



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Record of the Beginning of Jesus' Reign

Chapter Eight

INTRODUCTION

NOTE: Modern Babylon is made up of several branches: politics, religion, finance, propaganda, education, military, etc. However, at the time of the writing of the Book of Acts the system in Jerusalem was a little less complex. It was mostly just politics and religion. The Book of Acts exposes both facets.

Neither government nor church are willing to admit their roles in the murder of Jesus and His apostles, and the persecution of the ecclesia. The cover-up has incorporated several leaps of logic and tricky translational perversions.

Pay close attention because lesson eight hits hard at both government and religion.

STUDYING THE BOOK OF ACTS acquaints us with the reign of Christ. It is the record of the early years of His reign. But, the thing that many Christians find confusing is that this letter records considerable conflict – a factor which, according to church doctrine, isn't supposed to happen in "the kingdom." Nonetheless, the Book of Acts records both kingdom and conflict in the same era.

The churches' handle this contradiction by simply pretending the kingdom will not appear until sometime in the distant future when, they claim, Jesus will "return" and make all the conflict cease. Thus, the references to the kingdom and Christ's reign in the Book of Acts are generally ignored or reinterpreted by the churches to refer to a future time. Nonetheless, an honest researcher cannot avoid or ignore the clear references to the then-present kingdom ... and the conflict waged against it.

It is evident that Jesus and his followers met with contention and conflict everywhere they went. The Kingdom message made them "enemies of the state" ... but they couldn't keep silent. They were driven by holy spirit.

Acts chapters one through seven dealt with the early stages of this conflict and its effects in and around Jerusalem. The conflict, and the changes it was bringing in the lives of men, was a confirmation of Jesus' Reign. In chapter eight we will see this conflict spreading beyond Jerusalem as the message of the gospel goes forth.

Looking back over the life of Christ, we can see how this conflict developed. From an early age, Jesus learned what it was like to live under the oppression of man's government. He also saw the public's apathy, and man's affinity to slavery.

As it is for us today, it must have been frustrating for Jesus and the apostles at that time. They learned the differences between freedom and slavery ... only to watch family and friends passively learn to tolerate and accommodate the problem.

Submission to tyranny, if not corrected early, becomes a disease. The second-generation slave will commonly adopt slavery as "normal," defend his slave master, and stand against anyone attempting to expose slavery.

Coping with forced slavery is one thing. But, passively and willingly accepting it – and learning to like it – is something else. In other words, it's one thing to accept punishment, but it's quite another thing to cultivate pride in a legacy of punishment, and then rename the punishment and call it "patriotism" or "religion."

As a man, Jesus watched the oppression that came from man. That oppression became His enemy. It became the focus of His life. Under His Father's authority Jesus became the Champion of mankind, and for mankind's sake took upon Himself the battle of the ages. At this point the conflict was fully defined as He realized His single purpose in life was to fight oppression and expose it ... leading Israel into The Way of freedom.

WHAT IS JESUS LIKE?

MEN have imagined Jesus in many different images – mostly spawned in the minds and writings of pagans. Churches portray Jesus falsely – often as only a remake of Mithra, Zarathustra, Zoroaster, Buddha, Krishna, etc. But Jesus need not be a mystery to anyone. His personality can be described in logical and understandable terms ... if one honestly looks at the record.

Here are three simple points that show what Jesus was (and is) like:

1. WHAT WAS MOSES LIKE:

36. He (Moses) led them (the Children of Israel) out, with portents and signs in Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

37. This same Moses, said to the sons of Israel, God will cause a prophet like me to stand up out of your brethren.

Acts 7:36,37

What did Moses do? Moses confronted the oppressor – the Egyptian central government headed by Pharaoh. Moses demanded that his people be set free. He was a deliverer who led the Israelites out of Egypt and out of bondage. Moses said that a prophet like himself would later appear in Israel. That prophet was Jesus.

2. JESUS WAS (IS) LIKE MOSES:

Acts 7:36, 37 tells us that Jesus is like Moses. In the Book of Luke, we read this about Jesus:

17. And there was delivered to Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written,

18. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to declare the good news to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19. "To declare the acceptable year of the Lord."

Luke 4:17-19

"The acceptable year of the Lord" refers to that part of God's Law commanding the seventh-year RELEASE (debt release) – Lev. 25:9-10. In the sabbath year, the people are released from all debts.

In referring to the debt release, Jesus declared his mission to be basically the same as Moses' – namely, to deliver his people from bondage. He, like Moses, was a deliverer/savior. By the same token He, like Moses, was an enemy of the state.

3. JESUS IS MORE THAN JUST SWEETNESS AND LIGHT:

We can't forget that Jesus is a DELIVERER. If we're not careful, we may too easily slip back into that churchy thinking that Jesus is some kind of sugar-coated religious ikon — a symbol of passive niceness. That fairytale image does not describe the Jesus of Scripture. The Jesus of Scripture was a life-risking, life-giving savior. He was a FIGHTER; a man who died an early, torturous death because of his convictions and because of his LOVE.

Bottom line: Moses was 1) a deliverer, 2) a reformer, and 3) a fighter. Jesus was a man "like Moses" ... and the record bears this out. Jesus was 1) a deliverer, 2) a reformer, 3) a fighter. Keep these three facets of character in mind when you think of Jesus.

The developing conflict was beginning to catch the public's eye. It was between Jesus (the reformer), and the civil/religious rulers (government). As the common people watched, they saw the righteous Lamb of God in conflict with the rulers who hated Him. The rulers' agenda was clearly evil. These pieces of evidence began to build in the collective conscious of the people.

As the rulers began to realize that they were losing this battle of wits with Jesus, they reasoned that they had only two options: 1. Give up and watch Jesus dismantle their system, or 2. Kill Jesus and get rid of the competition. They chose the second option. However, what they didn't realize was that this Reformer couldn't be destroyed by their usual methods of threat and murder.

The Jerusalem government struggled to stop this righteous reform, but the rulers' efforts kept backfiring on them. The oppression aimed at Christ's Kingdom actually added fuel to the fires already burning in the hearts of those whose eyes were being opened.

Through the agency of "His body" (His inspired followers) Jesus was taking the fight to the enemy. The casualties were adding up, and the advance of Jesus' army was beginning to make the Beast uncomfortable.

In the previous chapters, we read about the assassination of Stephen. Now, in this chapter we read about Saul of Tarsus ... the patriotic government man who persecuted and murdered Christians.

Thus, we are following the conflict as it expanded via the Christians driven out of Jerusalem. At first this exodus appears to be a great loss for the Christians as they are dispersed into the nations. But, as the conflict renewed itself in each location where Christians resettled, we see how the seed of truth was sown. The kingdom seed was being sown in ever-widening circles, and the conflict was growing proportionately. Thus, was manifested the plan of God. What appeared at first to be a tragedy,

turned instead into a stunning blow to the Beast System. People, in increasing numbers, were losing their blindness about the Beast.

This process developed for some time. The seeds of freedom had to grow into strong trees – strong enough to survive the drought that was to come. The wonderful momentum gained through personal exposure to Jesus and His apostles was to last only about one generation (Lk. 23:28-31). Soon, the kingdom would see a change in momentum and the beast system would develop new and clever strategies to reassert itself. Greater deceptions and illusions were being conceived.

The beast system is built upon illusion and deceit. People are tricked into worshipping the beast. The great power amassed by the beast is held in place by illusion. Remove the illusion and the power evaporates.

Today, almost two millennia later, man's government (the Beast System) seems alive and well ... stronger than ever. This leaves us to wonder what ever happened to the battle which at one time seemed to be going in favor of Jesus' Reign.

Today, the illusions of *Mystery Babylon* are strong. The modern version of one-world government has risen to such power that it seems invincible. But remember, the Roman Empire at one time was overpowering and seemingly invincible ... but history shows that Rome eventually disintegrated from within.

Historical time lines show that central governments come to power, and then eventually weaken. Rome lost its place as a world power. The Reign of Jesus witnessed it ... and continued on. Jesus' reign will witness the end of this current phase of the Beast System as well.

Centuries earlier, Yahweh gave the prophet Daniel a future vision of the rise and fall of the world kingdoms that would make up the Beast System. That vision came about through a dream that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon at the time. The king had dreamed about a large metallic statue. Its head was gold; its chest was silver; its

loins were brass; its legs were iron; and its feet were iron and clay mixed. Nebuchadnezzar asked Daniel to interpret the dream for him. God gave Daniel the following interpretation:

36. This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.

37. You, O kin'g, are a king of kings: for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.

38. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven, He has given it into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all. You are this head of gold.

39. And after you there shall arise another kingdom inferior to you, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

40. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, forasmuch as iron crushes and subdues all these. And as iron that subdues all these, it will crush and break.

Daniel 2:36-40

Daniel foresaw five successive world-ruling empires represented by the delineated sections of metals in the statue. As Daniel identifies the metal sections from the head downward, each succeeding section of metal declines in value compared with the section above it. The gold head is the most valuable. The silver chest and arms were "inferior." The brass belly and thighs were less valuable. The legs were iron – a metal of even less value. The feet were of least value, being made of iron and clay.

Iron, while inferior in value, is stronger and wears longer than the more precious metal sections preceding it.

The head of gold represented the kingdom of Babylon. The chest of silver was Medo Persia. The belly of brass was the kingdom of Greece. The legs of iron were the Roman

empire. This represented the succession of world rulership following the historical time line starting with Babylon.

41. And whereas you saw the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with miry clay.

Daniel 2:41

This verse described what would happen after Rome fell. Little pieces of the Roman Empire (iron) would be dispersed in the world (clay). But notice that it would no longer be a single-nation empire as it was before. Rome fell, but its "republic" system of government (depicted by iron) lived on. It was transplanted to multiple small kingdoms which incorporated the Romanish system into their own governments. These governments eventually formed into a multi-national confederacy of Romanish "republics."

42. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.

43. And whereas you saw iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle

themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron does not mix with clay.

Daniel 2:42-43

Then, in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel revealed another kingdom – one that "shall stand for ever," as stated in verse 44. This is the Reign of Jesus! It was set up during "the time of these kings" and manifested in the days recorded in the Book of Acts. Notice that it says, "in the days of these kings." That means that Jesus' Kingdom was to exist along beside some of those kingdoms represented in the metallic statue – namely, the iron kingdom (Rome) and the iron/clay kingdom representing a multi-national confederacy of Romanish stereotype republics.

Jesus' Reign is symbolized by "a stone."

44. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall crush and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

45. Forasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it crushed the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver,

and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

Daniel 2:44-45

The kingdoms of the world are transient, but the Stone Kingdom (Jesus' Reign) is permanent.

Now, the Futurists in the churches tell us that the great kingdom Daniel described has not yet appeared. But as you can see, that just isn't true! God set up His Son's Reign enthroned Him in it, and we are reading about it in the Book of Acts. Jesus' Kingdom Reign is permanent. It cannot be overthrown, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. We may argue about what phase His Kingdom is in, but there can be no argument about its existence.

QUESTION: You seem to paint a militant picture of Jesus. But didn't He talk about *loving your enemies, turning the other cheek?* Doesn't that prove He was non-violent and an advocate for peace?

ACTS 8:1 PERSECUTION OF ECCLESIAS (NOT CHURCHES)

And Saul approved of the execution of him (Stephen). And in that day great persecution was upon the ecclesia in Jerusalem; and all were dispersed into the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.

IN CHAPTER EIGHT we are introduced to Saul. Verse one gives us a small, but important, piece of information about him. He was in favor of killing Stephen. Then the writer immediately moves on to the subject of the ecclesia.

The ecclesia of the Bible is an elusive institution to people of our day. In a world long inundated with central

governments, churches and their Centralism, most people cannot fathom the concept of the "ecclesia." Living in a world of religious tradition makes it hard to visualize this old concept. It takes determination, but the effort is well worth it. Knowing the truth about freedom – even in lieu of actually HAVING freedom – keeps us on a stabile mental/spiritual foundation. It insures our grasp of reality,

gives us a worthwhile goal, and helps us make sense of our lives and the world around us.

For churchgoers especially, the concept of "ecclesia" is difficult. Churchgoers only know of "church." Unlearning is harder than learning, and when churchgoers read the Bible their brain automatically jumps into the church mode. Therefore, it takes conscious effort and determination to take the important step out of the church world and into the real world.

The ecclesia is NOT a building. It is NOT a religious group that meets for sermons, rituals or singing. It is NOT a Bible Study group.

The ecclesia is a co-op of families cooperating with one another for mutual benefit. It is a self-governing, self-sufficient body politic.

That is not to say that all groups that meet together for rituals or Bible Studies are bad. But those groups are "churches," "study groups," "lodges," "synagogues" etc. They are NOT ecclesias!

The Ecclesia is the civil community institution of the New Covenant – not a religious institution. Jesus' ecclesia is not affiliated the governments of man. Jesus is its Shepherd and Commander in Chief. Its charter is the New Covenant, and its law is the Law of God. Its strength is in the morality, accountability and unity of free men, not in the forced unity of Centralism.

In other words, the Christian Ecclesia is a society that is dedicated to independence and freedom through God's word. Members are land holders, businessmen, and family men. The Ecclesia has no central rulers, no police, no taxes, no interference of any kind. It takes care of its widows and orphans through benevolent funds freely given, and it has no lawyers and politicians. It deals with crime within its ranks according to God's laws. It does not abdicate that responsibility to demigods and professional thugs (judges and police). In short, it manages everything within its independent society without outside interference.

Compare this concept to the

concept of "church," and you'll see that there is no similarity between the two. Churches are not communities. They are religious propaganda machines – dispensing the opiate, and teaching and supporting the institution of Central Government. Churches even incorporate Centralism for their own administration! Each church has its own central governing body created and incorporated under the state.

The ecclesia, on the other hand, has no central rulers, and allows all men to pursue freedom and self-government. Each man's liberty is limited only by that of another's. In other words, liberty is boundless except where it interferes with another man's liberty. At that point it is a Christian's responsibility to not step upon the liberties of another. The law of the land is the Ten Commandments – which have always defined sin (i.e., crime). Peer enforcement is the regulating influence which maintains order and morality. God's law, righteous vengeance, and lawful retribution are the forces which prevent the reprobate from violating the liberty of good people. The system works.

But, central government is jealous, and it isn't willing to allow an institution like I've described to enter its domain.

This basically describes the battle of the ages ... depicted by the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh, as well as the conflict between Jesus' Reign and man's government as seen in the Book of Acts. Jerusalem government told the Christians that they could not practice the ecclesia concept on Jerusalem turf. As a result, the Christians were forced to take their Christian Community (ecclesia) elsewhere. Verse one says the residents were dispersed into the regions of Judea and Samaria. The apostles, however, remained in Jerusalem to continue their work a while longer.

QUESTION: Are you advocating that mere private citizens, who have no knowledge or experience in matters of law, take the law into their own hands? Wouldn't anarchy and chaos result from this action?

QUESTION: With all your talk about independence, don't you think that there is proven historical value in people organizing in groups, churches, states, or nations and being unified together for strength and protection?

ACTS 8:2-4 SEEDS OF THOUGHT

And respectful men carried Stephen out, and made great lamentation over him.

But Saul was raging down on the ecclesia, invading the houses, dragging out men and women and delivering them to prison.

The ones, therefore, having been dispersed went through the lands declaring the word as good news.

WHEN Saul persecuted the ecclesia he wasn't going after churches. Rather, he was dragging people out of their homes. This further confirms the difference between church and ecclesia. Neither Paul, nor the Sanhedrin, nor the Romans were against churches (synagogues). They were against ecclesian communities. They went after people in homes in those communities. The churches were left alone! Churches are generally sanctioned by governments ... and are even given tax-exempt status. The state does not hate churches. Rather, the focus of government hatred has always been upon those who separate themselves.

The Way of Christ's Ecclesia is not a passive, state-sanctioned experience lived out within the four walls of churches on Sundays. The Ecclesia is a separate (holy) way of living. The ecclesian way is true "Christianity." It is, in fact, the **ONLY** true freedom movement ... for there is no freedom outside of Christ's Reign.

Freedom is possible **ONLY** in Christ! True freedom has only one definition. That one definition finds expression in The Way of Christ. There is no other freedom! Freedom points to Christ. There are other movements which may claim to be "free," but they miss the mark. The fact is that true freedom – just like any other principle – has only one true definition. The Christian Ecclesia embodies that definition. If liberty (freedom) existed outside the realm of Christ, that would mean that Christ's Way is just one of the many acceptable ways ... any one of which could define freedom.

But Scripture tells us that "... where the spirit of the Lord is, there is **LIBERTY**" (2 Cor. 3:17). "Truth," "freedom," and "Christ" are inseparable. Where there is one, there are all three.

The institution of the Ecclesia is a bulwark for freedom. It is not a passive, tax-exempt, government-approved religion. It is not a church. It is the only viable alternative to oppressive government-by-man.

On the other hand, churches love man's government.

"Oh," you say, "but the early church was different back then! And 'the true church' is different even now!"

Really? Then please define, with Scripture, "the early church." The word "church" is **NOT** even in the Bible.

And tell me what church today teaches against the Beast System? You say your preacher teaches against bad politicians? Big deal! Every organization under the Sun is opposed to "bad government" – but how do they define "bad"? They all still want government: "good government." But under men there are **NO** "good governments." It is impossible. The term itself is an oxymoron – like "good slavery."

Name one church that teaches that Christ's salvation saved us for this life (not just a future life).

Name one that teaches against central government or lawmakers?

Name one church that has, as its mission, the teaching of freedom for today rather than just "getting saved" so you can abandon the Earth for "heaven" or "the next life"?

You see, the business of Church is **NOT** the same as the business of the Ecclesia.

Our first introduction to Saul (later renamed Paul) is not a glowing one. Saul represented the very things we hate. Soon, he too would come to hate these things. His dramatic conversion was a powerful display of the Reign of Christ. We'll read about that in chapter nine.

Saul had been a government man whose mission was to stop the Christian dissenters. He attacked the Christian community – not the churches. He had the authority to round up and imprison followers of Jesus because they were considered seditionists and therefore enemies of the government.

The government in Jerusalem was facing a new problem. They discovered that killing Christians did not kill their ideas. The Jews could not kill the spirit of Christ that was in his disciples.

It was a tough time to be a ruler. Rulers were learning that murder couldn't stop Christ. In times past, murder had been very effective at stopping rebellion or competition. But now, in this case, when they killed one man ten more rose up in his place. They just couldn't poison out the seeds of freedom.

Government persecution scattered the Christians away from Jerusalem and into other lands. It was like wind blowing a plant's ripe seeds across the land to find new soil in which to germinate. Christians, like seeds born in the wind, were blown everywhere to bring the good news to more Israelites in other lands. Wherever they landed their message took root and began to grow and produce more seeds to carry the message farther.

The scattered Christians carried with them the seeds of this truth that cannot be killed. The seeds took root in men's minds and began to grow and proliferate. And, as they did, other governments had to face the same thing that had happened in Jerusalem. There was an amazing transformation occurring in men's minds, and it caused the slaves to lose respect for the slavemasters. When that happens, a wonderful, and natural, thing happens. When the mind is freed it isn't long before the rest of the body follows.

There is only one way to perpetually keep people slaves. That is to enslave their minds. A slave whose mind gets freed will begin to seek ways to free his body as well. His slavery resulted from years of error. He or his ancestors, somewhere along the line, were conquered mentally. It was probably a gradual process. But, as a result, it came to the point where he eventually found himself in physical bondage as well. But, a man's mind must first be enslaved for him to accept the idea of physical enslavement. And, whenever a people free their minds of the mental captivity they soon find ways to free their bodies as well.

Turning minds around – freeing them – was what the "good news" was all about. This was Jesus' own description of His purpose. He began

His ministry by stating publicly that He was sent, "... to declare the good news to the poor; to heal the brokenhearted, TO DECLARE DELIVERANCE TO THE CAPTIVES, and recovering of sight to the blind, TO SET AT LIBERTY THEM THAT ARE BRUISED" (Luke 4:18).

Those seeds of thought could not be killed. They were spreading abroad through the persecuted and dispersed Christians wherever they went.

The previous chapters in Acts dealt primarily with the conflict between Christians and the local authorities in Jerusalem. Chapter eight follows that conflict as it escalates beyond Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria.

QUESTION: Aren't you forgetting that, unlike our government today, the Roman Empire did not allow freedom of religion? That is why there were no church buildings for Saul to raid. Churches were "underground" organizations and had to meet in secret.

ACTS 8:5-8 THE PEOPLE BEGIN TO SEE AND HEAR

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and was preaching Christ to them.

And the crowds were attentive and in one accord heard those things which Philip spoke, and saw the signs which he did.

For many having unclean spirits were leaving with a loud protest, but many paralyzed and lame were cured.

And much joy came to that city.

PHILIP brought truth to the city of Samaria. They had already heard of Jesus, but they hadn't yet understood the good news of Christ's reign. Philip's preaching was received well, and the people responded positively.

It is important to read verse seven correctly. The King James Version Bible wrongly renders it, "*For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them...*" As you can see, the KJV is badly slanted to convey the pagan idea of supernatural "spirit beings" (so-called) living inside people. This typical church rendering of the verse portrays invisible ghost-like entities screaming as they flee out of the inner regions of people's bodies – a scenario

resembling a Hollywood horror movie.

But the idiom "unclean spirits" actually refers to the unclean motives of PEOPLE. There were PEOPLE there in Samaria who had bad motives ("unclean spirits") who complained and protested loudly, and were repelled away when faced by Stephen's truth. This presents no mystical, religious scenario. In fact, one can easily imagine a similar scene occurring in Washington DC if truth could ever break through their bulwark of lies and deceit. There would be a great outcry from the politicians, bureaucrats and lawyers ... then they would flee away.

In Isaiah 2, it was foretold that the spirit of God, and his judgment, would cause the merchants and kings

of the earth to flee to the mountains and caves just as they did in Samaria.

QUESTION: If the forces of evil (the fallen angels under Lucifer) don't exist, then where does that leave the forces of good (God and the good angels)? What do you say is causing all the evil in the world? What are God and His angels fighting against?

ACTS 8:9-13 THE SAMARIAN CHURCH LEADER

But a certain man, named Simon, had been in the city practicing magic, and astonishing the nation of Samaria, claiming himself to be some great one.

They all, from the least to the greatest, gave heed saying, This man is the power of the God called Great.

They were attentive to him because for some time he had astonished them with magic arts.

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were being baptized.

Then Simon himself believed also, and having been baptized, he continued with Philip, and was astonished, seeing the signs and great powers.

SIMON fits the typical church stereotype – an egocentric man in search of adoration and power. Successful preachers mesmerize their followers into a drugged-like state of dependency upon celebrity. To build a church a preacher must collect around himself a following of dupped people: a “Cult of Personality.” Unfortunately, celebrity worshipers (churchgoers) cannot differentiate between leaders and flim-flam artists. They prefer entertainment instead of truth and research. They like charisma instead of facts. They adore preachers who claim to know “the mysteries of God.” Simon was their man.

He had conned them with deceptive tricks into believing that he could work miracles, and that he had the power of God.

Whether it is con games, cheap magic tricks, sleight of hand, the big lie, the power of suggestion, or simply diversionary entertainment ... it is deception any way you look at it. These techniques are common among church leaders!

One such preacher was a so-called healer in Phoenix, Arizona during the 1980's. In the floor of his stage he

had installed a small metal plate charged with a slight electric current. He would call forward from the audience unsuspecting people who wanted to be “healed.” This Simon-type would have his subjects stand on that unnoticed electrical plate. Then, as he stood on the floor beside them, he would touch them on the forehead, completing the electrical circuit and causing them to receive a small shock. They would think the tingling sensation they felt was the power of God. The preacher was using sleight of hand to trick them into thinking they had been healed. The superstitious victims went away believing this preacher had great power.

Likewise, Simon had been operating a flim-flam show in Samaria. But, then Philip came with the truth about God and His Son, Jesus. The focus of the listeners suddenly shifted from Simon's magic to the message of the kingdom of God. Even Simon was impressed and drawn by the kingdom message.

Was Simon really converted?

He was baptized. But, apparently he wasn't changed. How was this possible? How could Simon have

heard, believed, and been baptized ... and yet not be reborn in Christ? James 2:19 explains that believing is not quite enough:

19. You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

James 2:19

Devils believe and tremble but they don't change. They are still devils. “Devil” in Biblical Greek is “diabolos”: which means “through thruster” – i.e., one who thrusts through as with a sword. Devils tremble when they know they are in a fight they can't win.

Typical preachers (like Simon) usually don't change either. Have you ever tried to convert a preacher? If you haven't, you ought to attempt it some day just to see how hard it is to convert a “man of the cloth.” Preachers are some of the most calloused idolaters of all. They know they speak nonsense ... but they don't care. Also, they are extremely protective of their acquired status, and refuse to consider anything, including truth, that might threaten that status.

This was the case with Simon. He watched Philip and thought to himself, “This fellow has some powers and tricky techniques that I could really use. He puts on a great show – even better than mine. If I stick around, I could probably learn his tricks and it would help MY ministry.”

Shortly, we'll see how Simon shows his true colors – like a typical preacher.

QUESTION: Do you think it is wrong for a person to be happy and uplifted by a message from a preacher? What's wrong with the sincere man of God bringing an uplifting, inspiring and entertaining message of hope? Do you think all preachers are tricksters?

ACTS 8:14-17 RECEIVING HOLY SPIRIT

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them:

Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive holy spirit.

(For it had not yet fallen upon any of them: but they had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Then they put their hands on them, and they began receiving holy spirit.

THE Samaritans accepted the good news of the Kingdom. The word, “accepted,” conveys the meaning of being convinced and not merely hearing a speech. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of this, they sent Peter and John to assist Philip. The scripture says they laid their hands on the people and prayed for them to receive holy spirit (KJV has “Holy Ghost” with capitals added, wrongly implying that holy spirit is a person). The idiom “lay hands on” implies more than just touching. It implies also “working with” or “teaching” the people.

Verse 16 casts a different light on traditional thoughts about how people receive holy spirit. It is sometimes assumed that baptism automatically puts holy spirit in a person. But, obviously, that was not the case here. Things aren’t always categorized or easily structured like that.

Ordinarily, people do receive holy spirit BEFORE they ask for baptism. It is normally a part of the conversion process. However, it is possible to learn of the need for baptism, or be persuaded of it, before receiving holy spirit.

Usually, holy spirit provides the motive for baptism. But, in this case, there were some Samaritans who got baptized before receiving holy spirit. That is where Peter and John came in. They helped Philip by praying for the recently baptized. They laid their hands on them (commissioned them), and they received holy spirit (spirit of separation from the world).

This shows that the baptism and inspiration processes don’t always happen in exactly the same way. It also indicates that receiving one’s commission can be the catalyst that brings the spirit to life in him.

QUESTION: Isn’t the act of baptism just a ritual? Can’t people have holy spirit and follow Jesus without going through this religious ritual?

QUESTION: Does this that you are discussing have anything to do with the term “Baptism of the Holy Spirit”?

ACTS 8:18-24 “THE RIGHT STUFF” CANNOT BE BOUGHT WITH MONEY

When Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the spirit was given, he offered them money,

Saying, Give me also this authority, that on whomever I lay hands, he may receive holy spirit.

But Peter said to him, Let you and your silver perish together, because you presumed to buy the gift of God with money.

You have neither part nor lot in this communication: for your heart is not right with God.

Repent therefore from your wickedness in this, and pray the Lord if the thought of your heart may be purged.

For I perceive you are in the gall of bitterness, and bound in iniquity.

But Simon answered and said, Pray to the Lord for me, that nothing should come upon me of which you spoke.

SIMON figured that everything had its price, and if a person has enough money he can get anything he wants ... including holy spirit. That's typical Babylonian strategy, and it often works. Some people think they can buy anything with money. But some things just can't be bought!

Clearly, Simon had not been converted. He had not changed. He was still the same old reprobate that he was before ... still looking for ways to trick and exploit.

Simon's case brings to mind two other cases related by Jesus. These two cases also show the distinct difference between one who gives the appearance of conversion, and one who is sincerely converted. Here is the first case:

21. Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works?

23. And then will I declare to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you who work lawlessness.

Matthew 7:21-23

Simon believed and got baptized, but he didn't enter into the kingdom of heaven. Believing and being baptized obviously is not enough. Sincerity is required – for, according to James 2:20-22, one's faith is defined by his actions. Also, according to John 3:5, one must not only be baptized in water, he must also have holy spirit before he can enter the kingdom of heaven.

Simon was a showman. He came off as a great power of God because of his showmanship and ability to trick people. Preachers fit this category. Preachers prophesy in Jesus' name, and they make great pretense about miracles of "saving" people, "healing" people, etc. They appear to do many wonderful works. We've seen how the Book of Acts exposes man's machinations. It exposes religious con artists too.

In Matthew 22:9 Jesus also related a parable of a wedding whose invited guests refused to come. Consequently, invitations were handed out on the streets to anyone who would come:

9. Go therefore into the streets, and as many as you find, invite to the marriage.

10. So those servants went out into the streets, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

11. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who wasn't wearing a wedding garment:

Matthew 22:9-11

Appropriate wedding apparel was worn by guests to show respect for their hosts. One guest chose to not wear wedding apparel, thus insulting the bride and groom and their families. The guest was rude, insincere and dishonest.

12. And he said to him, Friend, how did you get in here not having a wedding garment? But he didn't answer.

13. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into

outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

14. For the called are many, but the called-out are few.

Matthew 22:12-14

Likewise, Simon was invited to a wedding (the marriage of the Lamb). But he was insincere (he wore the wrong garment). Peter told him that he had "no part nor lot in it."

The term "wedding garment" very likely refers to spirit. The offending guest in the parable had the wrong spirit – otherwise he would have dressed correctly for the wedding. He came for the wrong reason. His motives were wrong. The same thing is true of Simon. His reasons were wrong. He had the wrong garment on – the wrong motive. In verse 22, "*the thought of your heart*" is another way of saying "*your spirit*," or "*your motive*."

Simon was "*bound in iniquity*" – a condition of being completely locked in to a fault. In this we can see the typical preacher. He lies to maintain his image of being someone great – like Simon. Since they lie week after week, preachers learn to lie without feeling remorse. Just like a politician, lying no longer affects their conscience. The Bible calls this alteration of morality "*a conscience that has been seared over*." They also develop what the Bible calls a "*heart of stone*," which is incapable of sincerity or holiness.

Now, because he had developed this "heart of stone," Simon didn't hide his face in shame. He wasn't sorry that he had led the people wrong and lied to them and brought shame upon them. He wasn't concerned about anybody but himself.

Well, Simon didn't drop dead just then, but he was exposed as a charlatan and the people could see through him.

Following this encounter with the preacher, Philip, Peter and John headed back toward Jerusalem.

ACTS 8:25-28 THE EUNUCH: A CHAMBERLAIN

Having witnessed earnestly and spoken the word of the Lord, they were returning toward Jerusalem and declaring the good news in many villages of the Samaritans.

And a messenger of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Arise, and go southward on the road that goes down from Jerusalem into Gaza, which is desolate.

And he arose and went: and he saw an Ethiopian eunuch, a man of power under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasury, who had gone to worship in Jerusalem,

And he was returning, and sitting in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah.

PHILIP was returning to Jerusalem when a messenger of the Lord told him to go to Gaza (scripture does not indicate whether the messenger was supernatural or natural). Gaza is southwest of Jerusalem ... between Judea and the coastline.

As Philip traveled southwest towards Gaza, he met an Ethiopian eunuch.

By traditional definition, a eunuch is a man who has been castrated. But, the Greek word also designates, according to Strong's Concordance, a

type of servant usually called a "chamberlain." A chamberlain is an officer who is held in subordination under a ruler or a superior officer. So a eunuch doesn't always have to be an emasculated male.

"Chamberlain" fits in this case because this particular man was in charge of the treasury of Queen Candace. Also, this particular chamberlain had gone to Jerusalem to worship, so this suggests that the man may have been an Israelite. When Philip happened along, the eunuch was returning from Jerusalem, and sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah.

ACTS 8:29-31 UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

Then the spirit said to Philip, Go near, and stay close to this chariot.

And Philip, ran up to him and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. And (Philip) said, Do you then understand what you are reading?

And he (the eunuch) said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he asked Philip if he would sit with him.

THE EUNUCH asked Philip to sit down and explain Isaiah to him. He needed the help of some man who understood Scripture to guide him.

This contradicts people who would say that the Bible is easy to understand. For instance, have you ever heard somebody say, "The Bible is written so that any child can read and understand it"?

In fact, no one can just open the Bible, give it a cursory reading, and immediately understand what it says. The truth is, the Bible is not an elementary text book. It is a book that requires much study to be understood. It is a compilation of ancient writings, taken from ancient documents. To understand it you need to know the historical background behind the people, places, words and events in the Bible. It isn't easy to understand. It requires time and effort. The eunuch was an educated man of high position under Queen Candace, and yet, he couldn't understand the Bible without help!

Philip was obviously sent there by the Lord to explain to him what he was reading. And the eunuch had the good sense to ask for help.

QUESTION: Most people are busy trying to earn a living. They don't have the time or the talents to become skillful in the understanding of the Bible. They depend on someone like a pastor who has the talent and can spend most of his time studying and understanding the Bible. How can they know if the pastor, preacher, minister or whoever is leading them astray or is actually telling them the truth?

PONDER THIS: What about those people who think they have all the answers? They have been indoctrinated so well with the established doctrines of the churches that they no longer have an open mind to learning anything different. Instead of discussing Biblical issues with you, they give you stock answers which usually end the discussions. Even if we think we understand much about the Bible, we should still keep a spirit of inquiry like the Ethiopian eunuch had ... and be open to new insights.

ACTS 8:32-35 THE SUFFERING SAVIOR

The passage of scripture he was reading was this, As a sheep he was led to slaughter, and voiceless as a lamb before his shearer, thus he did not open his mouth;

In his affliction his judgment was lifted away. Who of his generation will accurately declare it? for his life is taken from the land.

And the eunuch answered Philip, and asked, I pray thee, about whom is the prophet saying this? about himself, or about some other man?

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and declared the good news of Jesus to him.

PHILIP heard the eunuch reading from the book of Isaiah. But Acts does not tell us chapter and verse because at that time the Scriptures had not yet been divided into chapter and verse. (Chapters and verses weren't added until the Geneva Bible ... printed in the 1500's.) Today, however, we would recognize the passage as Isaiah 53:7-8.

7. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth: he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is mute, so he opens not his mouth.

8. He was taken from prison and from justice: and who shall consider his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Isaiah 53:7,8

Obviously, the reference in Acts 8 is not a literal quote from Isaiah, but rather a loose rendition.

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah foretells the sorrows and frustrations Christ was to undergo. He was treated like an animal – like a sheep before its shearers. It is a good exercise to read Isaiah 53 anytime you think you feel sorry for yourself. Compare your afflictions with the afflictions of Christ and yours will seem insignificant.

In Acts 8:34 the eunuch asks Philip to tell him who Isaiah was speaking about? Was he speaking of himself, or was he speaking of someone else? The eunuch was sincerely interested. Verse 35 tells us that Philip explained Isaiah 53 and told him about Jesus and the redemption of Israel.

Philip explained the prophecy of the suffering, misunderstood Savior. And, it is interesting to note that Jesus is STILL misunderstood by most people. The churches certainly do not portray Him correctly.

Some things today are the same as then. For instance, before the time of Jesus, the Pharisees of the area of

Jerusalem believed in a “coming messiah.” They also believed that Isaiah’s prophecy referred to this messiah. However, when the Messiah actually came they didn’t like Him. When Jesus showed up as the Messiah, the Pharisees rejected, hated, and murdered Him. Pharisaism preferred the doctrine of A COMING MESSIAH.

A PRESENT MESSIAH simply didn’t fit their agenda.

By the same token, churches today still can’t accept the present and true Messiah. They prefer to believe in a messiah who stays away in outer space (“heaven”). Churches teach of a “coming Messiah” (i.e., Futurism) – not a “present Messiah.” They can’t deal with Him up-close, so they put Him off in outer space.

When the unwanted Messiah appeared on the scene in Jerusalem, the Pharisees needed a way to get rid of Him. This entailed, among other things, amending their former interpretation of Isaiah 53. Their revised interpretation, which continues to be taught to this day, claims that Isaiah was only referring to a contemporary deliverer. Also, a modern theory holds that the messiah will manifest in a composite entity made up of the Jewish people as a group. Of course, this is ludicrous. The Jews of today aren’t even the same race as the Israelites of the Bible. And the idea of a large group of people constituting a SINGLE messiah is silly. Nonetheless, a big faction of Jewish people today believe that they, together, constitute that “suffering messiah.”

This doctrine is revealed in the Babylonian Talmud – the teachings of Judaism.

ACTS 8:36-40 THE BAPTISM OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

And as they were going down the road, they approached some water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what is preventing me to be baptized?

And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch did not see him any more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip was found at Ashdod: and passing through he declared good news to all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

APPARENTLY, Philip's conversation with the eunuch covered more than just Isaiah 53, because he not only began to understand the gospel ... he also began to understand the need for baptism. Therefore, coming along beside some water – probably a lake or a stream – the eunuch said, "Here's water. Why can't I be baptized right here?"

He and Philip walked down into the water. This, of course, depicts baptism by immersion – NOT sprinkling. In religious circles there are still arguments of whether baptism should be by immersion or by sprinkling. I don't see how anybody can possibly read anything in this passage other than immersion. It clearly states that Philip and the chamberlain walked down into the water. Obviously, the water had to be deep enough to immerse the eunuch.

In verse 39, where it says that Philip was "caught away," it doesn't

mean that Philip was invisibly beamed away ... as some preachers teach.

Interestingly, in other scriptural contexts we find the phrase "caught away" understood correctly. "Caught away," here, is simply an idiom meaning that Philip was motivated by the Lord to leave the eunuch and go somewhere else – much the same as he was motivated to come to the eunuch in the first place. It's obvious that Philip traveled on to Ashdod a few miles away.

Ashdod, by the way, is about twenty miles north of Gaza. So this was on Philip's way down toward Gaza.

Thus ends chapter eight. In chapter nine we'll read about the conversion of Saul, better known to us now as Paul – the man who was responsible for most of the New Testament letters (books, as we call them).

Today, amidst a new frenzy of

denunciation and slander about the Apostle Paul, and the Bible itself, the study of the events in Paul's life may be of heightened interest. As Bible students, we should have incentive to really learn what actually transpired in Paul's life in the book of Acts. Each time you read the account of Paul's conversion you can't help but be amazed by it. And each time you study the Book of Acts, you are apt to see more in that story than you had seen before.

QUESTION: If the act of sprinkling babies is not true baptism, then is "dedicating" babies to the Lord an acceptable substitute until the children grow up?

END OF CHAPTER EIGHT

FOR ANSWERS AND NOTES, SEE THE FOLLOWING "ANSWER SECTION."

ANSWERS & COMMENTS

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTER EIGHT:

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. Over the centuries, churches have twisted the image of Jesus ... re-making Him into a *religious* myth. Jesus was NOT "religious" – at least not in the way the term is used today.

2. The real enemies of Jesus, and His disciples, can be easily determined by simply asking who persecuted and murdered them. It was the churches and the governments.

3. Jerusalem bears the guilt of murdering Jesus. However, as the gospel spread to other regions the same battles erupted there as well. Disciples took the gospel to one nation after another only to find the same persecution from churches and governments.

4. The gospel of the kingdom had NOTHING to do with religion. It had to do with truth, freedom, and faith in God. The ecclesian community is held together by faith and love: faith in God and love for your neighbor.

5. The only hope for America, or any nation, is to stop honoring and emulating Babylon. That means we must have faith in God rather than in man's government. Man's government can NEVER be trusted.

6. Neither Jerusalem nor Rome persecuted religion (i.e., churches). Rather, the persecution was always aimed at the Reign of Christ (true Christianity) as seen in the ecclesian communities.

7. Religious hucksters and con men have created the huge religious industry manifested in churches today. They play upon superstition, weaknesses, and character flaws of the people. They give answers that are quick but wrong. Unfortunately,

throughout history people have tended to be amused by lies and trickery, instead of being angry. Thus, religious and political liars and tricksters abound.

8. "Spirit" is inspiration or motivation. It is NOT a person. "Holy" means separate. Thus, "holy spirit" means MOTIVATION TO BE SEPARATE AND CALLED OUT. (2 Cor. 6:17).

9. The eunuch, in Acts 8, may or may not have been emasculated. He was probably a "chamberlain."

10. Like the eunuch who asked for help in learning the meaning of scripture, we also should seek help where needed. However, the final responsibility of deciding right from wrong is ours personally. Seeking help is OK. But, accepting answers without testing them is idolatry.

11. The Pharisees wanted an absentee messiah that was "to come" in the future. They didn't like Him when He actually showed up. By the same token, churches today want Jesus to be waiting in outerspace. They don't want Him to be present.

ANSWERS:

pg.4

"Militant" is probably the wrong word. Jesus WAS a man of action. He lived an active and dangerous life, and died a violent death. Jesus LOVED His people ... enough to die for them. "Love" cannot be expressed without action. Passivists will not defend and protect those they profess to love – therefore, they cannot know "love" – only convenience. The terms "passive" and "non-violent" are often just euphemisms for "cowardice" and "faithlessness."

pg. 5

a) Taking God's law into our own hands is exactly what Scripture commands. Lawlessness and chaos have resulted from abdicating our personal responsibility to do so. By abdicating our responsibility, and handing it over to "government," we've committed idolatry and treason against God.

b) There are many advantages to working together and cooperating with fellow Christians. However, it should be voluntary participation ... like a co-op ... not forced.

States" & "nations" are not formed by people volunteering to get together and unifying. They are formed by military force arranged by bankers and politicians.

pg. 7

a) The Roman Empire, and nearly every "empire" in history were tolerant to religion. In fact, they usually promoted and sanctioned religion – the same as governments today sanction churches of all kinds. Churches did not suffer under Roman rule. In fact, the followers of Christ were often accused of being "atheists" because they would not join the Roman pagan churches.

Rome, and Jerusalem, persecuted Christianity ... not churches.

b) God is not in a battle! Nothing challenges God! Man fights. God doesn't.

For a good explanation of the question of "good angels -vs- bad angels," as well as the "Satan" doctrine, the following books are recommended – available from ACM:

SPIRITS ON TRIAL – by Ben Williams (\$8.50)

GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE – by Sheldon Emry (\$10)

THE BIBLE DEVIL DEFINED – (\$6.50)

WHO THE DEVIL IS SATAN – by Francis Christin (\$6.50)

pg. 8

There is nothing wrong with being happy and uplifted by the word of God. However, being uplifted or amused by lies is different.

Neither Jesus nor his apostles were entertainers, showmen or promoters. They did not strut around on stages. Their purpose was NOT to entertain and pacify people ... but rather to bring truth and awaken people.

pg. 9

a) Yes, it is possible – in fact, it happens often. However, like a wedding ceremony, the baptism ceremony is important in that it makes a public and personal statement and marks a major change in one's life. Jesus's answer to John the Baptist was, *"Let it be, this time, for it is suitable for us to fulfill all righteousness."*

b) "Baptism in holy spirit" means to be greatly inspired by God. "Baptism" means "immersion." Being "immersed" (engulfed – as in water) by inspiration and motivation causes

an urgency to separate yourself from the world and to address the work set before you.

pg. 11

Teachers or leaders (whether they are called 'pastors,' 'ministers,' 'chiefs,' 'elders,' 'patriarchs,' or whatever) can be very good and helpful as long as they are not "rulers" or "lawmakers." In fact, they will make mistakes ... but limited in scope and not catastrophic. It is NOT the honest mistakes that ruin a society. Rather, it is the deliberate deceptions and attacks from government and banking. Ignorance, alone, is not the great villain. Rather, it is the clever designs of devils in politics, banking and churches that destroy us.

Teachers and leaders must not be taken for granted. Blind trust is stupid. They should be trusted ONLY after earning your trust. And they should keep your trust ONLY if they continue to deserve it. Titles and showmanship mean NOTHING. Leaders should make good judgments and decisions, and offer good advice. Otherwise, they should not be considered leaders!

pg. 13

Sprinkling babies is not baptism. And, the practice of dedicating babies to the Lord has no significance to baptism.

The tradition of dedicating babies is just that – a tradition. In many cases, it amounts to nothing more than simply praying for the infant's safety and success in life.

However, in cases where the participants may be superstitious or overly bound by tradition and ritual the practice can conceivably become confusing and detrimental.

We should be careful what we say – especially in prayer. If we mean to actually "dedicate" a child, we should carefully consider what it means. If we only want prayer for the child's guidance and happiness, then that is what we should pray for.

NOTES:



AMERICAN CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES
PO BOX 740 • GRANGEVILLE, IDAHO 83530