

# BETWEEN THE LINES

## *A Deeper Look...*

### #849- THE ECHO OF PAUL: A Passionate Ministry

**Paul's Jealousy For God:** It didn't matter whether we meet Saul (before his confrontation with Jesus that led to absolute conversion) or Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, it appears that the driving motive of this man's life was a singularly focused, overwhelming jealousy for God.

It would take pages and pages to exhaust this topic if we turned to his epistles. We have to focus on a narrower body of Paul's work. Let's grab just a few episodes as recorded in the book of Acts to document this passion for the reputation of God...

- Acts 8: He sees Stephen as a threat to God and His chosen nation.
- Acts 9: The followers of the heretical movement must also be eradicated.
- Acts 13: We have Paul's first recorded sermon... it begins with affirmations of God. He speaks to the defense of this God who chose this nation.
- Acts 14: Paul rebukes those who would attribute any divinity to him at all.
- Acts 15: Paul comes to the council, glorifying God for his successes.
- Acts 17: He boldly challenges the polytheists with the claims of this one, true God.
- Acts 19: Paul courageously affronts the Diana cult in Ephesus for the glory of God.
- Acts 20: He affirms, several times, that his intention is only to follow God's leading.
- Acts 21: In spite of warnings he again affirms his full compliance to the will of God.
- Acts 22: We have Paul's classic defense of the God of Israel and his Messianic plan.
- Acts 23: How can the Sanhedrin find a weakness in his defense? Are they going to take a stand against their own God after his defense has been so well crafted?
- Acts 24: The pagan, Felix, is confronted with the claims of the holy God- and so is his apostate, Jewish wife.
- Acts 25/26: After two years in jail, held unjustly and without charge, Paul's emphasis is still for the honor of the God of Israel. Once again he builds a case for this God and His messianic Son. (I'm afraid I'd have been screaming about my rights being trampled or something!)
- Acts 27: The old apostle gives full credit for his insights, warnings, and protection to God. No one around him is going to be able to avoid his testimony.
- Acts 28: Bring on the storms, the snakes, the Italian nobility, or the Jewish leadership of Rome. None of them seem to be of any concern to this man in contrast to the God who seems to be Paul's obsession.

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**Stoning- More Than You Thought:** We all know that Saul/Paul was involved in the stoning of Stephen. The truth is that most Christians, sadly, have a bit of a warped perception of the literal process of that execution form.

Let's lean upon the testimony of *The Mishnah* to capture an accurate understanding of this manner of capital punishment in the world of Paul...

- This form of execution was reserved for very specific forbidden deeds (i.e. aberrant sexual practices - *Yebamoth* 8:6, fornication - *Ketuboth* 4:3, incest, bestiality, blasphemy, idolatry, spirit mediums, Sabbath breakers, sorcerers, the incorrigible child, leaders of apostasy, and those who offered their children in sacrifice - *Sanhedrin* 7:4).
- If one committed dual crimes (one that would require stoning and the other a more merciful, "less severe" death then mercy took over and the person received the less excruciating death - *Sanhedrin* 9:3)
- Men were stoned naked but this was not true for women - *Sotah* 3:8.
- This was not just a death reserved for humans. There are nine references that elaborate on Exodus 21 and Leviticus 20 where, curiously, at times an animal was stoned to death! (Even a rooster one time! - *Eduyoth* 6:1)

- *Sanhedrin* 6 speaks of the literal process... it was as follows:
  - The condemned was stoned outside the camp or outside the city wall.
  - A man stood at the gate of the court with a handkerchief to signal a horseman if the procession was to stop on its way to the pit in case of appeal.
  - This "appeal"/stay of execution could happen as many as four or five times!
  - The procession was led by a man shouting to the crowd, in essence, "This is \_\_\_\_\_ and his crime is \_\_\_\_\_. If anyone has reason for this sentence to be challenged speak now so that we may judge for him to be acquitted before it's too late".
  - About ten paces from the pit the condemned was allowed to make his peace with God.
  - Four paces from the pit the condemned man was stripped (women only partially) and the clothes were held by a chief accuser. (Paul "held the cloaks of the execution party... and maybe Stephen's too!)
  - The stoning pit was about 12 feet deep. The bound criminal was pushed over the edge and it was hoped that the fall would break his neck. If not a boulder was dropped on his chest. If he still survived he was then "stoned" to death by the accusers.

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**The Foundation Of The Past:** Paul did not just burst upon the scene of action as a beacon of "new light". He was, predominantly, the one apostle who most accurately redefined the testimony of the prophets in order to bring clarity to the life and ministry of Jesus.

Just for fun let's skip through just one of Paul's letters to see how very heavily he depended upon the sacred texts of the past for his teachings on behalf of this Messiah of Israel. Let's try Romans to see some of his contextual leanings...

- 1:17 A reaffirmation of Habakkuk 2:4... and you thought it was original!
- 2:24 He reapplies denunciations of II Samuel 12:14, Isaiah 52:5, and Ezekiel 36:20.
- 3:4 Paul justifies his assessment of society by the Psalms (51:4, and 116:11).
- 3:10-12 Scripture shaped his perception of base human nature. (Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1).
- 3:13 You don't like his blatant description? Blame Psalm 5:9, 140:3, & Jeremiah 5:16.
- 3:14 The same goes for Psalm 10:7.
- 3:15-18 More reminders from Isaiah 59:7,8 and Psalm 36:1.
- 3:19 "Iniquity silences the wicked" was first taught in Job 5:16 and Psalm 107:42.
- 4:9 The Old Testament taught salvation by faith? Genesis 15:6 and Psalm 32:1,2.
- 4:18 A faithful reaffirmation of the history of Genesis 15:5.
- 8:36 Another "as it is written" application, this time from Psalm 44:22.
- 9:7 Genesis 21:10,12, and 14 clarified this issue for Paul.

Beyond this partial listing there are other references in the book (i.e. 9:9 and Genesis 18:1,2,10, and 14) that simply quote the text to give validity to the strength of what Paul was teaching.

**In Conclusion:** So, what's the point? I feel it's terribly important that this man, the one most often credited with "creating" Christianity, often shared that the literal text of the Old Testament was the direct, unequivocal source of the composite of what he was trying to teach.

**He never once diminished the words of The Holy Writ.  
He simply built upon that wonderful foundation.**