

CHAPTER 9

DID JESUS VISIT NORTH AMERICA?

A large, primarily American denomination teaches that after the resurrection, Jesus carried out a personal ministry on the North American continent. This turns out to be one of their cornerstone doctrinal beliefs. You see, they do not believe that the Bible is the complete and perfect word of God to man. Instead, they require another book to be added to the Bible. That book is supposed to contain the revelations of God to their prophet. And that book details the activities of Jesus in North America.

Two members of this group came to my front door one evening. They were rather polite and quite well-dressed; their knowledge of scripture seemed fractured. That is, some parts they seemed to know really well, but in other areas their knowledge seemed quite weak. I listened attentively, and they left me a copy of their book that was to supplement the Bible (Reference-17). On a subsequent visit these two evangelists explained to me that their book had equal weighting to the Bible because it was revealed to their prophet in the 1800's and he was told by God what to write in the book. They showed me in this book, how Jesus came to North America for His ministry;

3 Nephi 10:18-19 (Reference-17)

And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared, did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them- Showing his body unto them, and ministering unto them; and an account of his ministry shall be given hereafter. Therefore for this time I make an end of my sayings.

(Introduction to Reference-17)

The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture

Comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains, as does the Bible, the fulness of the everlasting gospel.....

The Crowning event recorded in the Book of Mormon is The personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ among the Nephites soon after his resurrection.

After reading the 'revelation' made to their prophet, I had to decide how to expose their teaching as false. Yet I had the obligation to not unduly antagonize these two sincere young men. Since I had taken time to read their supplemental book, it became apparent to me that three approaches could be taken to prove false, their doctrine on Christ;

1. Their book contains a number of internal inconsistencies. Solely within their book, things sometimes just don't 'add up.' Perhaps I could dwell on these internal problems.
2. Their book is also inconsistent with the Bible. Maybe I should just point out these problem areas.
3. Using only the Bible, I could demonstrate that Jesus never did come to North America after the resurrection. With that shown, then justification for the existence of their extra book (Reference-17) becomes insupportable. None of its statements could then be relied upon as supportive Bible text.

I chose the third option. It seemed most concise and least confrontational. They readily admit belief in the Bible. With this choice, there would be no need to go through the excruciating details, comparing parts of their supplemental text with itself. Nor would I have to make the many comparisons between true scripture and the words of their 'revelation'.

I felt I could show them that their book was doctrinally in error. Once done, the whole basis for the existence of their denomination becomes questionable. Here's how our subsequent conversations went;

ME:

Are you aware of scriptures solely within the Bible that tell us about Jesus' activities after the resurrection? According to the Bible, He was to remain in heaven with the Father until the end of all things. This being true, then He wouldn't have left heaven to return to earth for further ministry. That includes North America;

Heb. 12:2 (NIV)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Acts 3:20-21 (NIV; my underlining)

. even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets

I Pet. 3:21-22 (NIV; my underlining)

.... It saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand- with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

The Bible tells us emphatically, what Jesus did after the ascension. Since His ascension, Jesus remains to this day, in heaven at God's side. I'm aware of the body of text within your supplemental book (Reference-17) that deals with Jesus in North America after the ascension. But if the Bible is correct (as I accept that it is) then your teaching has to be incorrect.

VISITOR:

The Bible alone, teaches that Jesus had more than one ascension. So it could have been between any of these other ascensions that he visited North America.

ME:

Until now though, both you and your text (3 Nephi 10:18-19) have described only *one* ascension. Your text refers to it as 'the ascension' and not as 'an ascension.'

Let's entertain your thought or a moment however. I'm curious to see how you'd show there were multiple ascensions..... between which Jesus could have visited North America.

VISITOR:

OK. Two situations in the book of John, Chapter-20 prove an ascension occurred before 'The Ascension' described in Acts Chapter-1. Both of the following scriptures describe events just subsequent to Christ's resurrection.

In the first, Jesus is speaking to Mary Magdalene, who saw Him after the resurrection. In the second, Jesus speaks at a later time to the apostle, Thomas.

John 20:17 (KJV)

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father...

John 20:27 (KJV)

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side.....

In John 20:17 the resurrection had occurred. Jesus did not want Mary Magdalene to touch him because he had not yet ascended.

Yet in John 20:27, Jesus invited John to touch him. So, there must have been an ascension between these two incidents. At some time between John 20:17 and John 20:27, Jesus ascended and returned . That was an additional ascension. Jesus could have conducted a ministry in North America then, or perhaps after some other ascension.

ME:

I'm not sure you're getting the complete meaning from John, Chapter 20.

Jesus did indeed, permit Thomas to touch his side. It was a means of removing Thomas' doubt about who He was.

For Mary Magdalene though, there was no such doubt to be dispelled. She had called out, 'Teacher!' She knew His identity. Why then, did He not want Mary Magdalene to touch Him? Thayer has studied the meaning of 'not me touch' as it is used in John 20:17. Here's what he says about the contextual use of the phrase in this verse;

*"In John 20:17, [not me touch] is to be explained thus:
Do not handle me to see whether I am still clothed with
a body; there is no need of such an examination....."*

Remember, this incident involving Mary Magdalene occurred directly after the resurrection. Jesus was just informing her that (when she saw him) He was still in bodily form. The apparent prohibition from touching Him, wasn't because He hadn't ascended. He was indicating that because He hadn't ascended, He still had a body- not spirit form, and there was no need for her to be sure of it by touching Him.

So, it really isn't proper to imply that an ascension took place at some time between these two verses, based on Jesus precluding and permitting contact by His followers.

VISITOR:

But I can actually show you an event in the New Testament in which Jesus returned to earth after the ascension of Acts Chapter-1. Do you remember what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus? Take a look at who is talking to him;

Acts 9:3-6 (KJV)

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutist thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutist: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

These scriptures identify Jesus talking to Saul on the road to Damascus. And it's after the ascension of Acts Chapter-1. So there's proof that Jesus did come back to earth after the ascension. Therefore the written revelation to our 19th century prophet is well-founded.

ME:

Looking over this description of events at Saul's conversion, something very important stands out. Notice that throughout this account, Jesus is never actually present. He's never on the scene. Jesus' voice was heard by Saul, but there's no reference to Jesus being there. Keep in mind that Jesus, at the right-hand of God, has Spiritual capabilities. It's not hard to visualize that He would be at God's side in heaven, (Acts 3:21) and project His voice to earth for only Saul to understand. Think of how often God did this very thing in the Old Testament scriptures!

Further proof that Jesus was not present, is given by the account of the men accompanying Saul;

Acts 9:7 (NIV; my underlining)

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.

No one saw Jesus because He wasn't there.

There just isn't any scriptural support for your argument that Jesus returned to earth after His ascension in Acts Chapter-1. These scriptures in Acts Chapter-9 soundly support the declaration of Acts 3:21.

It seems clear then, that there was only one ascension of Jesus. So according to the Bible alone, Jesus did not visit North America. This being true, the words of your additional text can only concern matters of false doctrine. Such a doctrine should not be a cornerstone of the beliefs of your denomination.