeyed his message. It was to them that the kingdom was promised, so as we read through the book of Acts concerning the many congregations of Christians, they were assemblies of the little flock.

Accompanying Peter's salvation message were many signs and miracles, undeniable proofs that what they were witnessing was indeed from Yahweh. The Lord granted them a 40-year period of probation, starting from the death of Messiah in 30 AD. This is no accident. Yahweh sent Moses to the desert for forty years to prepare him for his confrontation with Pharaoh. The children of Israel spent forty years wandering in the wilderness in preparation for entering the promised land. Jesus spent forty days fasting in the desert in preparation for His ministry. So now we come to another forty years for Israel, this time in preparation for the coming King and His kingdom. How would Israel respond this time around?

It didn't take long to find out. The Jews of Judea and Jerusalem answered Yahweh's gracious offer of the kingdom by murdering the first Christian martyr - Stephen - in 32 AD, the first step in national apostasy.

Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles'. (Acts 13:46)

Twenty years later when Paul ministered in Corinth, Jews rose up to oppose him, earning them this response from Paul in Acts 18:6:

But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’.

This was the second stage in the decline of Israel. Ten more years later (62 AD) and eight years before their probation was to end in 70 AD, another group, the representative Jews who had been dispersed to the empire by the severe persecution that arose in Jerusalem and Judea around 34 AD, met with Paul in Rome to consider his argument that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of Yahweh, and that He was offering them the kingdom. They performed no better than their brethren in Jerusalem thirty years earlier. They turned their back to Paul and took the third and fatal step into apostasy. Paul pronounced the judicial sentence upon them:

And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, ‘Go to this people and say, You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes; Otherwise they might see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them. Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen’. (Acts 28:25-28)

Though Yahweh’s longsuffering persisted, four years later they revolted against the Romans and were brutally crushed by the Roman general Titus. He destroyed Jerusalem and his army burned and dismantled the Temple. Jesus had predicted this, saying that not one stone of the Temple would be left upon another. Sure enough. The massive amounts of gold in the Temple melted down into its stones, and before Titus could prevent it, his soldiers had torn apart the Temple stone by stone to retrieve the gold, thus fulfilling Jesus’ prediction.

After 62 AD the final seven years of Daniel’s momentous prophecy of seventy weeks never materialized. The Jews were eventually cast out of Jerusalem, many of whom were expelled to the nations of the world in what is known in history as the Diaspora (dispersion). It is small wonder. When the Roman authority Pilate questioned Jesus, he also could find nothing unworthy in Him and was about to release Him. But the people railed against Pilate, crying out for Jesus’ death and saying, “*His blood be on us, and on our children.*” Those terrible words would haunt the Jews everywhere they wandered for the next nineteen-plus centuries. Every word of their evil pronouncement was answered in spades throughout the centuries, beginning in 70 AD with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.

This is the overview of the final 40 years of the 74-year carve out. So many intriguing details fill in the blanks and give us an unforgettable context, an unshakable foundation for our faith.

We’ve seen that the heavenly Risen One assigned three commissions to Paul. In his capacity as the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul unveiled the economy of the mystery of the body of Christ and of the grace of the Father. This was an entirely new revelation hidden in Yahweh, never shared with any man until Paul. This is very important to grasp. The kingdom economy could be called the prophetic economy because Israel’s prophets spoke much about the coming Messiah and the kingdom offered to Israel. This was not what Paul received. Three letters that he wrote from his safe house in Rome in 62 AD – Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians – contain his vision. This

economy is the Father's eternal purpose designed to produce a body for His Son. This stands alone in importance and significance to us Gentiles.

It should be noted that these letters do not contain dates that we can plug into a timeline. Are we to rely, then, on secular history and human scholarship to determine the evolution of Paul's letters? Is there any coherent trend in his fourteen letters as they have come down to us? Can we follow Paul's thinking from Romans to the Corinthians to Galatians, for example? Or should we let scholars tell us which letter came first, which second, and so forth?

Following the order chronologically allows us to put everything in context. Should we be bothered that we are relying on outside scholarship? There is a curious principle unveiled for serious Bible students in Genesis 2:5. It reads:

"Before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground;"

The Lord's rain depended on man's cultivation. His way is always to include a cooperating man to implement His purpose. The scholars who study timelines are crucial to the understanding of the Lord's word. We cannot know Paul's thought unless we do it chronologically. One letter builds on another, especially those letters written after the final national rejection in 62 AD. When we see the sequence of his writings, we can see the context. Then everything makes sense, and our faith and understanding is established immovable.

INVISIBLE? FAITH TO THE RESCUE

But Paul's gospel required faith and faith alone. Salvation was by grace and not by any works (Ephesians 2:8-9), and it was made eternally secure by the sealing of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). These differences between the two economies are critical to understand and should be separated.

We know much about Peter's history with the Lord during His ministry. We know little about Paul in comparison. We are first introduced to him on the road to Damascus and get to know him in the second half of the book of Acts. We owe our general knowledge of him to his faithful companion Luke, writer of Acts.

At Stephen's death the Lord saw the trajectory of His people Israel, and immediately took dramatic action. He called and saved his enemy Saul of Tarsus to minister to Israel, to kings, and, most significantly to the Gentiles. Saul (Paul) received his instructions and vision from the ascended Christ, not the earthly Jesus. This is important. Only Paul knew Jesus in this capacity. To understand this is to understand Paul.

His ministry greatly enriched and expanded the kingdom message preached by the twelve. Whereas the twelve regarded the Messiah's death as betrayal and murder, Paul saw His death as substitutionary and redemptive. It was Paul who saw that Yahweh's Lamb bore every negative thing – sins, sin, Satan, fallen human nature, the world system, etc. In fact, he said that he himself died with Christ (Gal. 2:20) and was made alive through His resurrection (Romans 6:1-14).

A thorough reading of Acts will show us that Paul preached Jesus as Israel's Messiah to be received and embraced; but to the Gentiles he preached Jesus as the Savior full of grace. To Jews Paul's message matched Peter's with its certain requirements, none more important than enduring to the end. To the Gentiles no such requirement existed. They had only to receive the Savior full of grace and love. He taught that Jesus' death released His life, His eternal life for His followers. In His life are all His attributes that we are to incorporate into our daily living.

Paul also realized that Christ was the end of the law, the fulfillment of all its decrees and requirements; that it was the duty of every believing Jew to embrace the Lawgiver. Gentiles knew nothing about these things, because they had no law. To them it was all a matter of grace, freely given and never lost. This created a great controversy among the Jews, requiring councils to explain and sort things out. It almost cost Paul his life (Acts 21:17-23:33).

The Lord through Paul sent the message loud and clear to the Jewish nation that the *status quo* was obsolete. As Paul wrote to the Hebrews – “Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away” (8:3) – Judaism was decaying. The book of Acts shows this. No stranger to controversy, Paul told Gentiles that circumcision was mutilation; the Temple was an empty house; the law was an impotent creed. Christ had come, had given His life, had fulfilled the law. He was the new thing, the living reality of the old. This is the message Paul proclaimed as his gospel to the Gentiles.

GETTING ALONG

What were the dynamics between the twelve (especially Peter and John) and Paul? Peter preached Jesus the Messiah and His coming kingdom. Paul urged the Jews he dealt with to embrace Jesus the Nazarene as their Messiah. Peter's message was basic for the Jews – repent, be baptized, endure to the end. Paul's gospel to the Gentiles was far simpler: by faith call upon the Lord's name for salvation. The Jews were saved by enduring; the Gentiles were saved by grace. This was the major difference between Paul and the twelve.

Surely, they had a good coordination and fellowship, though Paul was more advanced in his knowledge of the risen Christ, having been converted by Him from heaven. Peter wrote his letters to the scattered little flock to prepare them for the coming kingdom, although in his second letter he seems resigned to the setting aside of that kingdom and provided a segue into Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

Here's Peter, commenting on Paul's writings:

Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him has written unto you. (2 Peter 3:15)

Were they at cross-purposes with one another? Not a chance. Peter goes on to write something that is quite remarkable:

As also in all his (Paul's) letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which they that are unlearned and unstable pervert, as also the other

scriptures unto their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:16)

He admits the difficulty of understanding Paul and his arguments, but, more importantly, he holds up Paul's letters as scripture. This is amazing! Paul's early letters to the various congregations were circulated and were probably copied, so the congregations, if they didn't have copies, at least had access to them. In Peter's estimation (and the Spirit's as well) these Pauline letters enjoyed equality with the ancient Hebrew scriptures. This was long before the traditional canonization, where the early fathers, especially Athanasius, determined what was divine Scripture and what was not. Could it be that the brothers like Peter, John, Luke, and Paul were able to determine the New Testament Scriptures themselves? Did they know the Spirit's inspiration when they wrote? We know John was aware of the Spirit's moving on the island of Patmos when he wrote the Revelation. There are hints that Paul knew the Spirit's inspiration when he wrote to the Corinthians. And we know Peter recognized Paul as an inspired writer. This is a wonderful confirmation that these brothers worked in concert in the older kingdom economy until it was suspended. Peter's ministry to the little flock ceased at the national rejection, and Paul's commission to the Gentiles continued.

If the Ephesian assembly was typical, they left their status as a remnant assembly and embraced the body of Christ. Compare John's letter to Ephesus in Revelation written under the economy of the kingdom, and Paul's Ephesian letter written under the economy of the body of Christ. They are drastically different and prove how the saints in at least one city moved from one economy to another. We should think others did as well. Otherwise, what else were they to do?

Paul remained faithful to fulfill his burden for his countrymen. After the terrible debacle in Jerusalem at the hands of radical Jews, the Romans placed him in Caesarea for safekeeping. There he poured himself out to the Jewish believers who were paralyzed by the predominance of legalism in Jerusalem. It makes contextual sense that he wrote the treatise to the Hebrews at this time.

It is no mistake by the Spirit to insert Paul into the lives and ministries of the twelve apostles. A former devoted enemy of the *ekklesia* captured by the ascended Jesus, Head of the body, was now an interloper preaching a salvation without any accompanying obligations to perform. No repentance. No water baptism. Nothing. "By grace are you saved through faith" he taught far and wide to the Gentiles.

This message and practice made Paul a huge target of the unbelieving Jews and a suspect to the believing Jews. A traitor from Moses. A degenerate rebel worthy of death! Even some Christian brothers in Jerusalem couldn't bear with him. But this was the work of the Spirit to draw believing Jews away from the beggarly elements of Judaism; to replace the old religion with the new ascended Jesus. But old ideas die hard. The Lord's chosen people opposed Paul at every turn, and they refused to believe in Jesus. But Paul was never deterred, preferring to press on regardless with new light revealed by the heavenly Head.

Only the economy built up around Paul's revelation of the great mystery survived the 40-year probation. The Lord set aside the economy of the kingdom at that time temporarily. Since then,

the body of Christ has been center stage for over 19 centuries and Israel can only wait until the body of Christ is called upward (Philippians 3:8-12).

One of the serious errors of Christianity since the first century is to regard Israel's relationship to Yahweh after the final national rejection as permanently terminated. This misconception has led to the centuries-long practice of anti-Semitism. The hateful lash - "Christ killers!" – seared itself into world consciousness toward Jews beginning at the end of the first century. The apostles' bodies were barely cool in their graves when the insidious allegations came storming after the Jews. This corrosive debasement of the Lord's people unleashed the wolves of hate, attacking everything Jewish, allowing Christians to rob Israel of all the unfulfilled promises left to them when they lost their city and temple to the Romans in 70 AD. This broad-brush approach to history has painted over the entire experience of the first century.

Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles in both the economy of the kingdom and in the economy of the body, but *not until* the displaced of Israel (whose capital was Rome, not Jerusalem) had decided against their Messiah and refused to have Him rule over them did Paul enter the full explanation and practice of the mystery of the body of Christ. Remember Saul was converted shortly after the Lord's death, so it could have been some thirty years later when he received the complete vision of the mystery. However, we cannot dismiss the possibility that the Lord revealed the mystery progressively, expecting Paul to enrich the twelve and, in turn, enrich the remnant congregations and prepare them for their inception into the body of Christ should the national leaders balk at the kingdom offer. There are many truths in Paul's early letters that prove he was not holding anything back. What we don't know is whether he was simply connecting dots on his own or was given the Lord's revelation of the mystery in bits and pieces. Paul probably connected lots of dots and shared them as the Lord revealed the mystery to him. This brings up some intriguing questions.

Would the Lord have enlightened Paul at the beginning of his Christian journey only to force him into silence regarding the priceless treasure of the body of Christ to come? At the time of his conversion, Ananias baptized him into the kingdom economy so he could begin fulfilling his commission to the children of Israel along with the twelve. As it developed, Paul's emphasis was on the Gentiles, to bring them into the congregations of the Jewish remnant congregations and into the presence of the true God Yahweh and His Son. They met the requisite repentance and baptism, but nothing else; no law keeping; no circumcision; no mandatory trips to Jerusalem. Paul made sure of that.

Paul spent thirty years fulfilling his divine commission to Israel, the time covered in the book of Acts. Rather than rob Paul of his divine commission by making him, at his conversion, a functioning member of the body of Christ constantly at odds with the twelve apostles of the Lamb, we must let go and let him fulfill his ministry to Israel and to the kings and to the Gentiles *simultaneously*. When he was in a synagogue arguing for the man Jesus as Israel's Messiah, he was acting according to the Lord's will. When in the presence of the Gentiles, he gave them the gospel of grace without works because what else could they understand? They had no law, no religious traditions except idol worship, no true Creator. Paul's approach to them was also the Lord's will.

He worked in perfect harmony with the twelve in the building up of the remnant assemblies of believing Jews and Gentiles. He never held back what the Lord had shown him, however much that was at any given time. For example, what he saw of the body he shared in his early letter to the Corinthians and his later letter to the Roman congregation. What he never shared was the hidden mystery that this body would contain both Jew and Gentile without any distinctions. How could he if he had never seen this truth? Christ as the Head of the one New Man was the treasured mystery hidden in the Father, the apex of the eternal purpose. Paul only revealed this in his letters to Ephesus and Colosse.

In his early work with the little flock congregations Paul was deeply aware of the differences between Jews and Gentiles. He refused to allow his Gentile converts to be held to the same standard as the Jews. They were not to be forced into circumcision, and that was a huge obstacle to oneness between the two groups of people.

In the past when Jews came from Judaea into Paul's territory and insisted that salvation depended upon circumcision, Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem, taking the uncircumcised Greek – roughhewn Titus – with them, to hash out the problem and eliminate it. Paul was probably not too happy about all this. His gospel to the Gentiles included nothing but Christ – not Moses, not Judaism, not the law, not circumcision – but here he was in Jerusalem hammering out the details of his gospel and explaining the persistent problem with legalistic Jewish believers coming in to frustrate the uncircumcised. It seemed like Titus was there for a good reason. Paul probably wanted to watch the leaders in Jerusalem squirm when Titus was in their presence. Would they accept him as a brother in Christ, or as a Gentile in desperate need of circumcision? Paul threw down the gauntlet. Once and for all, what would it be?

SHINING MOMENT

Finally, Peter spoke up about his experience at the house of Cornelius saying,

And God, which knows the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit even as unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (Acts 15:8-10)

This was a shining moment in Peter's life. He must have seen something about the gospel Paul preached to the Gentiles, or he would never have spoken like this. His words were fully compatible with the three visions he saw on the roof in Joppa prior to meeting with Cornelius. There were no unclean animals in those visions! Uncircumcised Gentiles were not to be considered unclean anymore! This was a great victory for the message of the apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter delivered boldly. It was his last recorded speaking.

Shortly after the council, Peter was in Antioch enjoying a meal with Paul and the Gentile saints from that assembly when the legalists from James showed up and frightened Peter into withdrawing from the Gentiles, and even Barnabas joined him. Why did the legalists show up anyway? Maybe to spy on Peter? Paul reacted and confronted him in front of everyone about his

hypocrisy. Paul was at his hottest, but he had to save the Gentiles from the grasping tentacles of a dying religion. He stood firm for the gospel the Lord had committed to him regarding the heathen. He did not waver. Peter, however, failed. Barnabas got caught in the middle by siding with Peter. Paul's rebuke of Peter may have spilled over to Barnabas, and it may have offended him. Could that explain his falling out with Paul?

But was Paul warranted in his outrage? After all, Peter was simply being a Jew and he knew he wasn't to eat with the unclean Gentiles, even though it hadn't been that long ago when the Lord made it clear to him in three visions that Gentiles were no longer unclean. What Peter did here was irreconcilable with his visions of the unclean animals (Acts 10 – 11:18), a hugely important episode in the book of Acts. It brought into sharp relief the dispensational changes that were brought in by the conversion of Paul.

Poor Peter. It seems like he couldn't avoid these situations. With Jesus he saw the revelation of the Lord as the Son of Yahweh, only to be called "Satan" shortly after. He denied the Lord three times and ended up weeping bitterly. And now he goes from a beautiful and decisive endorsement of Gentile salvation to rank hypocrisy. We hear nothing more from him in the book of Acts. All that remains of him in the holy record are his two short letters to the dispersed Jews. After the episode in Antioch Paul occupies the second half of Acts, proof positive that the Lord was moving on.

Paul's early letters to the remnant assemblies (those in Galatia, Corinth, Thessalonica, and Rome), including the treatise to the Hebrews of Judea, make solid sense when we consider his commission from the Lord during the kingdom economy. These writings are Jewish in tone and content, meant to build them up and prepare them for the imminent return of the King. Trying to twist these writings into body of Christ instructions and exhortations is to violate the plain reading of scriptures and to fail to divide the scriptures properly (2 Timothy 2:15). Paul was not torn between the two programs, one to Israel and one to the body of Christ. Until arrested in Rome he may have not known of the fulness of the mystery of grace and the body. That full revelation appears first in the letters to Ephesus and Colosse, and is expanded in his letters to Philippi, to Timothy, and to Titus. In the years before 62 AD we see Paul sharing truths far beyond what the twelve taught, to be sure; but that does not mean he knew everything of the mystery of Jews and Gentiles in one body; or of the body joined to the ascended Head to become the one new man – the complete Christ. Those great truths he would unfold to the Ephesians and Colossians, because those treasures belonged to the newer economy. For proof of this, let's have a deeper look at Paul's early letters and see what we can discover.

Did Paul know the secret early in his career? Perhaps. There certainly are signs that he knew something special apart from Judaism and apart from the teachings of the apostles. Consider what the apostle wrote in his early (Acts period) epistles that contain concepts unknown to the twelve, but hint of the mystery of the body of Christ. These letters are, in chronological order the following: 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans.

EARLY LETTERS

1 and 2 Thessalonians

These letters do not resemble the letters written from Rome in 62 AD. That shows Paul's dedication to his commission to the believers in the kingdom economy, that is, the little flock saints. Even the famous "rapture" passage (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) under scrutiny yields up its Jewish flavor – the shout, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God, and the clouds. This appears to be the taking up of the little flock believers and past faithful of Israel. In contrast, the "attainers" of the body of Christ ascend without fanfare in Philippians 3:11-14. Those who do not attain may join the Jews in the resurrection of the righteous in 4:16-17.

There is a singular passage that carries over to a latter letter. In 1 Thessalonians 5:9 Paul mentions the armor of God that he develops thoroughly in Ephesians, the primary letter of the mystery and the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians.

- 1 Corinthians is a mix of truth – truth derived from Israel's kingdom economy and truth from the approaching economy of the body of Christ. He blisters the saints for dividing into four factions. This anticipates the one body having no divisions.

- Paul criticizes Jews for seeking a sign, and Greeks for seeking wisdom. Christ is everything, and anything else is foolishness. This is a precursor of the mystery economy in which Paul writes:

“And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all he might have preeminence. (Colossians 1:17-18)

- Next, the building of God. In Judaism this is the Temple in Jerusalem, but to the Corinthians, they are the temple of God because

. . . the Spirit of God dwells in you. (1 Cor. 3:16)

This is a look forward to Ephesians 2:20-22.

He begins the letter with a strict admonition against division (1:10), in which both groups (Jews and Gentiles) stood guilty. Next, he introduces the mystery of God (2:7) for the first time in writing, emphasizing that the Corinthians can only grasp it by the Spirit, not by the natural man (2:14). He moves on to include both groups in the farm and building of God (3:9), built upon Christ as the foundation with the individual responsibility to build with the proper materials (3:12). So far, the letter equally applies to the Jewish and Gentile saints. There are no barriers in Paul's path. All is straightforward.

One of the Corinthian Gentiles is caught in fornication with his stepmother (5:1). It's hard to believe that any Jew brought up under the influence of the law would dare do such a thing, so we should assume he was a Gentile. Paul is astounded by the audacity of such an act, stating that such a thing is not even named among the pagans. But Gentiles before Christ were pagans, and

morality was not their strong suit. He rebukes them sternly, instructing the Jews of the *ekklesia* to purge out the old leaven. This is a direct admonition to the Jewish saints. They were to purge out the old leaven (Feast of Unleavened Bread), mentioning “Christ our Passover” being sacrificed. Then: “let us keep the feast . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” This is altogether written for the Jews who were, apparently, practicing the festivals, at least the Passover and Unleavened Bread.

This letter contains frequent mentions of the “grace” of God (1:3), and grace is a hallmark of the mystery. He mentions the “hidden secret” in 2:7. Chapter 3 contains the “building of God” (3:9), a metaphor developed in Ephesians 2:20-22 – built upon Jesus Christ, our foundation (3:11), also enhanced in Ephesians (2:20). The most compelling argument for Paul knowing hints of the mystery early on is found in chapter 12:12-30 concerning the body of Christ. Listen to these two verses:

For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also the Christ (:12)

This is the beginning verse of Paul’s introduction of the body. Then he ends with this:

Now you are the body of Christ and members particularly (:27)

This is clear. Paul will fully develop this theme in his letters from Rome, but for now we can enjoy this fresh beginning of new truth.

In chapter 13 he describes the passing away of spiritual gifts (13:10-11) that are prominent in the economy of the kingdom, which gifts are not mentioned in his later, mystery letters. He also mentions perfection to come (:10) which he describes in Ephesians 4:12-13 as being present among the saints.

2 Corinthians.

In chapter 5 Paul talks of being “in Christ” and becoming a “new creation.” This new creation in Ephesians is the one new man made “in himself” (2:15). In chapter 12 there is mention of “visions and revelations of the Lord” (:1) and “the abundance of revelations” (:7). Paul elaborates in Ephesians 3 when he writes “that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery” (:3).

Galatians.

Paul begins with “who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world” (:4). In the economy of the kingdom the Lord’s death was a tragic murder, but in the economy of grace it is deliverance. In Ephesians 1 he writes “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (:7). This represents a much deeper appreciation of the Lord’s death than the kingdom saints knew.

Does this indicate Paul’s familiarity with the mystery revelation, or was Paul such a profound thinker that he was able to discern these things on his own? We know he was a deep thinker, but we do not know if he was sharing what he saw of the Lord through revelation, or by connecting the dots through fellowship, study, and prayer. Whatever the case, Paul reacted heatedly to

something that happened in Antioch that gives the impression of Paul seeing the mystery early rather than later.

Galatians 2 tells the story of the clash of two economies – one on the decline: one on the incline.

Peter visited the Antioch saints and took a meal with them. Simple enough. Then Jews from James in Jerusalem showed up and frightened the leading apostle of the twelve. The record doesn't say why they were there, but their motives were, shall we say, suspect. Peter right away withdrew from the Gentiles and joined the Jews, even influencing Barnabas to do the same. Paul had enough. He confronted Peter in front of everyone about his actions and verbally lashed him. But was Paul warranted in his outrage? After all Peter was simply being a Jew and he knew he wasn't to eat with the unclean Gentiles, even though it hadn't been that long ago when the Lord made it clear to him in three visions that Gentiles were no longer unclean. What Peter did here was irreconcilable with his visions of the unclean animals (Acts 10 – 11:18), a hugely important episode in the book of Acts. It brought into sharp focus the dispensational changes that were brought in by the conversion of Paul.

During this recount, Paul revealed a deep truth about the Lord's death. We cannot say with confidence that he saw this from revelation or from study and prayer, but revelation seems more likely. It was this:

I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (:20)

This inclusion with Christ in His death and the fact that He now lives in us had never been seen or known before Paul. Even the fact that the Lord gave Himself for Paul was a new concept. This is far, far removed from a tragic death at the hands of the Jews and Romans. These were new bedrock principles that carried forth into the dispensation of the mystery, enriching knowledge that came with Paul's conversion.

Chapter 3. Paul brings in Abraham to make another important eternal point:

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (:6)

Abraham believed God before he was circumcised as the first Hebrew, so he believed as a Gentile. This fact Paul used to encourage the Gentiles of Galatia.

That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (:14)

Paul would go on to use this eternal truth for the rest of his ministry. Did he receive it by revelation of the mystery early on, or did it come through study, meditation, prayer and fellowship? Maybe both. He ends the chapter with an iteration that

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (:28)

This is Ephesians 2:14 – “For he is our peace who has made both one (Jew and Gentile) and has broken down the middle wall of partition” – eliminating all distinctions in the body of Christ.

Paul must have known something of this important feature of the body of Christ early on when he wrote to the Galatians. This indicates that the little flock congregations under Paul's teaching were obligated at that time to practice the same oneness as would the Ephesians in a few years. There was to be no differences among the saints. This is a foundational body of Christ principle, strong evidence of Paul's early knowledge of at least portions of the mystery, and not only early knowledge, but also early practice as well.

74 YEARS CHAPTER FOUR

HEBREWS

Paul's passion for the Jews remained high even after the debacle in the Temple. He wrote to bring the Jerusalem assembly to Christ, away from everything Jewish. It was time for them to embrace their exiled Messiah, not their old religion. But he had to be careful. He had to tread lightly, even writing anonymously to let the Spirit do all the talking. To reveal who he was would reopen the fresh wounds from the Temple fiasco. The little flock there knew well who Paul was and how it was rumored that he had forsaken Moses and the law. We can be certain that James had not set them straight, sharing their suspicion, if not disgust, of the "Gentile" apostle. To them Paul was a turncoat, a traitor to Moses. Paul was aware of this and had to meet them on their ground, with only Jesus the slain and resurrected Messiah as the common denominator between him and them. They knew Him as their Messiah, true, but they could not shake their traditions. Paul had to be careful if he would lead them away from Judaism to their great High Priest in heaven. He hoped that by pointing them away from their entanglement in Judaism toward a "look unto Jesus," they would escape to freedom. But he had to take first things first – rescue them from the stranglehold of their old religion. He was more than willing to step into anonymity if his countrymen could embrace the Savior and nothing else. The wise apostle set upon a noble project.

What did he reveal to them? What is the content of the treatise? It should be apparent to a serious student of the Bible that Paul is not explaining or promoting the exiled Messiah of Israel. In so many points he is describing the exalted and glorified Jesus – the author and finisher of their faith; the great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (not Aaron); the Captain of their salvation; the one made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death; the greater than Moses; the beloved scapegoat they were to follow outside the camp of Judaism; etc. It was this one perfect Man Paul urged upon the remnant at the expense of all other distractions. Paul saw the demise of Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel when he witnessed the saints embracing the law. Not only is Paul extolling the heavenly virtues of the exalted King, but he is also exhorting the Hebrews to come forward to Him and to leave every inferior thing behind.

This should put to rest the corrosive idea that Paul was a disrupter of what Jesus put in place in His ministry and with His twelve apostles. I can't emphasize enough that Jesus gave Paul a three-fold commission and this treatise to the Hebrews – most likely Jews in Jerusalem and Judea – proves beyond any argument that he was writing this treatise in fulfillment of his obligation to Israel. He was not usurping; he was building up their faith in Messiah.

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil. (Hebrews 6:19)

Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. (Hebrews 13:13)

Twelve times he encourages them to press on into the reality of Christ.

- "Let us (Hebrews 4:11).

- “**Let us** hold fast our profession” (4:14).
- “**Let us** . . . come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16).
- “**Let us** go on unto maturity. . .” (6:1).
- “**Let us** draw near with a pure heart, in full assurance of faith. . .” (10:22).
- “**Let us** hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. . .” (10:23).
- “**Let us** consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works” (10:24).
- “**Let us** lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us, and **let us** run with patience the race that is set before us” (12:1).
- “**Let us** hold fast to grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (12:28).
- “**Let us** go forth therefore unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (13:13).
- “By Him, therefore, **let us** offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (13:15).

These are glorious words regarding the purpose of the economy of the kingdom. They are deep and profound. They are words written by one who had spent decades and his immense energy in debating the Jews concerning Jesus, Son of Yahweh. Paul knew that if they obeyed his exhortations, the way would open for the King to return and establish His kingdom. Peter’s message of repentance and water baptism was in danger of being swallowed up by Jewish traditions. Plus, James, one of the twelve (not the James of Jerusalem) who had received Jesus’ promise to sit on twelve thrones to judge Israel, had been murdered several years earlier. He had not been replaced as had Judas, so how could the kingdom come if all the thrones were not occupied?

John’s book of the Revelation warning of the seven-year tribulation to come was almost two decades old and nothing yet had transpired; in fact, if anything, the national leaders were more dug in than ever against their Messiah King. “We will not have this man to rule over us.” These words spoken at Jesus’ trial reverberated with appalling force as if they had been uttered yesterday. To Paul’s thinking, it was only a short time before the offer of the earthly kingdom to Israel would be set aside. What would be left for Israel then? Paul feared the worst and exhorted more fervently. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”

Paul was confident that if the recipients of his treatise would obey what he wrote, they would exit the dying religion and embrace their King. All depended on their view of Jesus. Was he the exiled King gone into a far country? Was He the exalted Son of Man, the Captain of salvation, the great High Priest? Once they saw Jesus as the Author and Completer of faith, they would understand and repent and prepare themselves for His soon return. Paul could desire nothing more than to see his brethren join him in the pursuit of their Messiah and His coming kingdom.

Paul wrote the treatise of Hebrews to the remnant assemblies of Judea, urging them to come forward to the “better things,” to embrace their rejected and exiled King, and to leave Judaism behind with all its old and stifling practices. He tells them that Jesus’ death for sin has torn in half the veil to the innermost place of the Temple, making a “new and living way” into the presence of the Father. He exhorts them to “come boldly” into what Jesus’ death has afforded them. This is the only way for the spiritual maturation of the little flock. Going back to Judaism

was to return to infancy. Paul could not bear it. He is addressing Hebrews after all, like their father Abraham – those who cross over rivers. He urges them to cross over from the law, the Temple, circumcision and traditions unto Jesus alone – to cross over like their ancient forebears did.

Peter no doubt read Paul's narrative and concurred, attributing to Paul's writings equality with the scriptures. Some of the last words he wrote were these:

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:14-16)

This is ultimate praise from Peter and a warm acknowledgement that his fellow warrior/slave was inspired by the Spirit and was indeed writing scripture in his letters. Both brothers were united in their deep burden for their Jewish brethren. Knowing Christ as Paul described in this treatise would result in their salvation and would bring in their kingdom.

Along this same line, it is reasonable to assume that Matthew and Mark wrote their gospels to the remnant believers, probably in the forties. Matthew wrote to extol the exiled King as the means of salvation and entrance into the millennial kingdom. Mark wrote of the servant slave as the example for the little flock to follow as His kingdom people. Peter wrote his letters to the little flock to prepare them for the coming tribulation and kingdom, although in his second letter he seems resigned to the setting aside of that kingdom and provided a segue into Paul's ministry.

Luke wrote his gospel to his friend Theophilus, describing the perfect life of the perfect man. The very fact that we can read these writings indicates strongly that the first century congregations read them as well, and probably copied them to have their own manuscripts.

Bringing unbelieving Jews to Christ and bringing the little flock to the heavenly, exalted, and glorified High Priest drove Paul in this writing. It demands our attention. Are we being presumptuous to attribute the book to Paul? Wasn't he, after all, the apostle to the Gentiles who unfolded the mystery of the body of Christ? Why would he write to the Hebrews exclusive of the Gentiles? Weren't the two groups without distinction in the one body?

A close look at the content of the argument says Paul wrote it. Who else could have written it? Apollos? We know very little of him except that he was a follower of John the baptizer. Barnabas? No doubt a faithful brother who looked after Paul, but we know nothing of his intellect. Peter? Almost no one feels Peter had the tools needed to write such an apology. Though we do not know the exact timing of Peter's death, he was no doubt familiar with the writing before he wrote his final endorsement of Paul's writing in his last letter.

Peter admits to not understanding some of Paul's writings, and certainly Hebrews is no exception. This does not prove Paul's authorship, but that should give us some confidence that he is the writer. Peter seems to imply it. Other suggestions for different authors seem flimsy.

There is also the mention of Timothy, Paul's student, at the end of the writing which points to Paul's authorship.

ROMANS

Paul wrote Romans late in the Acts period during the kingdom economy, perhaps in Caesarea while waiting transport to Rome; perhaps on the ship in transport. Much in the letter carries over to the economy of the mystery as a foundation upon which he builds later. Perhaps Paul knew the end was near for the offer of the kingdom to Israel, and perhaps this emboldened him to hold nothing back.

From the outset this letter is Paul's most philosophical. The first eight chapters consist of Paul's explanation of what salvation is and the importance of faith to the seeker of salvation. Salvation by faith applies across all economies because it is a universal truth. The early economies had some works attached to faith that the Lord required of the believers, but faith was indispensable. Adam had to offer sacrifices; Noah had to build an ark; Abraham had to be circumcised; Moses and the Israelites had to keep the law; the little flock had to be water baptized. But in the body of Christ economy, there are *no* requirements except to receive the resurrected and glorified Head.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested . . . even the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (3:21-24)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (6:23)

These are truths for the body of Christ that are developed in Paul's prison letters. For example, the apostle says much about "life," the eternal, divine life that we receive upon salvation and which we are to live by and appropriate for the rest of our lives.

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (5:10)

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (6:4)

The body of Christ is built upon this truth. Here is Ephesians 2:4-6 written directly and exclusively to the body:

But God, who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has made us alive together with Christ, (by grace you are saved) and has raised us up together and made us sit together in heaven in Christ.

It is hard to imagine Romans 8 coming to Paul without a visit or two from the Lord directly. So much is here concerning the indwelling Christ as the Spirit of life in our spirit, and our responsibility of setting our mind upon that Spirit to enjoy life and peace (:6). Our practice of living by His life makes us His sons and heirs according to the Lord's foreknowledge and predestination, so that we could be conformed to His image as the called, the justified, and soon to be glorified. Listen to these marvelous precepts:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren, Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (:28-30)

These truths provide a strong foundation for the saints to come to build up the body of Christ. Paul was a smart man, no doubt; but to see these spiritual truths on his own is a stretch. They must have come through revelation from the Head of the body. They are just too profound for a mere mortal even though that mortal stands head and shoulders above us all.

In chapter 12 Paul lays the groundwork for Ephesians, and all the letters he wrote from Rome. Those letters were about saints living corporately as the body of Christ, and the foundation of that living is found in 12:1-2:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God – your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

This is one of those vital teachings that transcend any dispensational boundary. It was as appropriate to the little flock saints as it would be to the body of Christ saints to come.

Paul again makes mention of the one body in verses four and five which mirrors 1 Corinthians 12 and is a precursor to his further revelation of the body in Ephesians 4:11-13. Here are the verses:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office. So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5)

And he (Christ) gave some apostles, and some prophets and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, with a view to the work of the ministry of the building up of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

If Paul was not sharing what the Lord had shown him, he was surely prescient, a paragon of spiritual insight. As we have seen, he very well could have been. That is how extraordinary was this special vessel. I still side with revelation.

The last five chapters of Romans could be looked upon as a practical pattern for all that Paul would share after his arrest in Rome. To the Ephesians and the Colossians he opened the full mystery of grace and of the body of Christ. These highest of all spiritual concepts came on the heels of Paul's tempering words at the end of his Roman epistle. What would we do in this present time if he had not included the principles of the practice of the body life? To this day these words ring out through history in the Word of God. These are words as appropriate to us now as they were to the Romans then.

During Acts Paul is aware of the peril facing his countrymen concerning their Messiah. This is why he visits their synagogues in every city, holding fast to the rule: “to the Jew first and then the Greek.” Though he is faithful to his own, it becomes apparent that they are drifting away from the truth of Christ. At the end of his journeys, Paul returns to Jerusalem one last time; this time James convinced him to enter the Temple with others to complete a vow. Radical, legalistic Jews who have never forgiven him for forsaking Moses, find out he’s in the Temple. They riot, forcing the Romans to save him and take him to Caesarea to await transport to Rome. Finally in Rome he calls to him the leaders of the dispersed Jews and presents them the Messiah/King one more time. They waffle and reject, forcing Paul to issue the pronouncement of judicial judgment upon Israel in Acts 28:24-28:

*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!”*

This pronouncement was the last of three, so it came as no surprise to the delinquent nation. The first was Acts 13:46; the second in 18:6, both by the word of Paul who was most familiar with the nation’s demise.

These three warnings were pivotal points in Israel’s history. After answering Pilate’s question of what to do with Jesus, the Jews cried out passionately, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” And they threatened to riot if Pilate didn’t submit to their will, and Pilate, not willing to get crossways with the Caesar, relented. To seal the evil deed, the crowd yelled: “His blood be on us, and on our children!”

Israel’s leaders failed. Once at Stephan’s death and once at Rome at the pleading of Paul. Judean Jews and the scattered Jews said no. Yahweh had no choice but to lay aside His beloved nation for a time – a very long time it turns out. The occupiers of the land came and destroyed their city and their temple in 70 AD, eventually driving them out of their land. Yahweh’s wonderful activity and speaking went quiet; the signs and miracles and wonders passed away like the morning mist, thrusting the favored nation into a deep, lonely, and desperately long night of darkness.

And so it was. Never were actions taken with more impact. They murdered the Son of God, and for nearly two millennia the Gentiles have defiled and disparaged Jews. But even then, in the first century His longsuffering still extended to them for a time. The nation had 40 years to repent and embrace the One they had slain, but they remained unwilling until the Lord set them

aside in 62 AD., destroyed their city and Temple in 70 AD, forty years after they killed their Messiah.

The Lord withdrew His offer of the kingdom to the nation in 62 AD, even though there were still eight years to go before the 40-year probation would expire in 70 AD. What happened in the interim? The nation revolted against Rome and Rome unleashed its destructive fury.

THE LATER LETTERS

After Israel made her dreadful decision, the Lord then released Paul to go strictly to the Gentiles. No more was he tethered to “the Jew first, and then the Greek.” No more was circumcision a major issue. No more was the law of Moses lurking about to bring the Gentile believers into bondage. Now the Lord unfolded the full vision of the mystery of grace and of the body of Christ. During all this descending geopolitical darkness, the sun of the body of Christ rose brightly, briefly, in the 60s, but then fell the way of religion. But a golden thread of truth was born and has remained unbroken in a believing remnant from then to now.

From his house in Rome Paul revealed the mystery of grace and of the body that had been hidden in Yahweh from before creation (Ephesians 3:1-6). We don't know precisely when Paul received the revelation of the mystery, whether it was in the desert following his conversion, or at this juncture in Rome, or even if it was a gradual awakening along the way, which, according to his early letters, seems most likely. However, there is no dispute about the brightness of the new economy as it descended upon Paul in his Roman safe house. Two letters written to two congregations – Ephesus and Colosse – unveiled what had been hidden in the Father's heart from eternity past. He had always wanted His Son to have a body, and Paul was His chosen vessel to make it known and to make it a reality. To be a part of this is the highest calling any human being can experience.

After Paul pronounced judicial judgment on Israel in Rome (Acts 28:25-28), water baptism, speaking in tongues, healings, the casting out of demons, etc. were suspended along with the kingdom economy. These features are absent in the economy of the mystery. Under Peter's ministry to the circumcision (Israel), salvation required faith with works – repentance and water baptism – and for assurance of salvation the requirement of works remained; that is, endurance and faithfulness all the way to the end of a person's life. This is a big distinction between the two gospels. The original gospel to ancient Israel required the hard work of keeping the law. After Pentecost Peter's gospel required repentance and water baptism and continued faithfulness to the Messiah. But Paul's gospel required faith and faith alone. Salvation was by grace and not by any works (Ephesians 2:8-9), and it was made eternally secure by virtue of our heavenly position in Christ and by the sealing of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:3-14). These differences between the two economies are critical to understand and should *never* be conflated.

A careful reading of his letters reveals many items unique to Paul. Where did he pick up these truths? Was it his immense experience in Judaism or in the Spirit's inspiration? A collusion of both? Probably. Judging from Paul's early letters (those written during the Acts period), it seems like he had received and was receiving light from the Lord regarding the economy to come. As

he received light, he shared. And what he shared he expected others to understand and embrace. How else can we explain his confrontation with Peter in Antioch recorded in Galatians? Consider.

Paul was an irritant to the traditional, unbelieving Jews, and even more problematic to the believing Jews like James who remained tethered to Judaism. These Jews wanted the Gentiles to submit themselves to circumcision, a major tenet of Moses' law. But Paul would have none of it. Though he was a credentialed, top-flight Jew – “Pharisee of the Pharisees” – he had received from the Lord a gospel far different and more “user-friendly” than Peter’s gospel of repentance and water baptism. Is this crazy talk? His gospel was this:

“For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

Under Paul’s gospel a recipient does nothing but believe.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)

Grace was everything to Paul. He had gone from hardcore enemy of Jesus to the apostle to the Gentiles in a very short and sweet conversion prompted and executed by the Lord of grace Himself. Paul was changed in an instant. His conversion experience became his gospel. But it’s unlikely the Lord divulged every detail that would go into that gospel. We can be pretty sure that whenever Paul became aware of new light, he shared it. However, he was not reckless. He knew he had a responsibility to the Jewish believers as well as to Gentile believers because his commission involved both. He knew his audience, what they could grasp, what they couldn’t. To the Jew it was all about their exiled Messiah; to the Gentiles it was Jesus as Savior and what He accomplished by dying for them. When these two groups were brought together in the *ekklesia* in various cities, he tactfully and artfully negotiated the minefield of Jewish religion and Gentile paganism.

After his incarceration in Rome, after the Jewish national rejection, Paul embarked upon the grandest experiment ever conceived in the history of the *ekklesia* – the bringing together into one body two antagonistic groups of Jews and Gentiles. Over these people groups Christ would reside as the heavenly Head. This extraordinary departure from human traditions and even human nature toward the end of our 74 years, qualifies the 74 as the pinnacle of the human experience. This is what is known as God’s “eternal purpose” hidden in Him from before creation. That Jews and Gentiles could join at all was a serious miracle. For them to put aside all their differences and to join under Christ their Head was unprecedented. Though the body was introduced in 1 Corinthians and developed in Romans, the concept of the two groups losing all their distinctions *under the headship of Christ* was brand new. This is what was hidden in the Father and never revealed until Paul wrote to the Ephesians. The core of the great mystery hidden in Yahweh is the headship of Christ over His body. This coupling of Head and body produces the “one new man” of Ephesians 2:15 – “to make in himself of two one new man.” The transcendence of this spiritual reality brings us straight into Yahweh’s heart where it was conceived. Let us spend much time here soaking it all in!

Think of it. Paul wrote the three letters to the congregations in 62 – to Ephesus, to Philippi, and to Colosse. He died six years later – leaving the assemblies only six years to see, understand, and

practice the truth of the body of Christ under the tutelage of the apostle. We don't know how much the mystery took hold, especially when we read of Paul's final lament to Timothy that all in Asia had turned from him and Demas forsook him and no one stood with him at his trial, except maybe Luke.

It should not surprise us even a little if, in Paul's exhortation to Timothy about rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), he regarded his own letters and Peter's letters and the gospels as the word of truth to be divided along with the Hebrew Scriptures. These brothers were not stupid, nor were they falsely humble to discredit what they had written by the Spirit's breath. Did they not know when the Spirit was inspiring them? Surely, they considered their writings as the "word of truth" meant to be put in their proper context along with the ancient writings. Paul wrote:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the Word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God... (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Was Paul referring to the ancient Scriptures, or to his own ministry and writings? "The word of God which you heard of us." That's clear. Paul's words were the Word of God.

Hold fast the form of sound words which you have heard of me... (2 Timothy 1:13).

And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men... (2 Timothy 2:2).

Paul was not unaware of the Spirit's breathing in what he wrote. Nor was Peter. We should attribute to Peter the discernment that the kingdom was not going to be realized in his lifetime; and that the saints of the remnant should accept Paul's words as scripture and let them be their future guidance. Could there be a higher honor bestowed upon one brother by another? Peter and Paul had fought the battle for Israel to the very end, but Paul, from the moment of his conversion, had the privilege of introducing to the world the economy of the mystery, the secret hidden in the Father concerning His Son's body:

The mystery which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God"
(Ephesians 3:9)

What about us? Seeing the life of Paul, would we, like Demas, also forsake him by dismissing his vision, his message, his passion for the body of Christ? Would we rather stay put with the traditions and false teachings of a discredited religion bearing the name and not the reality of Jesus Christ? It is extremely interesting to explore the life of the apostle – when he saw what he saw, why he did what he did, how he interacted with the other apostles, etc. Does it inform and compel our response to the great mystery? Do we have the heart of the apostle to give up everything, including life itself, for the one body?

After decades of debating, pleading, and persuading the Jews, Paul gave the final word and the Lord set aside His chosen people along with their kingdom. A very sad day indeed in the history of Jacob's progeny. But at Jesus' trial they had answered Pilate with the most damning word

possible – “His blood be upon us and on our children.” Thus began Israel’s descent into a very dark place for a very long time. Paul’s full attention turned toward the pagan Gentiles.

Paul was never disingenuous. He was hiding nothing. And he was all in all the time. If you doubt that, read Romans 9:1-3 where he wished himself accursed that his brethren could be saved. He fought hard for his countrymen to the very end of his divine commission. To say that he knew what was to follow is to read into the narrative what is not there. Can we say definitively when the body of Christ came into existence? No. Was it when Paul first believed? We don’t know, but we do know that whatever were the mechanics of his receiving the mystery hid in Yahweh from before creation we can only speculate. We know Ephesians is the unrestrained revelation and explanation of the mystery of the body of Christ, the divine organism comprised of Jews and Gentiles having no distinction. All barriers between them are blasted away forever.

The Lord as the heavenly gospel preacher did not require Paul to do anything for his salvation, so we could say Paul was the first person saved by grace alone without any conditions; and we know he did say he was a pattern of those who would follow (1 Tim. 1:16). If that had been the beginning of the mystery, then we would expect him to set off to the pagan Gentiles. However, after he believed in the Lord Jesus Ananias, a faithful brother of the kingdom economy, took Paul and baptized him in accordance with Peter’s message at Pentecost. This qualified him to preach to Jews and to build up their congregations, which he faithfully did while ministering to Gentiles as well. But it was costly. Here’s his description in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28:

... in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

This was a man, not an angel. These things hurt. But we search in vain for any indication that his undistracted passion for Israel ever waned. This was the Lord’s will for Paul. He allowed the offer to Israel to play out, to run its course before moving on. After the rejection in Acts 28 the Lord did indeed move on, placing His apostle under house arrest. What better time for him to receive, contemplate, and assimilate the highest vision ever afforded a human being than when he was in Rome in a safe house, unable to move about; stationary for the second time in his Christian life (Caesarea being the first) – exactly the situation where the Lord could unfold to His slave an economy that would encompass the world with grace.

From this time to the end of his life, Paul took the great secret Yahweh entrusted to him and passed it on in writing to the congregations in Ephesus and Colosse, expounding the eternal mystery that had been hidden in the Father from before creation. Those letters are a clear presentation of the one body comprised of Jews and Gentiles under one Head without any kind of distinction. The emphasis is on the ascended Head and on our position in Him as being seated with Him in the heavenly places. Together with Him we are the one new man of Ephesians 2:15.

This mystery of the grace of God, of the one body of Christ consisting of Jews and Gentiles, became Paul's all-consuming passion, as it should have been, for this is the Father's eternal purpose. This ministry became the fulfillment of the third pillar of Paul's divine commission – to bear the Lord's name before the Gentiles. Because of his efforts and diligence, we, formerly Gentile dogs, are beneficiaries of the highest revelation and most exalted position in the spiritual realm. To be the Son's body according to the Father's eternal purpose is the epitome of grace. For this Paul was called and we are called, and it is up to us to contribute obedience to the very end even as our pattern Paul did. May we be as faithful as he was, for, after all, as far as concerns us, it was for this the Father created.

A STEP BACK

When Paul first started his Christian journey, he was baptized into Peter's message – that Israel needed to see and embrace their Messiah so that He could return from exile to establish His kingdom. Being in Jerusalem in the early days, he saw the condition of the saints in the assembly, how they were being persecuted by their families and countrymen for their belief in Messiah Jesus, how they were being tempted to go back to the animal sacrifices in the Temple, how they were regarding Judaism above Yahweh's Lamb. Throughout his ministry to the Gentiles, whenever he went to the cities to seek converts and a congregation, Paul would go first to the Jewish synagogue and argue for the Messiah, and frequently got beat up for it. But his passion for his people never abated. His desire to see his countrymen saved cost him tons of physical trauma and nearly his life. He was faithful to his commission to the Gentiles, to be sure, but he never stopped agonizing over his brethren.

Toward the end of his ministry to Israel Paul determined to go to Jerusalem despite the protestations of the saints along the way, most notably Agabus the prophet. When he arrived, he carried the gift for the poor of Jerusalem from the saints throughout the empire. That seemed lost when James convinced him to join four men in the Temple to fulfill the Nazarite vow of Numbers 6.

This is an amazing turn of events. After what we've seen of Paul in his ministry, this is astounding. The unchallenged king of grace and freedom from the law had shaved his head on the journey back to Jerusalem, and now was about to take a seven-day separation, the end of which was the slaughter of three innocent lambs. Plus, there were four other men involved in the vow, whose costs Paul had been instructed to cover. Fifteen sheep awaited slaughter after the seven-day waiting period was complete. This is almost too hard to believe.

In a controversial move he went along with James' carefully devised scheme, if not outright deception, and went into the temple to separate himself and complete the vow with the other four. His plan for Paul was less than truthful. James said,

” . .and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning you, are nothing” (Acts 21:24)

Nothing? Really? That simply cannot be true, reflecting on the conflict at Antioch when those from James frightened Peter into retreat from the Gentiles. Paul had informed the Corinthians of the coming demise of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13). He coordinated with Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, in the work of the ministry. He had told the Galatians that circumcision meant nothing in Christ (Gal. 5:6). For Gentiles to trust in circumcision was to encumber themselves with the whole law.

To deceive people into thinking that Paul's preaching and practice were "nothing" was disingenuous. During his ministry Paul moved further away from Judaism as his involvement with Gentile assemblies was on the upswing. To put himself in needless jeopardy at Jerusalem to reach his countrymen was in violation of the warnings and prophecies that preceded his arrival in Jerusalem. Eventually the brothers issuing the warnings threw up their hands, saying,

The will of the Lord be done. (Acts 21:14)

His insistence required the Lord's intervention, and it landed him in the safety of Caesarea. Hindsight shows us clearly just how sovereign was that divine interruption.

Paul's behavior can only be explained by his passion for his countrymen. But his presence in the temple stirred up zealots who tried to kill him, creating a life-threatening riot that required a Roman rescue and an appeal to the Caesar, and which landed him in Caesarea to await his transfer to Rome. The Lord orchestrated this interruption before the animals could be sacrificed. Had the vow been completed, Paul's credibility would have been seriously compromised. Judaism would have won a decisive victory. It was in Caesarea that he had two years to reflect upon what had happened in Jerusalem, and more broadly, what he had experienced in his twenty-five-year ministry to Jews and Gentiles.

Ringling in his ears was James' proclamation:

"You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law" (Acts 21:20).

This stubborn adherence to the law by the Christians in Jerusalem was not healthy, and Paul wrote to remediate it, thankful to the Lord for the Temple rescue. Had he gone through with the vow and its sacrifices, his life's work would have been questioned and perhaps rejected. But the vow was incomplete, as if it had never happened. The old religion nearly rose up to frustrate the Lord's intention for the body of Christ. This whole episode should have troubled Paul deeply. Could the kingdom come to such a people as this?

After seeing and tasting the fury and fanaticism of Judaism in Jerusalem, the apostle landed in Caesarea with Luke under the protection of the Romans. Typical of Paul, he used his time wisely. He dictated the lengthy treatise to his brethren comprising the remnant of believers in Judea, strongly urging them to look unto Jesus and to come forth unto Him outside the camp of Judaism. He presented a Christ far superior to anything of the old economy of Moses. By writing to these Hebrews, Paul was throwing them a lifeline to come over to Christ and leave their past behind. It seems obvious how timely was this word. It couldn't have been written at a more critical time in the history of the little flock. Peter and John labored under the overbearing, law-

promoting James, whose leadership of the assembly was suspect. Did being the Lord's flesh brother have anything to do with it? Nothing is definitive, but two years in Caesarea under Roman protection gave Paul the opportunity to think, to assess, and to write.

BROTHERLY FELLOWSHIP

When Paul converted, Ananias brought him under the economy of Peter's gospel of repentance and water baptism and the offer of the kingdom to Israel. These were elements of the program unique to Israel, and Paul, passionate for the salvation of his countrymen (Romans 9:4), joined the apostles in their effort of proclaiming Jesus the Messiah to the nation. He argued incessantly in any nearby synagogue in favor of the Messiah, and this Pauline passion is readily evident in the book of Hebrews. The question is how this squares with the commission the Lord gave him at the onset of his Christian career to preach to the Gentiles.

Wherever Paul went he encountered Gentiles. They were primarily Greeks with their pagan gods and practices. It was the Lord's intention that Gentiles be included in the *ekklesia* with the Jews. In the Lord's mind this was in preparation for the body of Christ. It was Paul's commission and obligation to see that happen. Not an easy task! Paul would need help.

What kind of fellowship and coordination did Paul have with Peter and John? How did Corinthian factions coalesce around him (1 Corinthians 1:12) and around Peter? Peter preached Jesus the Messiah and His coming just as Paul and Apollos did. All these brothers had the same goal – to build up the Corinthians as the Lord's house. This assembly was plagued with all kinds of problems, so it is no wonder that Peter and Paul and Apollos were called in by the Spirit to remedy the situation. No congregation was more conflicted. There was a plethora of sign gifts (healings, tongues, etc. of the kingdom economy) but there was no growth in their spiritual lives. These three brothers colluded to fight for the dear saints and to bring them into a full realization of what they had in Jesus. Surely, they had a good coordination and fellowship, because at that time and in that place, they were in total agreement under the kingdom economy.

We today are living in the secret that was hidden in the Father until Jesus revealed it to Paul from heaven. How can we be lax having been given so much? The Lord has given us the truth of the economies for the uplifting of our spiritual welfare. If there are no separate economies to guide our understanding, how is it possible to decipher the Word of Truth? We are left with vague and suspicious traditions to inform our knowledge, and traditions have never been a good source of anything regarding spiritual things. In fact, we'd be better off to believe the opposite of conventional wisdom. We would at least land closer to the truth than if we believe what has been passed down for centuries as dogma.

By the Lord's grace, we have some insight into His household management of creation and, especially, of His people Israel, and of the body of Christ. The economical (dispensational) view of the world and the Bible unravels so many enigmas that have remained unsolved for generations. What this view gives us is context, without which we muddle along through life, satisfied with fumbling around in the dark and never sure about anything, "carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14). What do we do, for instance, with the Ten Commandments? Do we, as Christians in the body of Christ, think they are for us today? If you

say no, then why not? After all, they are in the Bible, and the whole Bible is the Word of God, is it not? Do we get to pick and choose? What about the so-called sermon on the mount? Is that for us in the body of Christ? If you say yes, then why? Because it is in the New Testament? Is that where we draw the line? If that's the case, then is the Father's forgiveness of our trespasses conditional upon our forgiveness of others? Matthew 6:12 says so. Does our salvation depend on our behavior?

At Pentecost Peter preached repentance and water baptism for the remission of sins, but Paul taught the Gentiles "by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). The two men taught differently about basic salvation, so what do we do about that? Both are in the New Testament. After His resurrection, Jesus taught this, recorded by Mark in 16:15-18:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he believes not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.

Is this our commission today? Are to organize mission societies to "go into all the world?" What about casting out demons? Or handling snakes? Or drinking poison? Or healing? Are these our instructions as the body of Christ?

Jesus said anyone who does not abide in Him as the true vine will be cut off and burned. Under the kingdom economy saints had to maintain their salvation and endure to the end. Do we under the mystery economy have to endure? We who are seated together with Christ in the heavens can be lost? Consider what we have under grace: We are:

- 1 – Crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:6)
- 2 – Dead with Christ (Galatians 2:20)
- 3 – Buried with Christ (Colossians 2:12)
- 4 – Made alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13)
- 5 – Raised with Christ (Ephesians 2:6)
- 6 – Seated with Christ (Ephesians 2:6)
- 7 – Manifested with Christ (Colossians 3:4)

Paul wrote this:

He loved us even when we were dead in our transgression; made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6)

This is about as secure as it gets. The Father, rich in mercy, loved us and made us alive by His life and raised us together to sit in Christ Jesus and will show us off as His masterpiece through eternal ages. This sounds like security to me.

Not so under Peter's gospel of repentance and water baptism. Enduring to the end was vital. For us in these days, we must know these things, or we can become so hopelessly confused we'll set

the Bible aside and quit the fight. This is why we must know context, and nothing provides context better than economical (dispensational) truth.

Something must give. We can't conflate these passages without performing scriptural mutilation. We must know the context! Who was Jesus' audience? Who was Paul's? Where do we fit in? What is for Israel and what is for the body of Christ? What is for both? If we don't understand the divisions in Scripture, we'll take everything for ourselves and leave Israel with nothing but judgment. Our concept of Yahweh will be a mess, and if that's the case, so will our relationship with Him. We need clarity, because everything in our human existence apart from the presence of the Lord's life and light is designed by His enemy to befuddle and deceive us, including, especially, traditional Christendom with its doctrines and practices. *The Bible must make sense*, or we will be mentally, emotionally, and spiritually adrift. Paul warned of this in Ephesians 4:14:

“ . . . that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.”
(Ephesians 4:14)

Traditional interpretations can be, and probably are, “the trickery of men” designed to keep us spiritual children. If we can't discern the Bible intelligently, how can we understand who the Triune God is, what He is about, and what are the applications of what we read to our individual and corporate lives? Paul's admonition to Timothy on the eve of his earthly departure is as vital now as it was then:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

By the end of his life, Paul had not only preached and taught out of the ancient Scriptures but had written letters in which he had uncovered the great “secret” that had never been revealed before to anyone until him. He was the sole recipient of the secret hidden in the Father from ages past. Read carefully his take on this. It is a sharp lesson as to where we should be today.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. (Ephesians 3:1-7).

What is the cause he is writing of here? It is the “economy of the grace of God.” What is that economy's purpose? It is

that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery. (Ephesians 3:3)

And what is this mystery, or “secret?” It is this:

... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ. (Ephesians 3:6)

Fellow heirs and partakers with whom?

And that He might reconcile them both (Jews and Gentiles) to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. (Ephesians 2:16) And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. (Colossians 3:10)

Who comprises this new man? The answer to these questions is this, and this is crucial to understand:

Where there is neither Greek (Gentile, or non-Jew) nor Jew . . . but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3:11)

This could very well be the highest truth a young Christian (or any, for that matter) can ever see. Not only so, but the following verses are also central to Paul's message:

... endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:3-6)

This sevenfold heavenly oneness is a radical departure from the faith/works salvation of the kingdom economy. The seven "ones" are entirely heavenly, and rightly so, for we in this economy of the mystery are heavenly people made to sit in the heavenly places in Christ our Head:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6)

There is no requirement of repentance or water baptism or circumcision or any condition. We are in Christ by grace through faith alone, and our salvation is eternal. We are sublimely blessed! A brother of the Plymouth Brethren nearly two centuries ago wrote these words regarding the mystery of Yahweh and our standing as the body of Christ from Colossians 2:12 and 3:1, 3, and 4:

"We learn from these scriptures, that the Church is spoken of as having died with Christ, risen with him, and made to sit in heavenly places in him – made alive with him, yea, that he is our life. This is the essential and prominent feature of the mystery. *Life* in Christ – *one* with our risen Lord."

"The prominent features of the Mystery, then, which constitute the real character of the Church are: - Partakers of the Resurrection-life of Christ, risen with Him, *seated* in *heavenly places* in Him, blessed with all *spiritual* blessings in heavenly places in Him, witness to those in *heavenly* places; conflict with wicked spirits in *heavenly* places; the Hope of heavenly Glory; the distinction between Jew and Gentile gone, *both* of *one body*, and that body the dwelling-place of *the Holy Ghost*."

“These are points which cannot be neglected without impairing the integrity of “the Mystery.” - George Wigram

Up to the time when Paul wrote his clarifying words, Israel was the chosen nation commissioned with the task of spreading the truth of Yahweh to the rest of the world. But when he was writing to the Ephesians and the Colossians in 62 AD about the “mystery” of the body of Christ, Israel had failed their commission by rejecting their Messiah and His offer of the kingdom (Acts 28). This “secret” economy followed the temporary setting aside of Israel and the economy of the kingdom. Instead of receiving the offer during the probation period, Israel answered by revolting against the Roman Empire in 66 AD and was crushed, losing Jerusalem and the Temple to destruction in 70 AD. The chosen nation would have to wait for her “seventieth seven” (see Daniel 9) when her dispersion to the nations of the world would end in 1948.

DECISION TIME

As for those congregations formed of believing Jews and Gentiles in the former economy, they were faced with a decision as the offer of the kingdom was suspended indefinitely. Would they cling to the gospel of repentance and water baptism preached by Peter at Pentecost, or would they accept and practice the gospel of grace preached by Paul? Would they continue as the remnant of Israel in pursuit of a sidelined kingdom, or would they stretch toward the heavenly citizenship and embrace the gospel of grace and the mystery of the body of Christ? Would they take Paul as their pattern? Would they heed the book of Hebrews and leave the camp and go unto Him as the Lord expected them to do? It seems that the saints of Ephesus did just that. Perhaps Philippi did the same.

If we study the two letters to the saints in Ephesus – the one by John in his Revelation, and the other by Paul written after the final Jewish rejection in 62 AD – we witness the glaring differences between the two. The change is dramatic. I think that sometime around 40AD, John wrote his revelation to the seven believing Jewish congregations under the kingdom economy. In 62 AD Paul wrote to a mix of Jew and Gentile believers under the economy of grace. The Lord through John urges the saints in Ephesus to persevere, to return to their first love, and to overcome. Paul reveals the secret of the body of Christ comprised of Jew and Gentile in one body under one Head seated in the heavenly places in Christ. Which came first in the experience of the Ephesians? I have to believe that assembly moved forward, not backward.

John, writing to the scattered little flock shortly after Stephen’s murder, wrote first. He probably knew many of these saints because they had fled Jerusalem and Judea where he lived. It is highly improbable that the Ephesians would have turned away from the mystery to return to the faith/work elements of the kingdom economy. It is far more likely they turned from the suspended economy of the kingdom to the economy of the body of Christ. This was the Lord’s way for them because His *ekklesia* is singular. They were to go forward into the new dispensation simply because the Lord was done with the old. If Ephesus is the model, the remnant congregations did just that!

In John’s letter in Revelation 2 to Ephesus he encourages this congregation to remember how far

they had fallen and to repent and do the first works – clearly an admonition to fulfill the conditions for the Lord’s blessing upon them. Here is Revelation 2:7:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. “To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.”

This is far removed from the lofty position this same congregation enjoyed in Paul’s letter from prison. These dear saints had come over to the higher calling, leaving behind the requirements and conditions of the economy of the kingdom. Only the Lord’s grace upon His people could affect such a change among an entire congregation. We have no reason to doubt that when the letters to Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse circulated among the congregations that they too followed the Ephesians into the grace-filled economy of the body of Christ.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

Tracing the evolution of the Ephesian assembly reveals the necessity of knowing the context of the scriptures. If we fail in this, we might miss knowing and appreciating the Author of the Word. If our knowledge of Him is skewed and twisted, only a clear reading of the Scriptures will correct it. When the Bible becomes clear through its context, we begin to know who Yahweh is in a transparent way, and our relationship with Him flourishes and grows, and we begin to know His purpose and where we fit into it. Only then do our lives have meaning and direction and focus. Knowing Bible context makes us aware of Satan’s tactics at every turn and gives us the means to repel his attacks.

Knowing context teaches us how to lead others into truth and away from the inducements of this age with all its sticky deceptions. With all of this, how can we ever dismiss the dispensational, or economical, view as unimportant? It is the most important light we can have upon the Word, and once we have light upon the Word, we have light upon everything in the Christian life, from individual to corporate. With this light we will find that Scripture will interpret itself and shed light upon every verse and chapter. One puzzle after another will begin to make sense to us, allowing us to empty our back burner of the issues that have plagued us for years. This is to say nothing of how much the Lord’s nature and character will open to us. This is exciting and worthy of our deepest attention and thought. All we have in our earthly lives that is tangible from the Lord is His written Word. We cannot know Him without it, so for Him to grant us this revelation is the most merciful endowment He can give us. It opens an entirely new realm of vision as to who He is and what He wants of His creation and what He wants of us. Best we take advantage of every moment He gives us since He so graciously and generously pours out His light into our soul and spirit.

Failure to “rightly divide the word of truth” in the past has resulted in the pillaging of much that belongs exclusively to Israel. Most egregious is taking away from her the bride of Christ. Because Christians after the apostles could not comprehend the temporary setting aside of Israel, they fashioned themselves to be the new Israel, the Israel of God, and felt at liberty to take Israel’s treasured possession – the bride of the Lamb. Christians claim the bride as their own using New Testament verses to justify the acquisition. They did not understand then nor do they know now that Israel has another seven years remaining of her history; that this dispensation of

grace and mystery is the continuing fulfillment of the Lord's promise to build His *ekklesia*. When that process is complete, the Lord will issue the upward call to the saints of grace, and the *ekklesia* of Israel will begin again for seven more years as the bride makes herself ready for her Bridegroom.

Some Christians gather to themselves the Ten Commandments, portions of the law that suit them, the sermon on the mount, the Lord's ministry to Israel, and the ministry of the twelve to the believing remnant as if it is spoken and written to them. They make themselves the wise virgins waiting for the bridegroom, and the overcomers in the seven assemblies in Revelation who will rule in the earthly kingdom. *But all this is for Israel, not for the body of Christ.* Such marks the condition among Christians in our contemporary world. More than ever do we need a revelation from the Father regarding the economies and how He has managed and is managing His house of people on this Earth. How and where we fit in determines how we live, what we think about, how we conduct ourselves, what our attitude is toward the world and toward others, and, most importantly, how we perceive and relate to our precious triune Lord. We need vision. We need intelligence. We need to be upended from all our concepts. We need His grace.

With the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, Israel as a nation was left with nothing. The Romans wearied of dealing with this headstrong people, especially after they revolted in 66 AD. The Romans eventually drove most of them out of their land into the rest of the world. The Romans even changed the name of the land of Israel to "Palestine" in deference to Israel's ancient enemy, the Philistines.

The bride (Israel) has had to wait in the shadows of history without a land, a city, or a Temple, wandering from one place to another, from one country to another, always bearing the mistreatment of being interlopers among the Gentiles, living in ghettos, outcasts from society, always yearning for "next year in Jerusalem." Meanwhile, the building up of the body of Christ – the Lord's mystery hidden in Him from ages past – began and thrived . . . at first.

Peter's life and ministry occupied the first half of the Acts; Paul's the second. In this arrangement we can see that the economy of the kingdom involving the remnant congregations followed the requirement of "first the Jew, then the Greek (or Gentiles)." But as we've seen, the trajectory of Israel was not good. In fact, the whole of Acts demonstrates the slow decline of the nation. This is what Peter and the eleven were fighting against. To witness the slipping away of the kingdom promise must have tortured them. They could see that Paul's preaching of grace to the Gentiles was beginning to signal the Lord's shift from Israel to the Gentiles, but there was nothing they could do to stem the tide. The national leaders held the future of Israel captive, and they had already killed Stephen. What would the dispersed Jews headquartered in Rome do with the Messiah and His kingdom? Would they behave any differently? We know too well – they rejected the offer and were set aside.

TO SUMMARIZE

The birth of Jesus, Israel's Messiah and every Christian's Savior, put in motion a series of unusual events populated by larger-than-life characters with world-changing ideas. Together they combined to make 4 BC – 70 AD the single most significant and extraordinary period in the

history of humanity.

The Word of truth – the Bible consisting of Hebrew and Greek scriptures – must be divided into proper segments to be understood. Without these divisions there is confusion. Confusion destroys apprehension of the Bible. When readers cannot grasp what they are reading, they will become discouraged and will most likely lay the Book aside. Some will read it dutifully, but not intelligently. Some will read it to appease the conscience, again without understanding. Some will cherry pick favorite passages. Some will read enough to use it as a club on others. Rare is the reader who seeks the complete picture and understands the context. I hope this booklet is a help in seeing the scope of the 74 years.

Yahweh built the universe. He is the designer and builder and the life giver of all creatures that populate this planet. In the beginning of our human race, Adam and Eve enjoyed the direct fellowship and speaking with Yahweh, but evil came in and prevailed. As the builder and maker, Yahweh changed the way He interacted with humans. This change of dealing is called in the Greek language *oikonomia*, from which we get the English word “economy,” also understood as “dispensation.” It refers to how Yahweh, the divine householder, dispenses beneficial changes to His household. We can see this with the first family.

In the beginning Adam and Eve enjoyed an “economy of fellowship” with their Creator. They disobeyed Yahweh and broke off that fellowship. To restore their relationship, they had to offer an animal sacrifice. We will call this the “economy of blood” because of the sacrifice of animals. This economical change lasted through Noah, and through Abraham and his family. Yahweh moved on in His dealings with people into the “economy of promise” when He promised a selected people and a land to Abraham and his progeny. Out of Isaac and Jacob came the nation of Israel which lived in the promised land. This opened the way for Moses.

Moses introduced the “economy of the law” which codified Yahweh’s expectations of His people and explained who He was. It was in effect until the Lamb of God fulfilled and finalized it by His sacrificial death. He completed and voided the law and its multitude of requirements. As the Spirit, He came to reside in His believers to live out His life in the new “economy of the kingdom,” which lasted until the great national rejection in 62 AD. Following this the economy of the body of Christ came forward and would last until Israel’s kingdom economy would resume.

These divine interventions in human affairs are perfectly legitimate. The Builder of His own project has the perfect right to intervene and modify anything He desires. Understanding the principle of Yahweh’s ability and prerogative to institute changes, we can trace and name the economies.

- 1 – The economy of direct fellowship.
- 2 – The economy of blood.
- 3 – The economy of promise.
- 4 – The economy of the law.
- 5 – The economy of the kingdom.
- 6 – The economy of the body of Christ.

7 – The economy of the kingdom.

After the resurrection, the offer of the Messianic kingdom to Israel could have fulfilled all the promises to Israel had she obeyed. She didn't, and that opened the economy of grace (body of Christ) through Paul. It will persist until the body of Christ is complete. Then the economy of the kingdom will take center stage once again and bring the Lord to Earth for His second advent and the millennial kingdom.

Using these divisions of the Bible and seeing the magnitude of events, we should be able to ascertain the transcendent nature of our 74-year period and when it takes place. Jesus was born in 4 BC and died in 30 AD. His sacrificial death ended the economy of the law because He fulfilled all its conditions. What is fulfilled need not continue. The economy of the kingdom took its place. Peter and the apostles preached repentance and water baptism for the remission of sins to prepare the people for the promised kingdom. In the middle of this kingdom economy, the Gentiles were brought in through Peter. Toward the end of the 74-year period, Israel rejected the offer a final time – the first at Stephen's death and the last in Rome in 62 AD.

The economy of the body of Christ technically began at the conversion of Saul. He was saved by grace alone when the ascended Jesus confronted him. What and how much he saw of the new economy we aren't told, although we have hints in his early letters written in the Acts period (before 62 AD). We can say with certainty that the full revelation came to him in Rome in 62 AD when he wrote Ephesians and Colossians. This economy is still in force to this day and will continue until the Lord calls us (or the faithful part of us) upward in the high calling of Philippians 3:12-14.

That call upward precedes the "resurrection of the righteous" of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Then the previous economy of the kingdom, suspended now for many centuries, will resume with the tribulation of Israel when the bride makes herself ready for her exiled Bridegroom. When that process is completed, the King will return to establish His kingdom and the Father's twin plans – body and bride for His Son – will finalize and result in the new heaven and new Earth for eternity. We will enjoy forever the magnitude and brilliance of His eternal purpose. Here it is in its seven stages (economies):

- 1 – Yahweh and Adam and Eve fellowship face to face. **THE ECONOMY OF FELLOWSHIP**
- 2 – Because of sin entering the new world, Yahweh requires blood sacrifices for communion with the first couple. **THE ECONOMY OF BLOOD**
- 3 – Through Abraham and his progeny, Yahweh selects out of humanity His own special people Israel. **THE ECONOMY OF PROMISE**
- 4 – To shepherd Israel in the ways of Yahweh, He gives them His law and its sacrificial system. **THE ECONOMY OF LAW**
- 5 – Acceptance of and obedience to the Messiah and His offer of the kingdom will result in His return to Earth. Israel's failure causes the kingdom to be suspended for a time, and their city and Temple to be destroyed, and the nation to be scattered. **THE ECONOMY OF THE KINGDOM**
- 6 – While Israel is set aside, the body of Christ is born, develops, matures, and is removed from the Earth. **THE ECONOMY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST**
- 7 – The resumption of the kingdom economy for its final seven years (the Tribulation), the return

of the King, and the establishment of the 1000-year kingdom ends human history and ushers in eternity. THE ECONOMY OF THE KINGDOM

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

When the Bible is divided into its economies, as this small book has done, it raises some questions that must be addressed. Here are some:

- Is water baptism something Christians should practice today?

If the Pauline letters written from Rome are exclusively for believers under the economy of the body of Christ, do they contain the teachings or references to water baptism? The answer is no. Paul mentions baptism in Ephesians 4:5 – “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Study the context of Ephesians 4 and you’ll realize that this baptism has nothing to do with water, but everything to do with the Spirit.

Water baptism is a sacred cow that Christians for centuries have nurtured with the best pasture. To suggest that water is necessary for salvation is to side with Roman Catholicism. No self-respecting Christ should align with that evil religion.

To suggest that water is necessary for identifying with the death and resurrection of Jesus is to deny that regeneration has already put us in Christ. What else do we need apart from Him? Absolutely nothing! Why should we argue and persist that a human work has anything to do with Him? He is enough! Let us rest in that!

- Should Christians pursue the millennial kingdom?

There is an external and an internal aspect of the kingdom. Externally, there is the Messiah’s earthly, thousand-year kingdom established in Jerusalem when He returns from exile. Internally, it is the reign of Christ in the lives of His people as the Head over His body, and His reign extends into heaven and lasts for eternity. We as Christians are destined to inherit this reigning Head in heaven forever and ever.

We Christians in the body of Christ should pursue the higher, heavenly kingdom and leave the kingdom of Messiah to its rightful heirs – the remnant of believing Israel born and matured in the economy of the kingdom.

- Should Christians in the body of Christ practice the Lord’s Table (the last supper)?

There are several facts to consider in this special meal of Jesus and His disciples. All the disciples were Jewish, and, at the time, these brothers were living under the economy of the law. There were no Gentiles present.

The Lord instituted the “new covenant” at this meal. We believers under the economy of the body of Christ are NOT covenant people. Covenant people have obligations of obedience to

certain conditions (endure to the end; abide in the vine; forgive to be forgiven, etc.). We of grace have no such requirements to cause Yahweh to honor His covenant commitment. Not so Israel. She has conditions to keep.

The Lord said He would not take this meal again until the kingdom was in place. The earthly kingdom is not the domain of the body of Christ. It belongs only to Israel.

This meal is entirely an economical (dispensational) issue. The Lord instituted it at the end of the economy of law, The body of Christ was nowhere near at that time. If we persist in this practice, we are guilty of taking from Israel what belongs to her

- Should we in this dispensation regard 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 as a description of the so-called “rapture” of the saints of the body of Christ?

Chronologically, 1 Thessalonians was the first letter Paul wrote while he was in the middle of fulfilling his commission to Israel. This was well before the economy of the kingdom was set aside and the economy of the mystery was instated. A study of the facts around the resurrection reveals a real paucity of subject matter. The best I can determine is that these verses describe the “resurrection of the righteous” for Jewish believers and Gentile proselytes in the remnant assemblies. On the other hand, Paul wrote of the upward call in his letter to the Philippians in the economy of the body of Christ. In it he urges the saints to leave everything behind and ready themselves for the “call upward” (Philippians 3). This seems to be the only exception to the resurrection of the righteous.

Should we then regard 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 as the taking up of the saints in the body of Christ? Only if we want to join the Jews and others of the preceding economies in the general resurrection of the righteous. Better for us in this economy to “attain” to the upward call of Philippians 3 – a special resurrection or “out resurrection” (the only one mentioned in the New Testament) from among the dead.

- Are signs and wonders and spiritual gifts for the body of Christ?

To whom were these items given? To none other than Israel to convince her of Yahweh’s benevolence toward His chosen people. Israel always demanded a sign, and the Lord in His graciousness complied with her wishes. As long as Israel was in play (until she rejected Messiah in 62 AD) there were signs and wonders. Once she was set aside, there were no more sign, gifts, and wonders, because they belonged to her exclusively.

Paul is a prime example of this. On his trip to Rome, he and the sailors and prisoners shipwrecked. Paul was instrumental in the survival of all aboard with miraculous interventions. Even a deadly snake attached itself to his hand which he shook off into the fire. He was unharmed. The people of the island responded to him, and he healed many. And why not? He was operating under the economy of the kingdom. Israel was still in play, so the signs and wonders were too. But in Rome after Israel’s national rejection, Paul could not heal Onesiphorus or Timothy. That economy was suspended along with the signs and wonders to Israel.

- Does the matter of economies needlessly complicate the Bible and make it harder to understand?

Try reading the Bible cover to cover and see if you find the answer on your own. I can almost guarantee you'll become tied up in knots. For one thing you'll find that about 95% of the content of the Bible is Jewish and is written to or about Israel. You'll ask if there is anything in the book written to and for the body of Christ. I dare say that without knowing the economies, you'll never come to an answer.

I shudder whenever I witness the eagerness of young believers who are advised to begin their Bible journey with the gospel of John. Why John? That may be the most difficult gospel to understand. Even to begin in Genesis requires someone with some knowledge to be a guide, but the knowledge must be accurate according to the rest of the Bible. We all need help in this regard. But once we piece together the divisions in the Bible, then things start to make sense.

So to answer the primary question, I say no. The economies make the Bible understandable because they put every subject in its place, like pieces of a puzzle. Putting the economies together is like having the finished picture of a jigsaw puzzle as a guide. There is lots of work remaining, but at least there is a guide. Don't fear the work needed to complete the puzzle. The joy and satisfaction and profit of the accomplishment is eternal.

- Should we concern ourselves with the timing of each economy?

It doesn't hurt to know a few facts. We should agree that the economy of the law began with Moses and the commandments. It ended when the Final Sacrifice died. Then the economy of the kingdom began and extended through the book of Acts. It ended temporarily with Israel's third and final rejection in Rome in 62 AD. The economy of the body of Christ was certainly in force with Paul's letters to Ephesus and Colosse. Some would argue that because Paul is our example, his conversion by grace is the beginning of the mystery of the body of Christ. Technically, I suppose that is correct, but whether the Lord revealed the secret of the one new man at that time is certainly debatable. What we must factor into the equation is Paul's three-fold commission given at that time. He came to Christ under the economy of the kingdom, and he functioned accordingly for many years, preaching to Israel the kingdom and the Messiah and sharing with the remnant congregations what he knew of the coming economy. An example of this was his introduction of the subject of the body of Christ when he wrote an early letter to the Corinthians.

Some argue that the economy of the body of Christ began when Paul and Barnabas began ministering in Acts 13. I don't see why this is a watershed moment. Right after this Paul was in synagogues arguing with the Jews.

If we take Acts 28 as the defining moment when Jews rejected Paul's offer, we still have nothing positive to go on. What we can say definitively is that Paul unleashed the secret, the mystery, in his letter to the Ephesians. That should end the needless speculation and arguments. The kingdom was set aside for Israel; the body of Christ, the two groups (Jews and Gentiles) had no distinctions; and it was time to see and practice the building up of the one new man. It's a case of Occam's razor – the simplest solution is usually the correct one.

- Does any of this matter in the grand scheme of things?

This IS the grand scheme of things! After all, we're dealing with God's eternal purpose here. What else matters? This is a war against darkness and the prince of darkness. The more light shed upon the Word the more light floods the battlefield. Satan wants nothing more than to keep the body of Christ confused and in the dark. So long as we are stumbling along, he is free to carry out his battle against Yahweh, and against us as well. Clarity means victory. Light obliterates darkness; darkness demands ignorance, apathy, and distraction. We should vow to stretch forth to truth, and in knowing truth, we shall be free to learn Christ and His eternal purpose, His body.

These are only a sampling of the many puzzles Christians have fabricated by failing to "rightly divide the word of truth." This failure results in the mingling of biblical truths pertaining to Israel with biblical truths pertaining to Gentiles. Without discerning which is which, confusion results and confusion regarding scripture is a death sentence to further study. It provides a poor but powerful excuse to lay aside the Lord's book. We should not be so disposed. We should, rather, determine to find the truth no matter what it costs us in time and energy. Truth sets us free – free from anxiety; free from frustration; free from ignorance; free from emptiness. Knowing the Bible enables us to know truth as the living person it is. Jesus is truth. The way to know Him as He wants to be known is through a proper knowledge of the Bible. As light shines on His Word, so it shines upon Him. Is it possible to involve ourselves in a more fruitful enterprise than this? I think not.