



GOD'S SECRET TRUTH

CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH
OR
CHURCHOID OF SATAN?

GEORGE N PATTERSON

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God's Secret Truth
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“churchoid: resembling a church”
Oxford Dictionary

“In the end that Face which is the delight or terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised . . . It is written that we shall ‘stand before’ Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or a burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.”

C.S Lewis: The Weight of Glory

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INTRODUCTION

Paul of Tarsus was one of the four greatest revealers of the “mystery of God”, the Church, which he described:

*“When he (God) made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment — to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ”.*² (my emphasis)

The other three Biblically significant figures were: Moses, prince of Egypt, who revealed God’s *Laws*; David, king of Israel who revealed God’s *Rule*; and Jesus, Son of God, who revealed God’s *Salvation*.

All later servants of God were missionaries with a message, but these four were primary emissaries of God’s purpose: Moses was given the *blueprint*; David was given the *format*, Jesus was given the *sacrifice*; and Paul was given the *fulfilment*. In thirty years of constant travel Paul laid the foundation of the world-wide *Church of Messiah* believers according to the principles given to him by God and delivered by him in *Seven Epistles* to churches, and *Seven Epistles* to individuals.

To both Jesus and Paul every believer should be a follower, and every follower a missionary to some degree. A missionary is “*one who is sent*”, and Jesus declared “*As the Father has sent me, so send I you*”, and “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel, making disciples . . .*”

² Ephesians 1: 9-10

The tragedy of what passes as the Church is that it created priests and pastors to force-feed seat-bound believers, and ignored Paul's pristine vision from God. A perfect example of this is the BBC's "toffee-apple Christianity" of their Internet programme *Songs of Praise*; in that it is neither one thing nor another but is passing pleasurable to consume. This book is about those who followed Paul and were true missionaries to their generations in keeping the Biblical vision alive.

When God the Creator looks down at his *homo sapiens* creatures from heaven—or, more exactly, because he is Spirit and spatially eternally present, looks *around* Him at them—He does not see a variety of religions or denominations of whatever ilk like a row of tinned soups in a super-market, but only two groups: *believers* in Him as their Creator, and *unbelievers*. As the German martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, said of commitment: "*When Christ calls a man he bids him, 'Come and die'.*"

Jesus also used this criterion of dividing the world of his time when he addressed his disciples with the question: "*Who do you say I am?*" With historic irony Peter's acclaimed reply, "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,*" not only divided the world into two camps, but also divided his own divinely-purposed "*Church of the Messiah,*"; namely, those who believed Jesus was the final authority of that future Church; and those who believed that it was Peter in what would be a future demonically influenced "*Churchoid of Satan.*"

Both of these groups between them have created the modern world's diverse civilizations and cultures; its loftiest aspirations, and its most despicable practices; its explorations of the farthest stellar universes, and the revelations of its limitless inner evils; the liberated understanding of the kingdom of God with its "*laws of life,*" and the restricting bondage of the kingdom of Satan with its "*laws of death;*" the Church of the Messiah and its glorious marriage union with the Son of God, and the Churchoid of Satan and its menial servitude in the kingdom of God.

This is the theme of this book, *The Secret Truth: Church of the Messiah or Churchoid of Satan?* Not a new religion, or a modern cult,

but an ancient revelation beginning with *Genesis* and ending with *Revelation*, promised in the Garden of Eden by a forgiving God of Creation, accepted in the Garden of Gethsemane by a willing Messiah of God, launched fifty days later by the Holy Spirit of God in eleven apostles, and articulated to the Gentiles by the late-chosen Apostle Paul of Tarsus.

The “*gospel of Jesus Christ*” was a revelation given to the Apostle Paul, not to the Apostle Peter, in seventeen God-delivered “*revelations*” of mysteries in fourteen *Epistles* in the *New Testament* of the Bible. These declared that the divinely revealed Church of the Messiah foretold by Jesus would be composed of three categories: “*believers*”, who accepted the message from God; “*disciples*” who followed that message in its totality; and “*apostles*”, or “*missionaries*”, with specific gifts from God to advance and monitor that message. These evangelistic gifts were given the charismatic designations of “*evangelists, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, administrators, and tongues-speakers.*”

What went wrong with that electrifying divine vision of the first century AD that rocked the imperial Roman world? The answer lies in the “*secret truth*” provided by God to the remarkable Jew, Paul of Tarsus, in the divine revelation of a universal Church which would unite an intransigent Israel with a single glorious Spiritual Body of purity fit to be a true Bride of the Son of God, a “*Church of the Messiah.*” That vision which survived the antagonism of the imperial power of Rome in the first century became corrupted in the second century AD when a few men with mixed motives decided they knew better than God and the Apostle Paul, and laid the foundations of a different universal Church ruled by them as bishops or vicars in the name of the Messiah, which would become a universal Churchoid of Satan.

It is generally agreed by historian researchers into Christianity that, although a historical religion, because of the complexity and controversies involved with ancient manuscripts, many books, most ideographs and diverse opinions, unanimity is an almost hopeless task. So why am I, a former journalist and not an academic, writing a book on the subject? What spiritual “*Jason’s fleece*” was there to

tempt a journalist to go where scholars feared to tread?

The answer is that the scholars were distracted by the siren attraction of documents and ignored the significance of the mysterious "*dunamis*" – the power of the early Apostles' preaching. They had missed the Apostle Paul's authoritative affirmation: "*The kingdom of God is not in words, but in power.*" They were misled by the desire for documents and testified evidence, and consequently their speculative evidence of first century Christianity is sparse and lacks the powerful impact that the mouth-to-heart preaching and living of the Christian gospel had on the rulers of the Roman empire. A good journalist, on the other hand, is intrigued by the spiritual power and is suspicious of the desiccated documents, sensing that demonstrable power is where the truth lies.

On this occasion, for me it meant "living" with the Apostle Paul and "seeing" what he saw on the road to Damascus which changed him and the world for ever. The first third of this book, therefore, is a journalist's report about Paul's vision for the "*Church of the Messiah*" before it was corrupted by Judaism's rabbis, later Christian scholars and intellectuals, and finally by disillusioned and militant Islamists.

Paul Johnson, as a journalist, has written an excellent *History of Christianity* from the legitimately critical point of view of an observant intellectual investigating the claims of the historical institutional Church. But he made little attempt to follow the history of those who across the centuries devotedly sought to follow Paul's divinely revealed spiritual "*Church of the Messiah*". Occasionally he mentions literary contributions by prominent individuals such as, for example, Origen, Tertullian and Augustine in the second and third centuries; and, over a thousand years later, the Protestants Luther, Hus and Calvin.

I was vaguely aware of the historical complexities and controversies from a lifetime of associations and participations in discussions, debates and studies regarding God, the Bible, religions in general and Christianity in particular. The first third of my life was spent among the "*Plymouth Brethren*" movement, a term they reject but which was true of them in the twentieth century when it

became a definitive sect. The remaining two-thirds of my life became involved with a variety of religions and their off-shoot sub-divisions and sects, as both political journalist and Bible teacher in Asia, but still retaining my association with Brethren-type national churches wherever I was accepted.

Most of my professional time as “*a writer on Asian affairs*” was spent in reporting, broadcasting and authoring books about politics in the Far East, with an occasional book or article about religion, especially post-colonial indigenous Christian movements in Asia as they struggled for an articulate identity in a politically resurgent Nationalist and Communist world. It was only when I ended active journalism and politics that I began to give serious attention to the place and growth of Christian witness in the ancient world.

I had just completed a book entitled *Christianity in Communist China*, after twenty years of comprehensive China-focused research, and I was involved in various other activities, when my random cognition became harnessed to researching early Christianity. I had started writing a book about “*The Miracles of Jesus*”, based on one of his little-observed comments, “*If you don’t believe my words, then believe my works*”, when I had the sudden apparently irrelevant thought of what would happen if I used the term “*Jesus the Messiah*” rather than the usual “*Jesus Christ*”? At first I dismissed it as inconsequential but, as the thought persisted at the back of my mind, it gained credibility. “*Jesus the Messiah*” definitely linked Jesus with past Jewish history, and it was his claim to being the Messiah that led to his crucifixion death by rabbinical Jews and cynical Romans.

The Greek term *Christos* of the early Christian writers had been rendered virtually meaningless over the centuries and in modern times had become merely an appended family-like name without significance. In the twentieth century and later it had even become a common profanity in an increasingly irreligious West. So, as the use of “*Jesus the Messiah*” unfolded in my writing, the significance of “*the works of Jesus*” being greater than “*the words*” in support of his Messianic claims not only took on greater meaning in the light of divine history; it also gave the term “*Messiah*” as “*the Anointed of God*” greater focus and power.

It meant that Jesus was stating in every miracle to every involved individual, *"Recognize me for who I am, the Anointed of God, and do what I command."* It was because of this Messianic claim to be greater than the *Law of Moses*, that his appearance on earth was the cusp of all Jewish and Gentile history, and the reason he was put to a grotesque Roman death by crucifixion.

I was still on a spiritual high when I became excited by the thought of what would happen if I used the same *"Messiah"* term instead of the currently meaningless appellation of *"Christ"* when applied to the Church—the *"Church of the Messiah"* instead of the customary *"Church of Christ?"* Jesus himself had linked his prophetic statement *"I will build my church"* with Peter's first divinely inspired declaration of him as *"Messiah"*. He had also prophetically declared *"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again"*; a clear statement the Apostle Paul later declared as meaning all Jewish Temple rituals and significance would be ended, and be replaced by a new Spiritual Body of Messiah believers.

The *"keys of the kingdom"* given to Peter and the other Apostles would be used to open the way to the presence of God for both Jews and Gentiles following the revelation and baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But to the Apostle Paul would be given the revelation directly from God regarding the Spiritual Body of the Church of the Messiah with the divine principles of its spiritual life and practice, and the divine authority to over-rule Peter when he sought to introduce his own Jewish ritual concepts. Writing to the Christians in Galatia Paul affirmed:

"Let me tell you, my brothers, the gospel I preach is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor did anyone teach it to me. It was Jesus Christ himself who revealed it to me."

The tragedy of Israel was that the nation rejected the *Messiah* for a rabbinical devised Judaism; and the tragedy of Christians is that by default they preferred the Greek term *"Christ"* for the Jewish term *"Messiah"*, thereby creating an unbridgeable gulf between Jews and Christians, and in the process giving birth to two ultimately meaningless ritualistic religions instead of an unique historical and

divinely approved direct personal relationship with God. Islam created another breach in the divinely revealed organism when the Prophet Mohammed claimed a bowdlerized version of original revelations of previous *Old* and *New Testament* prophets in his *Koran* was an advance on them, and enforced it with a personally conceived military force in the alien ultimatum, “Convert, or die.”

In this book I am writing from the opposite side of this unbridgeable gulf from Paul Johnson in his *A History of Christianity*, a journalist voice for the great sprawling mass of anti-establishment spiritual believers of the *Church of the Messiah* over the centuries in their historically neglected struggles to maintain the Apostle Paul’s divinely-revealed Church principles with simplicity and purity opening the door to sinful creatures in a personal relationship with a holy God. My self-appointed advocacy is not something new for it is a matter of literary record that I responded to the challenge in my mid-twenties. In his seminal book, *Brethren in Scotland: 1838-2000*, Dr Neil T R Dickson has recorded:

“When being interviewed about his missionary prospects George Patterson, an enfant terrible of the Brethren movement, found the Glasgow missionary committee members dubious of his enthusiasm for an absolute form of living by faith and on the side of financial husbandry. For Patterson it was a conflict between the charismatic and the institutional mentalities.”

When I returned to Britain after spending eight years in China, Tibet and India I was initially introduced at Brethren gatherings as “the twentieth century David Livingston” for my exploratory travels and preaching in remote areas in Tibet. But, as I went on to describe my first-hand experiences of the disastrous consequences of a colonialist Christian missionary policy in Asia, I was traduced by my detractors as “a hot-headed trouble-maker” and ignored as a Bible-teacher among them.

On one memorable occasion I was sharing the platform with the noted Brethren scholar, Professor FF Bruce, who held the prestigious *Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis* at Manchester University. The occasion was the Brethren annual missionary

meeting organized by Brethren leaders, a notable event when a few thousand Brethren members gathered from all over the country in Westminster Hall, London. I had already been preaching across the country, denouncing the out-dated and unbiblical colonialist methods of modern Brethren missionaries, and I was ordered by the London Brethren leaders to refrain from such attacks on this occasion. At first I refused to participate in the Conference at all in protest, but finally agreed to give an unobjectionable report. At the Conference, Professor Bruce actually expounded from the *Acts of the Apostles* how the early Apostles went on short itinerant preaching visits from place to place establishing small communities of believers across Asia Minor. In his later autobiography, *In Retrospect*, Professor Bruce gives his version of the event:

"That was the occasion when I met George Patterson, recently home from Tibet . . . He gave a brief report at the session. George is not only not establishment minded he is—or at least in those days he was—positively anti-establishment-minded. He told me afterwards about the restrictions placed on him; 'It doesn't matter,' he added, 'you said all the things I was told not to say, and at the end the chairman even said he hoped your message would be published in the Brethren magazine, the Witness!'"

Professor Bruce then went on to say it seemed it was not what I said that was objectionable but how I was saying it. He was the didactic academic whose spoken and written words were considered harmless, while I was the passionate revolutionary demanding total change—*now*. Out of respect for Professor Bruce, who was a close friend of my wife's family, I only argued that the Apostle Paul was *both* intellectual academic and passionate revolutionary, qualities evident in his fourteen *Letters* to individuals and churches.

In his *Letter to the Roman* church the Apostle Paul unmistakably linked the Church of the Messiah, revealed to him by God, with God's purpose in and through Israel in the past; in his *Letter to the Corinthian* church, with God's revealed principles and practices in the present; in his two *Letters to the Thessalonian* church, with God's promises for the future; and in all his *Letters* to seven individuals

and seven churches, he warned against “*false messiahs*” and others who would come with spurious claims to undermine the divinely appointed Messiah’s right to be “*Head of the Church*.” The source of these spurious claims he identified as Satan, who would represent himself either as an “*angel of light*” or a “*roaring lion*,” a kingdom of darkness with “*laws of death*” rather than a kingdom of light with “*laws of life*” – in other words, a counterfeit “*Churchoid (resembling a church) of Satan*.”

That historic battle between the spiritual *Church of the Messiah* and the institutional *Churchoid of Satan* is the theme of this book. I have limited myself to significant people, important events and reforming consequences during the two thousand years of often bitter conflict between the *Church of the Messiah* and the *Churchoid of Satan*. These are recounted as if I were reporting for people reading newspapers about two political party adversaries contesting to govern the nation.

Naturally, there is a considerable difference of attitude and magnitude between the two polarized universal Churches and two competing national political parties. The political parties seek votes, and the Churches seek souls; also, the differences in the Churches are wider, the convictions deeper, the passions higher, the issues profounder - and the life consequences eternal.

The book is dedicated to all those who have “*kept the faith*,” with their Messiah’s assurance ever before them: “*Do not be afraid: I have overcome the world*.”

PROLOGUE

In the year 26 AD the small nation of Judea was in an escalating ferment of revolt against the Roman imperial occupation. It was Roman imperial policy under its *Pax Romana* to tolerate philosophical and religious cultures in its expansion across the Mediterranean region, including the Hellenism of the Greeks and the Judaism of the Jews, but this normally acceptable policy had encountered an insoluble problem with the Jewish belief in a Messianic deliverer who would restore them to their divine inheritance as “*God’s chosen people, in God’s Promised Land*”.

The three great empires prior to the Roman—the Babylonian under Nebuchadnezzar, the Medo-Persian under Darius and Cyrus, and the Greek under Alexander the Great—had all been tolerant of the Jewish religion of the earlier State of Israel founded by the great King David. But the pre-Babylonian empire of Assyria had decimated David’s Israel by dispersing ten of Israel’s twelve tribes throughout the region; and the remaining two tribes were later dispersed by the Babylonians. Both of these “dispersions” became known as the Jewish “*Diaspora*.” During the reign of King Cyrus of Medo-Persia 50,000 Jewish exiles in Babylon had been permitted to return to their much reduced territory of Judea.

This exiled Remnant Israelis brought with them from Babylon some of the influences acquired there, which their scribes and teachers of the *Law of Moses* subsequently developed and incorporated into two major religious works known as the *Torah* and

the *Talmud*. The *Torah* was essentially a commentary of the *Pentateuch* of Moses—*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*—and the *Talmud* was the “official” guide to understanding and approaching God by means of 613 “*hedges*”, a qualified means of access through approved “*rabbis*” or teachers. This Babylonian-influenced religion became known among the returned Israelis as “*Judaism*”, and it became the national religion of the Jews of the truncated three provinces Judea, Galilee and Samaria of former Israel when the prophets John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth appeared publicly on the scene in AD 26.

Meanwhile, politically, from the second century BC, the Remnant Jews in Judea launched a series of revolts when one of the Seleucid rulers, Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria, enforced an intolerant Hellenisation on the Jews, including destroying all copies of the *Torah* and even enforcing worship of the Greek god, *Zeus*. When Antiochus IV offered the sacrifice of a pig in the sacred Temple of the Jews in Jerusalem the Jews rose up in rebellion.

The major revolt was led by the family of Judas Maccabeus and, after twenty four years, the Jews won independence for a short period until the humiliated Romans took control of their territory in 63 BC. The Roman General Pompey in his conquest of Jerusalem entered the Temple, slaughtered the priests and violated the Holy of Holies. This sacrilege precipitated a series of revolts led by a variety of potential Jewish liberators, some claiming to be historic “messiahs”, creating simmering tension and resentment against the Roman occupation officials and military.

The Jewish leaders were permitted to be represented by their *Sanhedrin*, a Council of seventy individuals drawn from both religious and secular communities, but dominated by the high priest of the Temple. The predominant political party was the *Pharisees*, upholders of the sanctity of the *Torah* and *Talmud*; followed by the *Sadducees*, the aristocrats with Hellenist influence; the *Essenes*, who observed the strict *Law of Moses*, rejected the Temple and rituals, and isolated themselves in desert communities; finally, the *Zealots*, who were the outright revolutionaries demanding Jewish freedom from Rome.

Part 1

"I Will Build My Church"

"There is a secret truth, my brother, which I want you to know, for it will keep you from thinking how wise you are. It is that the stubbornness of the people of Israel is not permanent, but it will last only until the complete number of Gentiles comes to God. And this is how all Israel will be saved."

The Apostle Paul: Romans 11:25: Good News New Testament

"When I came to you, my dear brothers, to preach God's secret truth, I did not use big words and great learning . . . The wisdom I proclaim is God's secret wisdom, which is hidden from mankind, but which he had already chosen for our glory before the world was made . . . It was to us that God made known his secret by mean of his Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, even the hidden depths of God's purposes."

The Apostle Paul: 1 Corinthians 2: 1, 7, 10: Good News New Testament

"You should think of us as Christ's servants, who have been put in charge of God's secret truths. The one thing required of such a servant is that he be faithful to his master."

The Apostle Paul: 1 Corinthians: 4:1, 2: Good News New Testament

"God's plan is to make known his secret to his people, this rich and glorious secret which he has for all people. . . In this way they will know God's secret, which is Christ himself. He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge."

The Apostle Paul: Colossians: 1: 27: 2: 2, 3: Good News New Testament

CHAPTER 1

God's Special Messenger Revealed

*"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it."
Jesus the Messiah: Matthew 16: 18: New International Version*

God's "secret truth", the "Church of the Messiah", like the public ministry of Jesus, began with a baptism, but this divinely revealed Church launching was the "baptism of the Holy Spirit", sent by Jesus ten days after his ascension, fifty days after his Passover death, as he had promised his Apostles just before leaving the upper room for the Garden of Gethsemane and Golgotha³. There could be no higher authority.

Yet in his short three-year public ministry Jesus only mentioned the word "church" on two occasions⁴. The Greek word he used for church is *ekklesia*, meaning "called out" or "separated", and it was applied to any group of individuals in a community meeting for either secular or sacred purposes. It had been used several times in the Old Testament to describe a varied number of Israelites meeting to hear God speak; and it had been used by the Greek city-states to describe their social and political gatherings.

When Jesus used it in speaking to Peter it was in the context of instructing Peter's divinely authorized responsibility to use "the keys of the kingdom" from which would emerge what Jesus called "my church"; in other words, the church would be a separate entity but part of the existing over-arching kingdom of God.

On the second occasion Jesus used the word "church" it was in

³John 16:6

⁴Matthew 16:17-19; Matthew 18: 15-17

the context of advice regarding the settling of a dispute between two believers. First, Jesus said, an attempt should be made to resolve the issue amicably between the two individuals; if that failed, they should take one or two witnesses to help settle the matter; if that, too, failed, then *"tell it to the church"* to decide. If all of these procedures were unsuccessful they were to treat the recalcitrant believers as *"pagan"*. He added:

"Whenever two or three are gathered together on earth in my name, I will be there with them and will be with them in heaven. Where two or three are gathered together in my name I am there with them."

It was apparent from these two episodes that Jesus anticipated he, the declared Messiah, would be the head of the church to come; the ultimate authority in any and every circumstance, but that he would delegate authority to Peter, the other Apostles, and those who believed in him after his death, resurrection and ascension in a functioning mystical body of believers, which would replace the former and later destroyed Temple of Judaism in a direct personal relationship with himself.

These were the only revelations to the mystery of his earlier momentous declaration at the cleansing of the Temple from rapacious money-changers and other swindlers exploiting true believers, with his ringing declaration: *"Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it again"*. The Temple, with its priests, rituals, and corruption of the true purposes of God, would be replaced following his three-day trial, death and resurrection with a distinctive spiritual Body to be known as his *"church"*, which would provide unobstructed and personal access to God.

Fifty days after the ascension of Jesus, therefore, during the Jewish *Feast of Pentecost*, a violent wind shook the building where the Apostles and other believers were gathered, swept through the house, and was followed by *"what seemed like tongues of fire"* which separated to rest on each individual. They were immediately imbued by a spirit of ecstasy and began speaking with the languages of other nations. There were over a million Jewish pilgrims from all surrounding nations in Jerusalem for the annual *Feast of Passover* and,

when they saw and heard the Holy Spirit phenomena, they expressed astonishment that provincial “*uneducated Galileans*” were enabled to preach the gospel, or “*good news*”, of the Messiah in their own national languages.

The annual *Feast of Passover* and subsequent celebrations on this occasion had produced an even higher state of tension because of the arrest, trial, crucifixion and reported ascension to heaven of Jesus, “*the Messiah*” of Nazareth. The Jewish religious leaders had fomented public excitement and protest about their handling and subsequent conflicting reports regarding the disappearance of the body of Jesus from his sealed tomb. The Roman military occupiers were on high-alert, and over-reacting with brutal authority against all signs of trouble. The many rebels across the region—religious revolutionaries like the *Zealots*, and secular revolutionaries like John of Gischala—were becoming even bolder.

In the midst of all this religious and political turbulence the small group of about a hundred-and-twenty Jesus believers, newly baptized and energized by the Holy Spirit baptism, discussed the final command of their Lord:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, and to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

They decided that, since Peter had been given “*the keys of the kingdom*” he should be the one to launch the world-wide commission by preaching the first message of the Jesus “*gospel of the Messiah*” publicly in the centre of Jewish worship, the Temple in Jerusalem. It created a sensation:

“Fellow Israelites, listen to what I have to say. Jesus of Nazareth was a man whose divine authority was clearly demonstrated to you by all the miracles, signs and wonders which he performed, which many of you have seen. In keeping with his own divine plan God had previously decided that Jesus would be handed over to you, and you killed him by demanding his crucifixion. But God raised him from death, delivering him from its power, because it was impossible for death to hold him . . .

“My brothers, God has raised this same Jesus from death to his

right-hand, and he has sent the Holy Spirit as He had promised. What you now see and hear is this gift that He has poured out on us that you might know for certain that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made both Lord and Messiah . . .

"Each one of you must repent of your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah, so that your sins will be forgiven, so that you, too, will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For God's promise was made to you and your children, and to all those who are scattered across the world, all of whom God calls to himself...."

Peter was a Jew, supported by his ten Jewish companion-Apostles, addressing an audience of Jews, and accusing fellow-Jews of putting the divinely anointed Jewish Messiah to death. That was the negative aspect of his passionate address: that not only the present Jews of Judaism, but all children of Israel's Twelve Tribes had been guilty of disobeying God's *Law*, guilty of stoning the nation's prophets, now guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus the proclaimed Messiah. The positive aspect of his address was that what the rabbinical Judaizers had done out of evil motives God had planned for good, because Jesus, as the Son of God, had willingly died so that all Israel might be redeemed from their sins and be made righteous through his sacrificial death. Before that *Feast of Pentecost* day ended, over three thousand of Peter's listeners became believers in Jesus as the Messiah.

Peter's passionate public address was a spiritual magnet that brought together the new converts with all those who had previously been converted through the earlier preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus. Each day the eleven Apostles gathered in the Temple to preach, then later to meet together in their homes, and the homes of the new converts, to convey what Jesus had taught them during their time with him, and to pray about their present and future plans. It was inevitable in the circumstances of the time that such public divergence from Judaism would bring them into direct confrontation with the religious authorities, and it was precipitated by a miracle performed by Peter.

Peter and John were on their way to the Temple and as usual saw

a crippled man being carried by family or friends to his customary begging place outside the Temple Gate. On this occasion when the cripple asked them for alms Peter said to him, *"Look at me"*. When the man looked at Peter curiously Peter said to him, *"I have neither silver nor gold but I will give you what I have. In the name of Jesus the Messiah, stand and walk."* Taking the cripple by the right hand he helped the man to his feet and, after a few tentative steps, the man began to jump up and down on his restored legs. As they entered the Temple with the man drawing attention to his healed condition, and praising God loudly, a crowd of several thousands quickly gathered as the news spread through the Temple and city. That day another estimated five thousand believers were added to the number of converts.

It was too much for the religious leaders and they sent Temple guards to arrest Peter, the apostles and the healed cripple and bring them before the Sanhedrin for questioning. It was a formal gathering of the Jewish "Supreme Court", with the high priest, the ruler of the Temple, the leaders of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and teachers of the Law all present. The charge directed at the Apostles was: *"By what power or what name do you do this act of healing?"* Peter addressed the question directly:

"If we are being questioned today about the good deed done to the crippled man, and how he was healed, then you and all Jews ought to know that the man who stands here with us was healed through the power of the name of Jesus the Messiah—the same Jesus you crucified and whose God raised him from death . . . Salvation is to be found through him alone because there is no-one else in all the world with such power."

The religious leaders were enraged at such public condemnation of their recent actions, and also astonished that a group of uneducated Galilean fishermen had the effrontery to challenge the leaders of the Jewish people in such terms, and they called on the Temple guards to remove the apostles and healed cripple while they considered further action. When they had left the chamber the religious leaders agreed among themselves that they could not deny the fact of the crippled man's cure because it was already widely

known, but they would order the apostles to desist from all further such activities in the name of Jesus the Messiah. The reality was that these Jesus believers in Jesus the Messiah already numbered more than either of the leading parties represented in the Sanhedrin. They called Peter and the others back into the chamber and informed them of their decision and warning. But Peter replied:

"You are the religious leaders of our people so you judge what is right in God's sight: to obey you, or to obey God. For our part we cannot stop speaking of what we personally have seen and heard."

But the reality of the multiplying numbers was also a problem for the Apostles. While the annual influx of Jews from all the countries of the Dispersion during the annual *Festivals* provided a unique opportunity for them in an outreach to the world, it also brought with them the problems of Judaism's two internal divisions: the Greek-influenced Hellenist Jews, who were more open to the Jesus gospel; and the Traditionalist Judean Jews, who were more difficult to convince. The two groups usually met in their respective synagogues, and as the Apostles increased the numbers of converts from both groups it not only created cultural and religious problems but also practical tensions caused through charitable activities.

In the new spiritual enthusiasm released by the baptism of the Holy Spirit the thousands of Jewish believers felt a common bond greater than their formal attachment to their former ritualistic practices, and this led to their practical commitment to the commands of Jesus to *"Take no thought of tomorrow"* in the practical provisions for their daily lives. Many of them sold houses, fields and other possessions and brought the proceeds to the Apostles to use on behalf of the poor. In this distribution the Greeks of the two Judaistic factions complained that the bulk of the distribution was going to the Traditionalist faction because of the greater number of synagogues. After praying about it, the Apostles decided to appoint seven men drawn from each faction to supervise the daily charitable distribution.

One of the seven *"deacons"* chosen was a Hellenist Jew named Stephen, a gifted young orator who's preaching from the Hebrew

Scriptures the Traditionalist rabbis had found difficult to refute in public discussions. They produced false charges against him and persuaded the Sanhedrin to arrest him for teaching contrary to the *Law of Moses*. Stephen was neither awed by the Sanhedrin religious leaders, nor intimidated by the false charges. When the high priest asked *"Are these charges true?"* Stephen calmly presented a lucid exposition of God's purposes through His prophets to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the foretold Messiah. He ended his brilliant peroration with the scathing words:

"You are so stubborn! You are like pagans with your fixed opinions! You are like your ancestors who always resisted the Holy Spirit! Was there a single prophet your ancestors did not kill? They killed God's messengers sent to announce the coming of the Messiah, and now you have betrayed and murdered him. You are the people who received God's Law that was handed down by angels—yet you have disobeyed it!"

The Sanhedrin chamber was in an uproar as members were on their feet shouting at Stephen in uncontrolled fury. Stephen stood serenely in front of them, his face turned towards heaven, and said slowly and clearly, *"Look!"* The chamber quieted as the distracted members looked at the ceiling. Stephen continued: *"I see heaven open and the son of Man standing at the right hand of God."*

This was too much for the religious leaders. With shouts of rage they left their seats and rushed Stephen out of the chamber on to the streets and out of the city. The sight of the enraged religious leaders yelling and dragging the unresisting Stephen through the streets drew a large crowd to follow them. Outside the city gate they threw Stephen to the ground and, picking up stones, they beat him to death. As he was dying Stephen said, *"Lord, receive my spirit and do not hold this sin against them."*

One young Jew of Stephen's age was distinctive throughout the whole episode. He had been an interested observer in the Sanhedrin, but not a participant, and had followed the enraged mob closely to the stoning place. When the stone-throwers had taken off their outer clothes they dropped them at his feet as he stood watching with a troubled frown. He was a well-known figure at the Temple and

Sanhedrin known as Saul—or his Roman name, Paul of Tarsus, from the province of Cilicia; a pupil of the noted Rabbi Gamaliel, and a bitter opponent of the Jesus believers and all diverse cults,

Saul was the quintessential young Jewish rabbi, a pure Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, his family had come originally from northern Galilee where they had been known for their ultra-conservatism. With the Roman occupation of Judea his great-grand-parents had moved to Tarsus where the family became wealthy Roman citizens, and Saul became fluent in Roman, Greek and Aramaic as well as Hebrew. Saul's sister had been sent to Jerusalem to be married, and Saul later sent to be theologically trained by the best conservative rabbis, eventually becoming a favoured student of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel.

Saul was the last to leave Stephen's stoning place, waiting to see who were his friends coming to remove the body, but also pondering the fanatical passion shown by Stephen and his fellow Jesus-believers. He could understand Galilean fishermen believing in the nonsense of a resurrected obscure teacher from a Nazareth village, because the country was filled with them following scores of false messiahs, but Stephen was an exemplar of young Jewish manhood, a charismatic teacher of the Hebrew Scriptures, who had allowed himself to be stoned to death on behalf of a deluded criminal—even with his final dying breath. He, Saul, would have liked to ask him how he reconciled his belief in the Nazarene with the indisputable fact in the *Law of Moses* that God himself had declared "*Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.*" Now he would never know the answer unless he could find out from Stephen's friends who would come to collect the body. Meanwhile, he would personally put a stop to anyone preaching this accursed false doctrine of the Nazarenes by any means in his power.

When Saul had taken note of the people taking away Stephen's body he returned to the Sanhedrin and offered his services to destroy the Jesus movement, and was given approval by an incensed Sanhedrin also determined to wipe out every vestige of a movement that threatened its very existence. Saul started immediately, going to the houses of those who had had come for Stephen's body and

widening his activities from reports volunteered by the Sanhedrin religious leaders.

While Saul went from house to house in Jerusalem questioning the occupants regarding the beliefs and the whereabouts of other Jesus believers, the Sanhedrin religious leaders also launched a coordinated campaign of arrest and intimidation. As a consequence thousands of Jesus believers fled from Jerusalem into the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria, but not in panic because they were taking their beliefs with them and with evangelistic zeal made other converts wherever they travelled. The apostles Peter, John and Philip went to Samaria and had tremendous impact on the principal city of Sebaste through the conversion of a famous sorcerer called Simon.

After preaching and teaching throughout Samaria with many converts the two apostles, Peter and John, returned to Jerusalem, and Philip went to Caesarea. In Jerusalem, because of the fanatical persecution launched by Saul of Tarsus there were only small groups of believers meeting in isolation with great difficulty. James, one of the brothers of Jesus, had become a believer in Jesus as Messiah after his resurrection when Jesus had a personal meeting with him, and he was held in great respect by the Jewish religious leaders because of his Traditionalist beliefs.

With the majority of Jesus believers in Jerusalem either in prison or scattered, Saul of Tarsus obtained permission from the Sanhedrin to proceed to Damascus to carry on a similar persecution of Jesus believers there. Saul's apparent success in getting rid of the Jesus believers in Jerusalem had created in him a consuming passion to purge Judaism of all its heretics in expectation of a true Messiah who would lead the Jewish nation to its historic destiny and not the false Messiah preached by the two recent so-called prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. Their Messiah was a dead and cursed criminal; his Messiah was a glorious David-like deliverer of Israel. Judaism could absorb Jesus believers such as James, the brother of Jesus, because it was tolerant enough to include Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots. What it could not tolerate was a small cult that preached the removal of all historic religious institutions, to be replaced by a mythical personal relationship with

God through a delusional resurrected criminal.

Saul was reflecting on this as he rode at the head of his group of Sanhedrin-authorized interrogators on their way to Damascus when he was suddenly struck by a blinding light from heaven, and he fell off his horse to the ground. As he lay stunned he heard a voice saying clearly, "*Saul, why do you persecute me?*"

Saul's first thought was that this was an angelic visitation of some kind such as was recorded in the Scriptures on several occasions, and he said, "*Who are you, Lord?*"

The reply confounded him: "*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Now, get up and proceed into Damascus and it will be told you what you are to do*". This was not a vision, but an actual appearance of the Nazarene prophet addressing him from heaven like the experience of the martyred Stephen.

The voice stopped speaking and Saul became aware of the anxious voices of his companions surrounding him as he lay on the ground, but he could not see them because the light had blinded him. They helped him to his feet, asking him what had happened, so Saul knew they had not heard the voice that had spoken to him. He decided to say nothing until he saw what would happen in Damascus according to what the voice had said. If it was indeed Jesus who had spoken, and if he spoke again in Damascus regarding what he must do, then he, Saul, would have life-changing decisions to make.

For the next three days in Damascus Saul isolated himself from his companion interrogators, fasting without food or drink, as he waited for the voice from heaven to speak again. Meanwhile, he concentrated his thinking on the one great essential fact: if it was Jesus who had spoken then his central theory—his passionate certainty—that a cursed crucified criminal could never be the true Messiah was shattered. He was missing something vital, something that the murdered Stephen had when he spoke his dying words "*I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God*". Stephen not only had a personal belief in Jesus as the true Messiah, he obviously had a personal relationship with Jesus as "*Son of Man*"—an accepted designation of an earth-dwelling manifestation of

God whom he identified as "*Lord Jesus.*"

At one point in his intense concentration Saul had a vision of a man called Ananias who would be the divine messenger to give him a spiritual revelation and also restore his sight. So he was not surprised when a man called Ananias appeared at his door saying that God had sent him. He proceeded to lay his hands on Saul's eyes and said: "*Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me—Jesus himself—who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here. He sent me so that you might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.*"

Immediately it was as if a blind had been raised and light flooded his darkened mind. It had a dramatic transformative effect as elements from Stephen's address re-arranged themselves in his mind in a series of images illuminating the conviction that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah of divine history. With Saul's sight restored Ananias went on to inform him of what God had revealed to him when he had expressed doubts about Saul to God:

"Go, because I have chosen him to serve me, to make my Name known to Gentiles and kings and to the people of Israel. And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake."

Saul closed his eyes and took a long, deep breath as he sought to envisage the immensity of what he had heard. This man, Ananias, had certainly been told details of his roadside experience from God, and his restoration of Saul's sight was further proof that he was God's messenger, but the scope of the vision being presented was breath-taking—"*make my Name known to Gentiles, kings and to the people of Israel*". This meant not only the repudiation of the Judaism of Israel, but of all the religious rituals of the Gentile nations, as well as challenging ruling Roman authorities. It included a direct and personal relationship with God, not only for himself but as a possibility for every individual in the world. Every journey begins with one step, he thought, and he said to Ananias, "*What is my next step?*"

Ananias did not hesitate: "*To be baptized, and then to meet with your new brothers and sisters in the family of God.*"

When Ananias left to make arrangements Saul ate his first meal

in three days to regain his strength for the days ahead, and considered tentative plans to go into a desert community to ponder and pray without distraction how his divine vision would be accomplished. He knew incontrovertibly that he was committed to a new course, a new life, a new allegiance, a new destiny. The framework would be the Scriptures and the God that he knew so well, but the interpretation of that experience would no longer be the traditional or rabbinical version he had acquired but that of Jesus of Nazareth, the historically *Anointed Messiah* of God. A great peace flooded his mind for the first time in many years, as he acknowledged his acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus the Messiah, and the beginning of a new and deeply satisfying anticipation arose in him. Jesus—who apparently was really the Son of God—had said he would be told what he must do! There would be more visions and revelations to come.

Chapter 2

will be available on this site on the 1st November 2011