

CHAPTER 2

God's Secret Truth Revealed

Saul went to the synagogue in Damascus as usual but now he was in the company of Ananias and the Jesus believers, and as a recognized rabbi of distinction he was asked to address the congregation. The synagogue was silent as the famous rabbi of Tarsus and Jerusalem, with his well-known gifts of oratory and debate, opened up the Scriptures in his masterly fashion.

Then they were confused, and stunned, to hear him argue persuasively from these same Scriptures that Jesus, the recently crucified Nazarene, was indeed the promised Messiah of Israel. It precipitated furious controversy inside and outside the synagogue, but they found Paul equal to any argument that could be produced against him. He had just spent the past few years investigating every Scriptural claim made by the Nazarenes in order to refute them, and from his youth he had studied, debated and taught the Scriptures among the leading Jewish theologians, so he was masterfully equipped to expound them.

The Traditionalist religious leaders in Damascus, unable to contend with him in debate, resorted to Paul's own recent tactics of having him whipped with thirty-nine strokes under the synagogue's rules of discipline. When this punishment did not deter Paul from spreading the Jesus doctrine they plotted to have him put to death. They had no authority themselves to impose the death penalty but

they sent a delegation to the representative of King Aretas of Arabia to have Paul arrested and put to death for causing disturbance in the city. To save his life the Jesus believers smuggled Paul out of the city secretly, hiding him in a large vegetable container and lowering him over the walls of the city with ropes at night.

As he left Damascus, alone and friendless in the darkness, Paul recalled with wry amusement his planned arrival in the city a few weeks before as the powerful representative of the Jews, Romans and Syrians. Now he was an outlaw from all three authorities, a man without a family, friends or support of any kind—yet with a divinely commissioned command to go out and conquer the world for God. He reflected that he had the same command from the same source—Jesus of Nazareth—as the eleven apostles, so, strictly speaking, he was not alone but had the support of a spiritual movement that was already demonstrating the presence and power of God in its impact on Jews and some Gentiles.

As he trudged through the night Paul decided that before he launched himself into another prominent campaign—this time on behalf of Jesus the Messiah—he would need a period of quietness for prayer and reflection on the Scriptures, and to discern the will of God regarding his future activities. The revelation of Jesus as Messiah was not just another interesting item of information to add to the sum of his knowledge, like the cosmology of Pythagoras and Philo.

It was a wrenching, transforming, spiritual cataclysm out of which a new theology had to be formed, a theology which must transcend the old Judaism and the Greek and Roman mystery cults. This new spiritual kingdom of God initiated by John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah, unquestionably arising from the earlier divinely revealed patterns of the Scriptures as they had demonstrated, would have to be articulated in a form that would make it understandable to the nations of the world with no knowledge of God or those Scriptures. Also, if they were to be thrown out of the synagogues for such teaching then they must have some form of association which would perpetuate their spiritual fellowship despite the antagonisms of the secular authorities. In other words, the Temple of the Jews, as

Jesus had foretold, would have to be replaced by a spiritual building or body of some kind.

The *Law of Moses*, the *Psalms*, the *Prophets*, the *Oral* as well as the *Written Traditions*—all had to be re-examined, re-assessed, and given appropriate value. If historical Judaism as he had learned it from the leading rabbis was not the divine revelation he had supposed, and Jesus had asserted, then he had to find out from God what that revelation was. Stephen obviously had been confident he knew it. He, Paul, had glimpsed it, touched it, with the blinding revelation of Jesus in the past few weeks. That was a start; perhaps a key. But he felt he was like an explorer who had just crossed the frontier into an unknown land; he had an almost blank map and a certain amount of experience, but that was all.

As dawn broke in a riot of colours on the horizon over the empty desert Paul had made up his mind. He would travel to some remote community of the Essenes, where he would not be known but would be accepted as one who sought peace and quiet for spiritual reflection, and there in the desert like John and Jesus he would prepare mind and body and spirit for the task ahead.

Paul remained three years in the desert of Arabia, bringing his body under physical discipline in order to release the spirit to soar into the spiritual realms through prayer and meditation; reaching into the innermost processes of his mind, while reaching out to meet with God in the unspeakable splendours of the spirit. In the Arabian desert community Saul began the harrowing process of re-thinking his whole spiritual and intellectual framework in the light of his recent vision and commission from God. Jesus had dismissed the *Torah* and *Talmud Traditions* of Judaism so Saul addressed himself to re-think the *Pentateuch*, *Psalms* and *Prophets*, and especially the *Covenants* of God to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David; also, the revelations of the “*promised seed*” from Adam; the “*sceptre of Judah*” from Jacob; the “*prophet to come*” from Moses; the “*redeemer*” from David and Job; the “*man of sorrows*” from Isaiah; the “*saints of the Most High God*” from Daniel; the “*prince of the house of David*” from Ezekiel.

He now knew what Jesus meant when he said on one occasion

that the time would come, and now is, when God would no longer be worshipped in Jerusalem; but whoever wanted to worship Him in spirit and truth would do so anywhere, for God is Spirit. The *Law*, the Temple, the sacrifices, were but schoolteachers to bring everyone to knowledge of Jesus as the true Messiah of God. Woven throughout the fabric of the Scriptures as revealed by Jehovah was the greater vision of God's worldwide spiritual Kingdom, superior in every way to the national kingdom of Israel, or the demonic kingdom of Satan, the adversary of God. Israel had forfeited its right to be God's divine instrument when it demanded a king instead of God, and then when it replaced the *Law of Moses* with the Babylonian-conceived Torah and Talmud.

It was of this divine spiritual kingdom that the *Prophets* spoke, as Stephen had declared; but, back beyond the *Prophets*, and the *Psalms*, and even the *Law of Moses*, it sprang from God's promise to Abraham. The mysterious statement of Jesus came alive: "*Abraham saw my day and rejoiced*", for God had also said to Abraham, "*In you shall all nations be blessed*". It even reached beyond Abraham into the Garden of Eden itself, when God said to Eve that the offspring of her womb would have his heel bruised, fulfilled in the death of Jesus; but in the process, God had said, he would wound the head of the serpent, Satan. The resurrection of Jesus from death not only ensured the eventual destruction of Satan, but also the eventual triumph of God's spiritual kingdom.

The restoration of all despoiled creation was the message of God: to make imperfect creatures perfect, to reconcile the alienated sinners with a holy God: a purged, redeemed and perfect world of loving, obedient children of God on earth doing the will of their Father in heaven. The old movable Tabernacle, and the later Temple of Solomon, with their inadequate offerings and ceremonies would be replaced by a Spiritual Body of believers called out from the unbelieving and disobedient around them. "*Called out*"; the words used to describe the chosen body of administrators in the Greek city-states, the *ekklesia*; the expression used by Jesus to describe his followers corporately when he declared: "*I will build my church, — my ekklesia — and the gates of hell will not overcome it.*"

The Jews' *Old Covenant* with God was based on the *Law* written on tablets of stone; the *New Covenant* forged by the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus as Messiah, was written in the hearts of men and women by the Spirit of God, sent by Jesus after his ascension into heaven. These were the "*called out ones*", the divinely ordained *ekklesia*, the instruments of God's purpose in the world from now until eternity: *The Church of Jesus the Messiah*, the earthly Bride of the heavenly Bridegroom. A spiritual organism composed of spiritual people practicing spiritual values, mediated by spiritual men and women as divinely-approved priests — with no institutional framework or ecclesiastical hierarchy — was the secret truth of God hidden from the creation of the world but now revealed with the coming of Jesus the Messiah. And he, Saul, was God's special messenger to make it known to the world. Peter had been given the key of the post-resurrection Kingdom of God; but to him, Saul, had been given the key to the worldwide Church of the Messiah.

With the illumination of the Holy Spirit brighter than the desert sun Saul moved from the past to the present. If all religions were to be swept aside and replaced by a personal relationship with God through Jesus the Messiah, what form would the mystical body of believers be that Jesus had in mind when he said, "*I will build my church*"? If it was not to be a physical building like the Temple it must still have the features of a "*building*" as Jesus implied, with believers as "*living stones*," or as "*members*" of a "*body*". They certainly could not continue to be just a spreading collection of believers meeting occasionally and randomly as in present Judea, Samaria and Galilee. Within the Roman Empire only Hellenism and Judaism were *religio licita* under the *Pax Romana*, so if Jesus believers like him were excluded from the officially protected synagogues, a simple dynamic spiritual body of believers with spiritual elders, apostles, pastors, teachers and prophets meeting in houses or independent buildings would have to be created by means of the heavenly bestowed Spirit of God.

Before he launched himself on his monumental vision Saul decided he must have some long discussions with the leading apostles; preferably Peter, as one of Jesus' closest companions, and

James, the step-brother of Jesus. From them he would obtain the knowledge he needed to give greater substance to the vision developing in his mind and spirit. To them he would unfold that vision communicated to him by God over the past three years in the desert. Between them they would forge the message that would transform the world.

Saul's departure from Jerusalem had brought a measure of peace from religious persecution for the Jesus believers throughout Judea but the internal and external political pressures increased with a new Roman governor in the country. This, in turn, increased revolutionary activities across the nation and the three Herod brothers schemed and fought for influence and supremacy. Within this simmering political and religious crucible the Jesus believers continued to increase in numbers as they preached their message from Jesus that a national calamity was looming for both Temple and nation linked with Jesus' predicted return to rule the world in peace.

Saul entered Jerusalem quietly, in the spring of A.D.38, with a group of dust-stained travellers. It was a dramatic change from his departure from the city over three years earlier. The arrogant intellectual Pharisee rabbi was now a humble anonymous bond-slave of God. He was dressed in the rough, dark-brown, goat's hair robe of the desert-dweller; and his former aristocratic fair-skin was burned a deep brown from the desert exposure to sun and wind; his beard thick, his hair thinning. Only the intelligent and penetrating eyes gave any indication that he was not just an ordinary wandering tribesman come for a visit to the holy city.

Saul had chosen to visit Jerusalem after the Feast of Passover, when most of the pilgrims would have left but the city would still be crowded with those who wished to visit relatives or spend some leisure time there. He did not know how he would be viewed by the Sanhedrin officials because of his sudden defection in Damascus, and his conversion to the Jesus teachings; but he wanted to be undetected among the crowds until he had spoken with Peter and James.

It was strange to walk through areas where he had talked with the haughty members of the Sanhedrin; where he had whipped and

tortured and made to blaspheme the many Jesus believers he had arrested; where he had impounded many of their sacred writings and destroyed them, where he had put to death the prominent among them. Yet he must witness here in Jerusalem to his new faith, just as he knew he must witness in Rome. *"Before kings"*, God had said.

He went straight to his sister's home, as he had always done. Alone among the family she had always welcomed him in the past, whatever his beliefs and activities. But he knew she had been shocked when their relatives, Andronicus and Judas, had become Jesus believers. Her orthodox husband was the antagonistic one. She did not recognize the desert-browed Saul at first, but she greeted him warmly and invited him to share their meal. From her Saul learned that other relatives had become Jesus believers: Lucius, Jason, Sosipater and Herodion, were now believers and were either in Cilicia or in Rome. Saul did not stay in his sister's home; that would have drawn immediate attention to him from their circle of Traditionalist friends. He went to a small unobtrusive inn that he knew, where he was just another anonymous pilgrim, while he made cautious enquiries regarding the whereabouts of Peter.

Meanwhile, he picked up news from visiting pilgrims about events elsewhere in the world. The Emperor Tiberius had died at last, his death hastened it was being said by his dissolute grand-nephew, Gaius Caligula, and the Praetorian Prefect Sertorius Marco, who had replaced Sejanus as the favourite of Tiberius. Gaius Caligula had his cousin, Gemellus, grandson of Tiberius, murdered, and had himself acclaimed as Caesar on March A.D.37. He made his uncle Claudius his colleague in consulship, and had sought popularity by providing spectacular shows, games and generous largesse for the people. After surviving a serious illness Caesar Caligula had become even more depraved, a monster of decadent lust and diabolical cruelty.

In Palestine the previous year, Tiberius, before his death, had removed Pontius Pilate after a series of protests from the leaders among both Jews and Samaritans, and had replaced him with Marcellus, a friend of Vitellius, the president of Syria. Caesar

Caligula had bestowed the territory of Herod Philip on his sycophantic friend, Herod Agrippa, and promoted him from tetrarch to king. This so infuriated Herodias, the former wife of Philip who had left him to marry his brother Herod Antipas, that she nagged Antipas into returning to Rome to protest to Caligula personally. Caligula had Antipas banished to Spain for his temerity, and did the same to Herodias, and added his territory to Agrippa.

In Alexandria, in neighbouring Egypt, the disputes between the orthodox Jews and the Hellenists erupted into such bitter quarrels that one of the Greek leaders, Apion, demanded official punishment for these Jews, such as Philo and his associates, who would not recognize the divinity of Caesar in their daily worship. Reports from Rome said that Caesar Caligula was enraged by this, and was sending Agrippa to Alexandria and Judea, with a new president of Syria, Petronius, to teach the Jews a lesson in obedience. It was also being said that Caligula was now demanding that he be worshipped as a god in all temples, and that this would include the Temple in Jerusalem.

Saul eventually obtained news of Peter from a Hellenist friend, Joseph Barnabas, a Levite Jew from Cyprus, who had attended the University of Tarsus and also studied under Rabbi Gamaliel. His family and relatives were wealthy merchants in Cyprus, with business as well as religious interests in Jerusalem. He was an intelligent and attractive individual, with a gift of eloquence, and it was one of the many surprises for Saul during his persecutions of the Jesus believers to hear that Joseph Barnabas had donated his considerable wealth to them and had become a leading figure among them. Saul had not sought a confrontation with him, partly because of his own slight friendship with him and partly because he was one of those with powerful friends in the Sanhedrin. He was also the nephew of Philip the Gaulonite and Mary, parents of John Mark, the relatives of Jesus of Nazareth, at whose home he had often stayed. The son, John Mark, cousin of Joseph Barnabas, was said to be particularly close to the apostle Peter; and that Peter either lived in their home or was often to be found there.

Saul asked Joseph Barnabas, or Barnabas for short, to arrange a

meeting for him with Peter. Barnabas had heard of Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, and was aware of the fury of the Sanhedrin at his public defection, and the dangers he faced. Paul now told him of some of his thinking over the past three years since his conversion, and that he needed to talk with Peter and James urgently. He needed Barnabas' help to effect the introduction to the Jesus doctrine leaders here in Jerusalem as Ananias had done in Damascus. Barnabas said he was happy to help.

When Saul came face to face with Peter, the leading apostle of Jesus, they looked at each other with interest. Saul saw a tall, powerfully built man of about forty years of age, with bushy eyebrows, watchful eyes and a thick beard. Saul had reports of Peter's impetuous character as a disciple-companion of Jesus—stepping out of a fishing-boat to walk on water, grabbing a sword to defend Jesus at the time of his arrest, his quick denials of being a follower of Jesus at his trial, his dramatic recovery and leadership following on the reported healing of the crippled man—but this man he was looking at now had a quiet confidence and air of authority.

Peter saw a man about his own age who looked older than his years; the slight body in the desert robe, the nondescript face with its prominent nose and piercing eyes giving no indication of the former notorious prosecutor of Jesus deviationists. When each was satisfied with the appraisal of the other, and had exchanged the usual greetings, Saul informed Peter of the details of his conversion on the road to Damascus, what had happened in the city, and then of his decision to go into the desert of Arabia for a time of quietness and reflection. It was to discuss the fruits of those three years that he now sought out Peter; and, if he agreed, he would like to spend as much time as possible with him to lay before him what he had received from God, and what Peter thought in the light of these conclusions.

He told Peter he would prefer not to get publicly involved with the Jesus believers during this visit, limiting the fact of his presence in Jerusalem to as few as possible. God's commission for him was "*to go to the Gentiles*", and it was the implication of this vision that he wished to discuss with Peter, setting it in the context of the history of the nations other than the Jews, although from God's point of

view related to them as His chosen people. The liberating work of their great God—not just a tribal Jehovah of the Jews, but a universal Deity with a cosmic purpose for all men and women everywhere—had been demonstrated in the past. The Assyrians and Babylonians with their world-wide military conquests, the Medo-Persians with their rule of law, the Greeks with their enlightening culture, and the Romans with their great highways, universal administration and common use of Roman and Greek languages, had linked together people everywhere, preparing the world for the message of God he would bring.

The Greek philosophers had provided a philosophical language whereby the whole world was now able to grasp the concept of a universal, transcendent Deity in control of human affairs. Hellenists everywhere, as well as Jews, accepted Plato's antithesis between body and soul, between material and spiritual, recognizing evil as a force in the world. Cicero, Horace, Plutarch, Juvenal and Seneca all showed that people were afraid and worried about personal failure to measure up to some higher standard, with a sense of uncleanness and defilement, and with a hunger for expiation.

All of these forces, Saul argued, surely and steadily were working against the Jewish *Traditions* of isolation and superstition, and in favour of God's design for the world. People everywhere were being encouraged and taught to read and think; criticism, debate, examination, a sense of proportion, a recognition of natural and codified laws, justice and righteousness, were becoming a part of everyday experience. Philo the Jewish philosopher had publicly praised the Emperor Augustus for not only loosening but abolishing the bonds in which the whole habitable world was previously bound and weighed down.

The Great Dispersion of the Jews had also contributed to a worldwide recognition of the God of the Jews, Jehovah. Wherever there were Jews there were synagogues, and there were also copies of the Jewish Scriptures. The Jews of Alexandria had also translated those into the Greek Septuagint Version, making it available to the world. The Jewish religion was recognized by the Roman authorities as *religio licita*, a permitted religion. It was essential, therefore—at

least, for as long as possible—to communicate the gospel of Jesus through the established synagogues, as Jesus himself had done while here on earth. Jesus was the Messiah of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. It just had not been his primary task to reach out to them; God had given that task to Saul.

The world was ready for the gospel, the “*good news*” of Jesus, the Messiah of the Jews, the *Christos* of the Greeks. The message Jesus had brought from God was not tribal, nor even national, but universal “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life,*” Jesus had said. That encompassed all nations, all peoples, all individuals, in all parts of the world.

Peter was deeply impressed with what he heard from Saul, encouraged by the response of the highly respected and intelligent Barnabas who was obviously excited by what Paul had said. And he agreed that James, the step-brother of Jesus, who was now the leading elder of the Jesus community in Jerusalem, and who was respected by the Traditionalist Jews for the godliness of his life, should be present at future discussions. He would be able to provide insights from his own family experience of Jesus. For the next fifteen days the four men met together from morning to night, stopping their discussions only for sleeping and eating, and the essential services of the Jesus believers.

It was a breath-taking, cosmic vision which Saul presented to his companions during this period, articulated with all his intelligence and passion, logic and lucidity. When they had grasped the main points they moved into a dialogue, with questions and debates. Saul argued that he saw himself, with his God-provided preparation, as an architect-builder in advancing the vision he articulated, conceiving the plans and laying the foundations on which others would build. He was no less an apostle than Peter, or James, or the others, because of his own unique personal commission from Jesus on the road to Damascus, confirmed by Ananias in the city later. Barnabas, for example, despite his obvious great gifts, had not been selected by God or Jesus for such an experience.

But Saul also made it clear that, while he was arguing for three

types of apostleship - one, the individual and distinctive apostleship of such as Peter and himself, to the Jews and Gentiles respectively; two, the unique apostleship of the Twelve who had been with Jesus; and, three, the practical apostleship of such as Barnabas and others of like stature and ministry — there could be only one gospel. There was not one gospel for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. The revelation of God from the beginning had been directed towards only one end: the redemption of one whole and perfect people for Himself. God had begun with a chosen nation, the Jews, but it was always His purpose to have a chosen people, an elite priesthood, from all nations represented in His kingdom. That was the promise made by God to the father of the Jews, Abraham; the message of the Jewish prophets; and the gospel of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. In other words, they could not continue to have both Jewish “*Messiah*” and so-called Gentile “*God-fearer*” “*Messiah*” converts from Gentile paganism to Jewish Judaism. There could only be Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus as God’s Messiah on the one hand, and Jewish and Gentile unbelievers, on the other. — the “*sheep*” and the “*goats*”, the “*wheat*” and the “*tares*”, as Jesus taught.

The core of that gospel was in the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, his unique redemptive work by which all men and women could be delivered from their inherited and practiced sins by accepting God’s free gift of salvation. That was the prophecy of John the Baptist at his first meeting with Jesus: “*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*” Jesus the Messiah had died for the sins of the world, as he made clear when he said: “*I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*”

The death and resurrection of Jesus did not close the door on the Jews, nor did it wholly disinherit them; it simply removed them from the central place in God’s cosmic purpose because of their rejection of God’s Messiah. From now on the true children of Abraham would not be those who had circumcised foreskins, kept the *Law of Moses*, and attended the annual Feasts of the Temple in Jerusalem; they would be all those who demonstrated a like faith with Abraham in God’s provision of His Son as a sacrifice on their behalf, and who lived their lives accordingly.

Just as it was possible to be born into the Tribes of Israel, and to be circumcised, but not to live and act like a true child of Israel or of God—such as the sons of Aaron, or the sons of Korah, or the sons of Eli, or the sons of Samuel—so it was possible to live and act like a child of God without being a member of the nation of Israel. The proselytes, or “*God-fearers*”, of the synagogues were like this, such as the centurion of whom Jesus said he had not seen such faith in all Israel. A true Jew, in other words, was one who kept the commandments of God written in his heart, and whose circumcision was that of the heart and not just the foreskin. And, if a Gentile did likewise then he, too, was as a Jew in the sight of God—one of God’s chosen people, a priest, a “*saint*” with the sanctification of the Spirit of God.

The work that Jesus accomplished in his life and death and resurrection provided the bridge between the old and new systems of worship, between the *Old* and *New Covenants* between God and His creatures. The cross of Jesus stood at the cross-roads where old Judaic sacrifices ended, and new Messiah-centred salvation began; where God’s written *Law* was replaced by God’s living *Word*. From now on there would be no Jews as favoured people, only Messiah believers—whatever name they were called or given by others—as God-perfected saints.

By his death, Saul said, Jesus had provided deliverance from the creature’s bondage to the old sinful nature, the unrelenting temptations and failures of “*the flesh*” in all its carnal aspects. That basic tendency to self-centred indulgence was the natural life of the “*old creature*”, which had to be put to death by every believer—“*crucified*” with Jesus—and be made into a “*new creature*” through the appropriation of the resurrection power of the Messiah by faith. That was the message of the empty Holy Place and the torn Veil in the Temple—symbolic of the prophesied destruction of the Temple by Jesus; God was no longer in the Sanctuary of the Jews; He was ready and waiting to be enshrined in the hearts of men and women everywhere.

The Messiah had not only slain the Pharisee in Saul; he had put to flight his acquired Judaism as well. “*Eternal Life*” and “*Resurrection*

Power” were the key themes, or emphases, of the new theology; together with “*Transformation and Transfiguration*”. The goal of every believer was conformity to Jesus, as he had been the image of his Father in heaven: a perfect people in a perfect Spiritual Body, the Church of the Messiah, the *ekklesia* of God.

The kingdom of God was not terrestrial or political in character, as Jesus had constantly emphasized. It was inherently a spiritual kingdom, which could only be entered by repentance and remission of sins. Thus Jesus, as Messiah, the Saviour of the Jewish nation, became the Saviour of the individual in every nation, the “*first-fruits*” of all who believed in him. He was the foundation of the Church; the apostles were the builders; the members were the stones. That was the true miracle of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit, “*the Counsellor*” which Jesus had promised would follow his own departure from earth, had descended to indwell every believer. This was the “*new life*”, the “*living water*”, of which Jesus had spoken—and that, Saul reminded his listeners, to a Gentile, a heathen Samaritan woman. Now all men and women everywhere had direct personal access to God in heaven, through the presence and advocacy of Jesus the risen Messiah.

It was important to grasp and articulate these great and sweeping truths inherent in the teachings of Jesus the Messiah, as he, Saul, had come to understand over the past three years of meditation in God’s presence, because it had become apparent that the more the teachings of Jesus were taught the more likely the Jesus believers were going to be persecuted, put out of synagogues, and even be put to death. If, therefore, they did not have synagogues as centres of worship and meeting in the community, then alternative forms of gathering for spiritual fellowship would have to be created and developed.

Also, there would come a time when this gospel would be carried to places where there were no synagogues, and so there would have to be a divinely validated alternative. God had provided houses and elders for His people in bondage in Egypt; He had provided the Tabernacle for them among the hostile tribes of Canaan; He had provided the Temple of Solomon when David had

made the Tribes into a State; He had provided them with synagogues during the Babylon Captivity and since. There had always been a form of divinely provided *ekklesia* adequate to every situation from the beginning, when the man-made structures had become obsolete or were destroyed.

What he, Saul, was now proposing, therefore, for the times in which they lived—and for all time afterward—was that they continue to use the synagogues where they could, until such times as they were forbidden; but at the same time to begin gathering at the simplest level of encouraging meetings in houses, or fields, or caves. The true Temple of God was not confined to any building, but was in the hearts of His people. For this, God had chosen him to be an apostle, no less than Peter or James; a minister of the *New Covenant*, a herald of the Spirit, an ambassador of Jesus the Messiah to the nations.

It was a stunning revelation to Peter, James and Barnabas listening to Saul articulating the fruits of his three years' meditation in the desert, based on his previous incomparable knowledge of the Scriptures. So far, despite their zeal in preaching and proselytizing, the Jesus movement leaders had a fairly simple conception of their faith as revealed by Jesus to them. They had been content with little more than a powerful sentiment binding them to the more prominent of Jesus' messianic teachings, with no special effort given to definitions and expositions of *Old Covenant* Scripture.

As Saul ranged backwards and forwards through the Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus, as he had learned them, the others were visibly moved, inspired, overwhelmed and astonished in turn. Beginning with only an occasional question to clarify some point, Saul's monologue had gradually become an intense dialogue as implications were aired and challenged and resolved among the four men. Both James and Peter were able to provide the words and thoughts of Jesus from their different experiences of him. But what excited all of them was the general consensus and obvious confirmation of the bulk of Saul's thinking and vision, rather than the contrary.

They had been embattled in Jerusalem, and in the surrounding

areas, from the time of Jesus' resurrection, struggling to keep pace with the many crises that were constantly threatening their very existence. Now, here was Saul, fresh from his murderous persecutions of them and from his three years' solitary communion with God in the desert, providing them with a worldwide vision of the expansion of the kingdom of God such as few who knew the Scriptures could resist. It was almost like having Jesus back amongst them again.

To Saul, it was no anomaly in being one of the most hated and hunted persons by the leaders of the Jews, in being secretly in Jerusalem at present, in being outlawed from Damascus, while serenely contemplating the ascendancy of the small local group of Jesus believers into the worldwide Church of the Messiah. The others had to assume that Saul, with his cosmopolitan background, was fully aware of the scale of the task and the opposition. Yet all that seemed to concern him was finding agreement on the spiritual principles that were to be taught and incorporated into that worldwide Spiritual Body. It was as if, given their agreement, he would then go out and simply find the means to bring about that vision as he saw it—whatever the opposition waiting for him.

When Peter raised this point of interest with Saul he gave one of the rare smiles that lit up his usually sombre face. It had little to do with intellect, or courage, or even hubris, he said musingly. It had to do with the mind of God as demonstrated in Jesus. He had been interested to note in his many official interrogations of the Jesus believers, and his conversations with them since his own conversion, how often Jesus had referred to the power of God being freely available to all those who would simply believe. This resurrection power could enable them to move mountains, rebuke kings, cure diseases, exorcise demons, overcome enemies, withstand the gates of hell in building the *ekklesia*—and many other things, even greater works than Jesus himself did, if necessary. All of this could be accomplished on one condition only: that it was "*according to the will of Jesus, and of God.*" In which case, if they got it right in their ongoing discussions together, as Jesus had also promised, "*if any two of you agree on anything in my name,*" then there could be no

doubt about the successful outcome.

Each of them had their own particular vision from God, and these had to coincide on earth as in heaven. All prophecies were fulfilled, and all promises were realized, in Jesus as the Messiah. His life, death and resurrection reflected the purpose of God for him on earth, and this he had accomplished despite all the opposition of Jews and Romans, priests and officials, because *"all power had been given by his Father, to him on earth as in heaven."* That same power he had passed on to them, among other things to exercise lordship—spiritual lordship—over God's spiritual inheritance of the Church on earth. *"As the Father has sent me, so I send you,"* he had asserted before returning to heaven.

Jesus the Messiah was *"Lord"*—the name and title of Jehovah, which God had freely bestowed on him. Jesus had made it clear that his lordship required absolute sovereignty over the consciences of men and women, over the hearts of believers forming the Spiritual Body, his Church, and over the historical events of the world. Jesus was to the new Messianic spiritual consciousness what Jehovah was to the old Jewish prophetic consciousness—omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent by the Spirit. He was first and last, beginning and end, all things. When that was recognized, and practiced daily in the lives of his followers, then there could be no effective opposition to his will on earth.

Peter then told Saul of an incident which had occurred some time before, and which illustrated something of what Saul was saying. He had been in Joppa, at the house of one Simon, a tanner, and he was praying on the roof-top about mid-day. While praying he fell into an ecstatic state, and in this state he saw heaven opening and a great sheet let down to earth. In the sheet were all sorts of four-footed animals, birds, and insects; and a voice ordered him to rise up, kill and eat them. He had refused, saying that he never ate anything that was unsanctified or forbidden, as these were. The voice of God—for he was now certain that it was God speaking—again ordered him to eat, saying that he was not to call anything unsanctified or forbidden which God had cleansed. This had happened three times. Then God had said that three men would seek

him, and that he was to go with them, doubting nothing, for He had sent them to Peter.

While he was still puzzling over the significance of this revelation, dream or vision, there came a knock at the door. Three men were standing there, and they introduced themselves as messengers from Cornelius, a Roman military commander, who, with his family, was a "God-fearer" attending a synagogue in Caesarea. They enquired if there was someone named Peter living in the house, and then went on to say that an angel had appeared to Cornelius and told him to send to Peter to invite him to come to Cornelius' house and speak to them.

Next day, Peter and some of the Jesus believers left Joppa for Caesarea to visit Cornelius. Cornelius had invited a number of his friends to the house in anticipation of Peter's visit, and when Peter arrived he asked him to give them God's message. Peter had been disconcerted with the whole experience, he said, and he told Cornelius rather abruptly that he must be aware that it was not lawful for a Jew to keep company with, nor enter into the house of, a Gentile such as Cornelius. However, he told Cornelius, recently God had just given him this vision in which He showed that there was nothing unsanctified or forbidden if God had cleansed it, and he took this as God's message for him now in this particular experience.

Peter had just begun speaking to the assembled company, uncertain as to how to proceed in a Gentile setting, but emphasizing that God was no respecter of persons, as his trance-vision had asserted, and that there were those in every nation who feared God, kept His word, and were accepted by Him. He had gone on to state that this God had anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and this had been demonstrated in his life in many ways, culminating in his resurrection from death.

While Peter was still speaking, there was a sudden experience like that of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down in a divine afflatus on the company, and the group in the house of Cornelius all began to speak in unknown languages and praising God. This was a sign to him that God was providing the same experience of

spiritual blessing and inheritance for the Gentiles, as He had done for the Jews. Peter had then baptized them, and admitted them to the fellowship of the Jesus believers.

He agreed with what Saul had been saying about God reaching out to the Gentiles with the same offer of divine grace in Jesus as He had offered to the Jews. But more specifically he, Peter, took the incident to confirm what Jesus had said to him, and about him, regarding the keys of the kingdom of God being given to him to open up the way into the kingdom for the Gentiles. He had opened the door to the Gentiles, and it was now up to Saul to go forward in obedience to God to open the door of the Church of the Messiah. His own vision corroborated that of Saul's, and they were agreed as Saul had desired.

So there was forged between the two apostles—the warm-hearted and enthusiastic Peter, and the scholarly intellectual Saul, helped by the devoutly orthodox James and Barnabas—the beginning of the first great framework for the gospel of Jesus the Messiah. But it was Saul's own unique combination of gifts—his spiritual inspiration and dialectic power, the mixture of the rational and mystical, the analytical perception to articulate clearly the activity of the *nous* and *pneuma* in the individual—which played the major role. The innate ability which had been demonstrated so formidably in the debates in the past had now been released on a wider cosmic scale, and he revelled in the play of theses and antitheses from the viewpoint of God as he sought the syntheses on earth in their continuing discussions.

Beyond the organic cosmic form and divine order flowing from the Mind of God, and revealed through Jesus the Messiah, there lay the unfolding boundless realm of the world of the Spirit—a hitherto unknown world only opened up by the ascension of Jesus to heaven and his promised dispatch of the *Paraclete*—the Holy Spirit as "*Counsellor*"—to earth. The function of the Spirit of God had only rarely been recorded in the Scriptures, and usually in relation to specific individuals or events. With the coming of Jesus the Messiah, and since his departure, a new era of the human spirit had been opened up in which the Holy Spirit was the direct intermediary

between God and His creatures, able to plumb and to communicate all the depths of the Mind of God. Through this provision worship and adoration of the Divine became limitless, nourishing and giving birth to creative thought, and the knowledge of a personal loving Father-God. The dialectic was nothing, as he had known and demonstrated so often in his own life until the road to Damascus experience. It was the life of the Spirit, flowing from God through Jesus the Messiah, and into every believer as he had promised, which was the ever-satisfying living spring spreading to streams of living water and ultimately rivers of life which filled, satisfied and answered all things.

Saul's description now was that the *body* is like the Outer Court of the Temple, with its daily life visible to everybody; or what might be called world *sense-consciousness*—what can be seen, heard smelled, tasted and touched. Then there was the *soul*, which like the Inner Court of the Temple reflected the inner life and embraced the emotions, volition and mind which, when purified by obedience to God's commands, can serve God acceptably; and this might be termed *self-consciousness*. And then there was the *spirit*—“*the secret place of the Most High*”—, or dwelling-place of God in the Holy of Holies, who can only be approached and communed on God's terms of purity from sin; or what might be called *God-consciousness*—conscience, intuition and communion. All of the activities of the past individual high priest in the Tabernacle and Temple—and, through him, of the nation of Israel, —were God-directed by and from the Holy of Holies to and through every individual.

So, it could be stated very definitely that all communication between God and His human creatures takes place first of all in the spirit. As Jesus said, “*God is Spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.*” If any individual did not approach God through the spirit then what he or she said or desired coming from body or soul is unacceptable to God. This was very important when it came to prayer, because it meant that all self-generated or sense-generated prayer was not acceptable to God.

Of the three faculties of spirit, soul and body, it is the soul which is predominant because of the mind/emotion/volition power it has

over the body. It is the soul which contains the intellect and volition —or “will-power” —which determines the choice of good or evil actions. The Scriptures clearly stated that the human spirit has three faculties: conscience, intuition and communion through which every human creature was aware of God. *Conscience* was the discerning faculty which signals what is right or wrong, and informs the soul’s will-faculty of its choices and consequences. *Intuition* was the sensing faculty of the human spirit, the knowledge which comes without any help from the soul’s mind, emotions or volition. We “know” through our intuition, but our mind helps us to “understand”. *Communion* was the faculty by which we were enabled to respond to, be taught by, and to worship God. God cannot be apprehended, or known, by body responses and soul thoughts, feelings or intentions. Saul described this as “*What man knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*”

These, said Saul, are the “*first principles of God’s word*” or “*elementary truths*”, or might be termed “*Solid food is for the mature who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*” That “*training*”, or *aistheterion*, is the “*capacity for spiritual perception*”, or the senses activated regularly by the meditations of the mind and the promptings of the spirit. In other words, the ability to distinguish good from evil, or right from wrong, is something that could be acquired by constant and diligent spiritual application and mental discipline.

It is the spirit that God “*regenerates*” —or gives new birth or eternal life—thereby forming His likeness in us. Without this new birth experience the spirit becomes so overwhelmed by the intellectual and material demands and activities of the soul and body —what He called “*the flesh*” — that it becomes impossible to tell the difference between soul and spirit. In other words, it becomes “*dead*” to God in its self-absorption.

The living, breathing sinless Adam as he stood before God had a perfect blend of all of these three elements of spirit, soul and body; before Satan intervened in the Garden of Eden no other outside element had been introduced to produce tension of any kind

between Adam and his Creator. When these three elements were in alignment with God it allowed this human creature to talk and walk with God in an unfettered freedom in a perfect paradisaal environment. This was '*the Paradise factor*' in all later human creatures, faint memories of which were still with everyone at certain times in their life's experience. It was this residual "*Paradise factor*" which drove individuals to mysticism, spiritism and all forms of replacement addictions in a vain search for a fulfilling vision.

While Saul was still talking with Peter, James and Barnabas an incident happened which abruptly terminated the quiet interchange between them. Saul had gone to the Temple to visit some of the familiar places he had known and, as he stood in a quiet spot praying and meditating, he passed into an ecstatic state such as Peter had described happened to him on the roof-top in Joppa. It was this state in which his ordinary consciousness was suspended, while his spirit explored the things of God, when God intervened in a startlingly clear manner. It was a different experience altogether from that on the road to Damascus, in which Jesus himself had appeared with divine authority in his conscious mind as he lay on the ground. It was also different from the normal dream state, for it seemed to occur in a dimension beyond ordinary consciousness, and had been induced by the preceding reflective meditation.

It was while he was in this ecstatic state of suspended consciousness that Jesus again appeared to Saul and commanded him to leave Jerusalem, because any witness by Saul would not be accepted by the people of the city at this time. Saul was disappointed, for he had been anticipating that, when his discussions with the Apostles were concluded satisfactorily, he could then emerge from his self-imposed silence to challenge the religious authorities as he had done in the early days in Damascus.

On his way out of the Temple, following on his visionary experience, Saul encountered some of the leading Hellenist rabbis and entered into a discussion with them, which rapidly escalated into a violent confrontation as he expounded his version of the Scriptures. It was only with difficulty that he was rescued from imminent death by stoning like Stephen, when some Jesus believers

recognized him and were able to remove him from the infuriated religionists. Saul accepted from these circumstances that the command from Jesus was to be obeyed immediately, and he made preparations to leave for Caesarea and his family home in Tarsus.

In Caesarea, while waiting for a ship for Tarsus, he had learned from Alexandria and Rome that the Jewish people everywhere were facing a new and deadly crisis. Caesar Caligula had sent his Jewish favourite, Herod Agrippa, to Alexandria on his way to Judea as his approved "king of the Jews." While in Alexandria, with the connivance of the governor of Alexandria, Flaccus, who hated the Jews, Herod Agrippa had been lampooned in the streets and theatres of the city, to a point where mass riots were precipitated resulting in many deaths. When Caesar Caligula heard the report he was enraged, and he sent troops to arrest Flaccus and to conduct him to Rome. The Jews of Alexandria meanwhile sent a delegation to Rome to protest, led by the respected Philo.

And while all this was going on, Saul recalled what he had heard in Jerusalem, of Philip the evangelist preaching to a wealthy Ethiopian official from the royal court of Queen Candace of Meroe who was returning from Jerusalem through Egypt. He had been reading while riding in his chariot from the Septuagint version of the Scriptures, when, seeing Philip, he had stopped and asked him to explain a passage from the *Book of Isaiah*. Philip had proceeded to tell him of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings, and the official had become a convert on the spot, and asked to be baptized, before going on his way.

Saul marvelled at the contrast: Herod Agrippa scheming to be "king of the Jews", and skulking impotently and ludicrously in Alexandria. Caesar Caligula, the emperor of the world, scheming to set up his image in the Temple and synagogues of the world as God. And the gospel of Jesus the crucified Messiah was being carried by a black eunuch into Africa; while he, Saul, a renegade Pharisee rabbi, was carrying the same gospel into Asia and the world. A thousand years from now who would be remembered—and for what?

During the journey to Tarsus Saul reflected on the great changes which had occurred since his departure from his native city some

seven years before. He had gone to Jerusalem with such high hopes for his future in Judaism, eager for a worthy cause; now he was returning with a reputation as the greatest enemy of that Judaism—but with a cause beyond all imagining. Instead of a dream of a new and purged Israel he had been provided with a divine commission to convert the whole world into a spiritual kingdom of God. What would his family, his wife, his friends, his tutors, think of him and his message? They would think him mad, he concluded ruefully.

Chapter 3

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