

# ARMOR OF GOD

A Publication of Biblical Clarity

## Heresies: Ancient and Modern

“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.” (Matt. 24:4-5)

## Who Changed the Sabbath to Sunday?

Who made this change and how did it occur?

## Is Christmas Christian?

Do not make up your mind before you examine the facts.

## The Trinity, is it Biblical?

How do the doctrine of the Trinity and the traditional view of the nature of God compare with the Bible?



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## Managing Editor

Bill Watson

## Editor

Vance Stinson  
Horane Smith

## Writers

Bill Watson  
Ian Boyne  
Wayne Hendrix  
George Ramocan  
Lloyd W. Cary  
Waine-Ann McLaughlin  
Vance A. Stinson  
Horane Smith

## Copy Editor

Jasmin Smith

## Layout & Design

Shey Smith

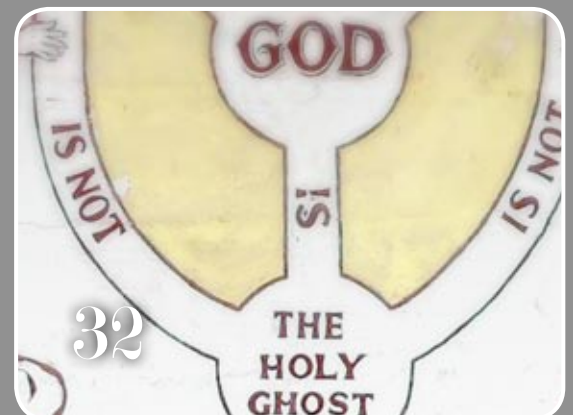
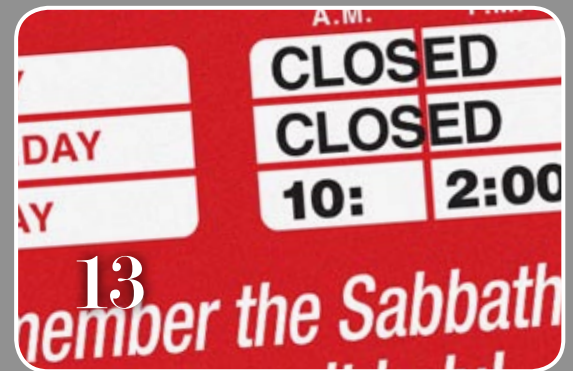
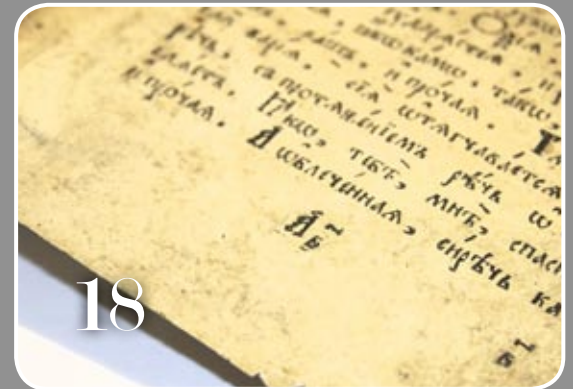
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- 4** Editorial
- 5** Polycarp: A Man on Fire Lighting the Way
- 8** The Church that Jesus Built is NOT What Most People Think
- 10** A Snapshot of the Historical True Church
- 13** Who Changed the Sabbath to Sunday?
- 16** A History of Church Buildings
- 18** Heresies: Ancient and Modern
- 24** How Passover was Replaced by Easter
- 28** Is Christmas Christian?
- 32** The Trinity, is it Biblical?
- 35** Letter from Polycrates

# Contents



# Editorial

BY BILL WATSON

The story of the Church of God down through the annals of history is quite a saga. It is written in the blood, sweat, and tears of literally tens of thousands of God-fearing devoted people simply caught in the *crossfire* of so-called "Christian" religious persecution. Over the centuries this *true story* develops into an epic that is sometimes stranger than fiction when considering who was responsible for inflicting what some considered a merciless genocide on quiet, hard-working, God-fearing family communities—all in the name of Jesus Christ and Rome's Universal (Catholic) Church.

What is the truth concerning these historical benchmarks that discolor and blister the alleged Christian Church? How is it that a "work of charity" in the name of Jesus Christ can continue to be so revered in our modern

day and yet be responsible for so much innocent bloodshed and not be held accountable, but instead remain believable? Is it because most of today's secular society and culture is unaware? Perhaps they just don't care because *pop-culture* has them too distracted. Maybe they really are too busy to take the time to search out the information that discloses these atrocities and changes. Or perhaps many have just simply lost a love for God's truth.

Whatever the reason, this issue of the *Armor of God* has assembled a variety of in-depth, hard-hitting articles revealing information which for some will be extremely eye-opening regarding Christian church history. You will be exposed to an assortment of particular specifics concerning so-called cherished *Christian* traditions and beliefs that will explain there is nothing Christian about them; and furthermore, Jesus, His apostles, and the

New Testament do not mention them at all.

We have attempted to make it simple for you, the reader, to obtain some of this basic fundamental information that should be easy for you to evaluate, and if you choose, access additional information for further education in this segment of ecclesiastical history. So pay particular attention in the course of the articles and sidebars for recommendations for more *FREE* material designed to improve your awareness of just how much of our Lord Jesus Christ's teachings have been compromised and abandoned. If you are sincerely seeking the truth, this issue should be of particular value to you. Remember, our Lord said, "I am the truth and the light..." and yes, the truth will indeed set you free!



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# Polycarp: A Man on Fire, Lighting the Way

BY IAN BOYNE

**H**e was set on fire—literally burned at the stake for his staunch refusal to deny Christ and proclaim Caesar as lord.

The great irony however, was that the raging flames that engulfed and consumed Polycarp's frail, aged body did not just leave his charred bones at the base of the stake to be collected by his devoted disciples. They also ignited a passion, zeal, and commitment to God, and His truth within the hearts of those believers who witnessed Polycarp's martyrdom in A.D. 167—and that continued on long after the flames had been extinguished.

The light of his example of devotion, sacrifice, and steadfastness even in the midst of death shines with challenging brilliance down through the centuries upon God's people in this age. The spirit of Polycarp stands on the one hand as a powerful testimony of saints who lived within their time and circumstances as those who "believed that they were pilgrims and sojourners here on earth" who "sought for a better country." On the other hand, it presents a compelling challenge for contemporary believers to live for eternity, rather than for the comforts, safety, security, and ease offered by society.

Who was this courageous, inspiring, and saintly believer who joined the pantheon of the great heroes of faith referred to in Hebrews 12 as "the great cloud of witnesses" pointed to as examples for all believers to

look to? What were his life and times like? And what lessons can God's people of today take from his life, death, and legacy?

Not much of his life is known, except that he was a disciple of the apostle John, as attested to by his disciple Irenaeus whom Roman historian Eusebius quotes as saying:

*"Polycarp was instructed by the apostles, and was brought into contact with many who had seen Christ."*

Irenaeus also paints one of the very few portraits of an apostolic man found in antiquity, in reference to Polycarp:

*"I could describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat and taught; his going out and coming in; the whole tenor of his life; his personal appearance; how he would speak of the conversations he had held with John and with others who had seen the Lord." (emphasis mine)*

Polycarp, who was the leader of the church in Smyrna, is believed to have written what Irenaeus describes as:

*"an existing Epistle to the Philippians, most satisfactory, from which those that have a mind to do so may learn the character of his faith."*

This epistle, apparently in response to the Philippians' solicitations, contains several themes and direct quotations from Paul's writings. These include liberal praises of the Philippians' faithfulness to the resurrected Christ and various exhortations to virtue and patience, as well as instructions for deacons, youths, and virgins.

Polycarp was also a *companion and acquaintance of Ignatius of Antioch*, who was a major figure in the centralization of the church's initial authority in the early second century. The power of Polycarp's legacy through the centuries has not been due to his notable associations, or even to the greatness of some illustrious deeds completed in his life; but rather by his unconquerable faith, and unswerving devotion to Christ as he surrendered to persecution, torture, and ultimately a fiery death, all for his testimony of Jesus.

As one of the leaders of the early church set

Photo by John Wards

up by Paul and the other apostles, Polycarp's resolute faith and his contempt of mortal death for his faith, has served as a significant boost to the faith of beleaguered, persecuted saints for centuries. A brief retrospection of the historical landscape will serve as a useful background for appreciating the lessons his life and death have for God's people today.

With its dramatic, though relatively humble beginnings in Jerusalem at Pentecost A.D. 33, Christianity exploded throughout the whole Roman Empire within the three subsequent decades, as a result of the strategic missionary expeditions of the early apostles, but not without a powerful backlash from the Roman authorities.

Noticing the rapid rise of this growing religious sect, there was increasing anxiety which was partially fuelled by lurid rumors that the Christians practiced cannibalism; that they were atheists, meaning they didn't worship the Roman gods; and that they were misanthropes or haters of the human race because they didn't conform to the cultural norms of Roman society. Thus, the civil authorities undertook a campaign to keep them in check which included imprisonments, beatings, and evolved into torture and death. The Roman historian Tacitus described the situation faced by these early Christ followers as follows:

*"Hated for their evil practices was a group popularly known as Christians. Their deadly superstitions were beginning to spring up with all kinds of sordid and shameful activities."*

With the razing of Rome by a mysterious fire in A.D. 70, Emperor Nero was implicated, and in turn transferred the culpability to Christian arsonists, and authorized an official anti-Christian campaign which was sustained by his successors through several subsequent decades well into the second century. Here is how Tacitus remembers the scenes of dying martyrs around A.D. 100:

*"In their deaths they were made a mockery. They were covered in skins of wild animals, torn to death by dogs, crucified or set on fire so that when darkness fell they burned like torches in the night."*

The Roman strategy was to target the leaders of the Christian movement, and publicly persecute them with beatings and various tortures, by forcing them to fight wild animals in the coliseums, by beheadings, or burnings

at the stake. These were the circumstances which spawned the deaths of many of the apostles in Rome including James, who was thrown to his death from the temple mount in Jerusalem, Paul who was beheaded in Rome, and Peter who was also crucified—but upside down.

Ironically, however, this strategy only served to strengthen the Christians' faith, as aptly captured by one account which states:

*"The blood of the martyrs is seed for the new faith."*

This was the direct effect of the martyrdom of Polycarp, bishop of the church in Smyrna, who was perseveringly sought out by the Romans in the mid-second century, under Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

*The Ante-Nicene Fathers—Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325* by Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D., and James Donaldson, LL.D., records the primary source of information regarding Polycarp's martyrdom, namely, *The Encyclical Epistle Concerning the Martyrdom of Polycarp* which is a detailed account of the circumstances leading up to the bishop's death, written by the church in Smyrna and circulated throughout all the congregations of Asia Minor, and beyond. Great sections of this epistle have been recounted by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* (iv. 15), which omitted several disputed

passages believed to be inauthentic.

On the occasion of one elderly Christian named Germanicus, the multitude of spectators, upon marveling at his steadfast refusal to declare allegiance to the emperor cried,

*"Away with the Atheists; let Polycarp be sought out!"* (Polycarp was well known as a leader of the Christians.)

But Polycarp was not unduly troubled when he learned he was being sought, and "was resolved to continue in the city" despite the threat to his life. He, however, gave in to his companions' appeals and was persuaded to move to a country house not far from the city.

*"There he stayed with a few friends, engaged in nothing else night and day than praying for all men, and for the Churches throughout the world, according to his custom."*

While in one of these prayers he got a vision of his pillow burning, three days before he was captured, which he prophetically interpreted to his friends, "I must be burned alive."

As soon as his pursuers were close he departed to another house. When they came and failed to find him, they proceeded to torture the two young men they found, one of whom disclosed Polycarp's destination, and led them to it. Here they found Polycarp, who had

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"I must be burned alive."

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refused to make any further attempts at eluding the authorities, saying, "The will of God be done." He greeted his captors who "marveled at his age and constancy, some of them saying, 'Was so much effort made to capture such a venerable man?'"

He then ordered that his captors be fed, and requested of them an hour to pray undisturbed. This was granted and he proceeded "for two full hours, to the astonishment of them that heard him, insomuch that many began to repent that they had come forth against so godly and venerable an old man."

When he finished praying he was placed on an ass and escorted into the city, where Irenarch Herod and his father Nicetus endeavored to persuade him, saying, "What harm is there in saying, 'Lord Caesar,' and in sacrificing, with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, and so make sure of safety?" Refusing at first to answer, Polycarp eventually said, "I shall not do as you advise me," which infuriated Herod and Nicetus enough that they hurled him from their chariot dislocating one leg.

Upon being taken into the stadium, he was again beseeched to deny Christ, by the proconsul saying,

*"Have respect to thy old age. Swear by the fortune of Caesar; repent and say, 'Away with the Atheists.' But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, 'Away with the Atheists.' Then the proconsul urging him, and saying, 'Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ;' Polycarp declared, 'Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?'"*

When the proconsul again pressed him, Polycarp again refused, saying,

*"Since you are vainly urgent that I should swear by the fortune of Caesar, and pretend not to know who and what I am, bear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and thou shalt hear them."*

The proconsul then proceeded to intimidate Polycarp with threats saying, "I have wild beasts at hand; to these I will cast thee, except thou repent." But Polycarp answered, "Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous."

The proconsul tried one last threat:

*"I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent."*

Polycarp's parting words were filled with contempt for a death that to him paled in comparison to his faith in God's eternal promise of eternal life:

*"Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for*

*eternal life... I glorify Thee, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom, to Thee, in the Spirit, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen."*

With this, he was set ablaze by his persecutors. *The Encyclical* fittingly discerns the inner attitude of mind and spirit which characterized Polycarp and the martyred Christians of his time by saying,

*"Looking to the grace of Christ, they despised all the torments of this world... They kept before their view escape from that fire which is eternal and looked forward with the eyes of their heart to those good things which are laid up for such as endure; things 'which ear hath not heard, nor eye seen, neither have entered into the heart of man.'"*

This was the attitude of Christ Himself, and of all the holy apostles, and is the attitude God longs to see in His people today.

While it is highly unlikely that God's people today generally will have to contemplate the fate of being burned at the stake, beheaded, or being thrown to wild beasts, the demands of our world today are no less unrelenting.

Neither must we believe that the stakes are any different—the choice is still between worshipping the gods of society and receiving society's reward in this present world, or putting our commitment to God's Kingdom before everything else, even at the expense of our comfort, personal success, or our very lives.

The gods of this world are not emperors demanding worship as deity, nor images of Tammuz or some other pagan deity. No, the gods of this age are alluringly disguised as the reasonable entitlements of any "normal" human being.

The gods of pleasure, greed, pride, selfishness, and materialism are as potentially fatal to our eternal destiny as anything the early apostles could have faced. Because of their more subtle and insidious nature, they are even harder to detect and reject.

continued on page 9

"For whosoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whosoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

*the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt."*

With this final show of determined defiance, the "astonished" proconsul sent his herald to proclaim in the midst of the stadium thrice, "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." Upon hearing this "the whole multitude both of heathen and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable fury, and in a loud voice, 'This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods.'" They then proceeded to quickly prepare a funeral pile for his burning, and bound him.

As he faced his impending death, Polycarp did what he always did—he prayed:

*"I give Thee thanks that Thou has counted me worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of thy martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, to the resurrection of*

# The Church that Jesus Built is NOT What Most People Think

BY WAYNE HENDRIX

Historians and biblical scholars alike are in agreement that many of the doctrines and theological concepts associated with today's *traditional* Christianity bare little or no resemblance to those of the early first century church, as originally established by Jesus Christ and His apostles. Admittedly, many significant changes have occurred, regarding "the faith once delivered," as the New Testament so succinctly describes in so many areas (Matt. 24:5; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; Jude 3; Rev. 12:9).

For example, over the centuries, it has become very obvious in light of biblical history that Christ, His disciples, and the early church membership never taught, sanctioned, honored, or observed Sunday as the day of worship. Instead, the original first-century Christians observed the Israelite Sabbath, which the Bible clearly teaches begins on Friday at sunset, ending at sunset Saturday. In other words: what many today would consider to be the Jewish Sabbath. It's also plain to see that Christ and the apostles, including the early Christian followers, never required, observed, or enjoined upon the churches theological concepts and practices such as those found in the observance of Christmas or Easter. It's just not in the record of the New Testament!

In addition, to the chagrin of many evangelicals are doctrinal concepts that are absent from the pages of both New and Old Testaments; such as the "rapture" of the church, immortality of the soul, and the "triune" nature of God. As a matter of fact, the words Christmas, Easter, Sunday, rapture, trinity, and immortal soul are not to be found anywhere, from cover to cover, within the pages of God's

Holy Word. So how is it that such contrary doctrinal concepts, beliefs, and teachings have become so broadly accepted, cherished, and embraced as today's dogma of the traditional Christian community? This is a most interesting question and the answer may be surprising to some, but it is in no way a mystery.

History records factually confirm, the church of Jesus Christ came into existence during a time, and in an era, when the populace of the world was firmly and deeply entrenched in long-held pagan superstitions, traditions, customs, and religions developed and

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"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. . . because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." (2 Thess. 2:7-11)

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accumulated over many centuries and generations of ignorance. It was compounded by human reason, vain philosophy, and satanically *steered deception*. Consequently, as Christianity began to grow throughout the known world, departing from its origins in Jerusalem and the land of Judea, many former pagans, Hellenists, and Mithirists, who continued to hold onto some or all of their former traditions, began to infiltrate the church in ever-increasing numbers. The truth of the "faith once delivered" came under assault. Notice what history tells us:

*"The Church had changed its Nature, had entered its Great Apostasy, had become a Political Organization in the Spirit and Pattern of Imperial Rome, and took it Nose-Dive into*

*the millennium of Papal Abominations. The Imperial Church of the fourth and fifth centuries had become an entirely different institution from the persecuted church of the first three centuries. In its ambition to Rule it lost and forgot the spirit of Christ." (Halley's Bible Handbook, p. 760, emphasis mine)*

Unfortunately, those who were able and qualified to withstand and repudiate false doctrine and heresy inevitably began to die out. Obviously, this included all of the Apostles who were martyred within a few decades, with the exception of John. Eventually, over the course of the next few centuries, the apostles and all of their immediate disciples died and were replaced by church leaders and teachers who no longer had the benefit of sitting and learning at the feet of Paul, Peter, James, and the others who personally knew the Lord and had directly received the pure, untainted "faith once delivered."

Sadly, many of these third and fourth generation church leaders didn't share the *same level of passion* for the truth and because of a variety of reasons compromised it, giving way to accepting many Greco-Roman philosophies and Hellenistic teachings. Notice what Paul says to those in Thessalonica just a few decades after Christ ascended:

*"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. . . because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." (2 Thess. 2:7-11)*

And that, unfortunately, is exactly what



happened—many of them started believing lies. The fact of the matter is: the “New Testament” exists in large part as a documented rebuttal and response to the relentless assault upon the *Truth!* Much of it is in the form of admonition from its authors to resist and oppose heresy, including those who were preaching it.

Regrettably, another fact of history which had enormous impact upon the early Christian church was the continuous problem of an ever-growing anti-Semitic mood within the Roman Empire against any and all things perceived to be ‘Jewish.’ The Jews, unlike others whose homeland was under Roman dominance and occupation, would not submit to becoming ‘Romanized.’

The Jews were perpetual in their rebellion toward Rome and its occupation of Judea. Eventually, Rome grew tired of the conflict, and in 70 AD, destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, massacring thousands of Jews and leading to the standoff known in history as “Masada.” But even then, resistance continued until Rome ultimately destroyed all vestiges of the nation and dispersed the surviving Jews to all parts of the world. Rome even went so far as to ban the Hebrew language.

They destroyed every copy of the Torah that they could find and even changed all of the maps to designate the holy land as “Palestine,” instead of Judea or Israel. The construction of the Coliseum, the ruins of which can still be seen today in Rome, was paid for in large part by the looted treasures of the temple in Jerusalem. The people of Rome *hated* the Jews; the imperial government of Rome *hated* the Jews, and eventually that *hatred* infected even the Roman church.

During this same period of history, another social and cultural phenomenon was also gaining influence throughout Rome and had been around for centuries. It was called Hellenism.

Hellenism was the cultural and philosophical perspective that had started to spread from Greece throughout the ancient world during the time and influence of “Alexander the Great.”

As a result, many aspects and elements of Greek culture and civilization, including Greek names, language, architecture, art, science, mathematics, history, politics, philoso-

phy, and religion, greatly affected and dominated the surrounding cultures, influencing the views of the people on religious and philosophical matters throughout the entire Mediterranean region, including all of Judea.

Even Rome became extremely “Hellenized” and as it ascended to its pinnacle of Empirical power and dominance, it continued the spread of Hellenistic thinking and culture as an enlightened and superior worldview of philosophy and life.

Unfortunately however, at its core, Hellenism was still a fundamentally flawed ‘ism’ in that it was still founded on pagan beliefs, assumptions, and pseudoscience. Yet admittedly, it had its effect and profound influence on the early church, especially in that of the belief in man’s inherent immortality.

This belief, that man had an immortal soul in him that could live apart from his flesh, disembodied, was always a primary religious belief among the pagans and provided “logic and rationale” to the teachings of heaven as a place of reward for those who please God and hell as a place of eternal torment for those who don’t. Sadly, however, it began to be accepted by Christians and Jews as well, due to the result of philosophical reasoning and cultural peer pressure. In light of all this, it’s no surprise that God’s Word says the whole world is deceived (Rev. 12:9).

Paganism, anti-Semitism, and Hellenism are but three of the many different and various ways in which deception occurred throughout the course of history in the Church. Jesus Christ assured His church,

*“the gates of hell would not prevail against it.”*  
(Matt. 16:18)

Unquestionably, Christ was saying His church would *never* cease to exist! Therefore we can be confident and sure that His church, the *true* Church of Jesus Christ, does indeed still exist today and, with uncompromising certitude know it is here for our spiritual benefit.

And like Him, we can be certain that His church does not and has not changed and will continue to “contend for the faith once delivered.” Therefore, it is incumbent on us to seek that we may find and ask so we may receive.

## Polycarp...

continued from page 7

God seeks people today with the hearts of the apostle Paul, who considered the best that this world could offer him as dung compared with the surpassing greatness of knowing, accepting and elevating Christ above everything else in life. Our Master seeks faithful believers like Polycarp who pour contempt at the prospect of persecution, pain, and death because they look for a life beyond this earthly plane, which is “really life indeed.”

A study of the resoluteness of Polycarp, and the Christ-like character he displayed in the face of a martyr’s death cannot but elicit a feeling of sober reflection as to whether you could suffer a similar fate with as firm a trust in God as Polycarp had.

Thankfully, you may never need to find out in the way that Polycarp did. You and I, however, still have the opportunity to exemplify his steadfast, unwavering faith when we are tried, persecuted, unjustly treated, and when we suffer. We can yield our lives to Christ to be examples of zeal, humility, courage, determination, and love for God, His people, His gospel and His work, to all those who will come after us.

It has been insightfully said that, “It is often easier to die for one’s convictions than to live up to them,” and this is the challenge you and I face as we daily live the life of martyrdom Christ has called us to. In big and small ways we are called to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ daily (Luke 14:27) and ‘die daily.’

Can you, like Polycarp, thank God that you are counted worthy to sacrifice, suffer, and even die, for the sake of your hope in Christ and His blessed resurrection? As God’s elect, destined for a special role in his wonderful world to come, you can, because you have accepted the awesome paradox of Christ’s challenging message that:

*“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”* (Matt. 16:25)

# A Snapshot of the Historical True Church

BY GEORGE RAMOCAN

Recovering the history of God's church is indeed a remarkable study into a variety of astonishing facts that answer so many questions about the dilemmas of the Christian movement. This article attempts to provide an encapsulated view of a segment of the historical record covering almost 2000 years of the ongoing ecclesiastical era.

Very little is known about the history of the *true* Church that was founded by Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Actually, Church history, as we know it today, is the history of a movement—the Roman Catholic or Universal Church “movement”—

intensely debated for approximately the first two or three centuries. The controversy finally culminated when an order by Emperor Constantine was issued, proclaiming Easter was to be kept on a specific Sunday throughout the world.

*true* Church of God was forced to go underground for its survival. Hence, for many centuries and up to the present time, what the world has come to know as Christianity is but a counterfeit imposed by Rome, not the original Judeo-Christian teachings proclaimed and exemplified by Jesus and the original Apostles.

And so it was, the annual Easter festival, along with an additional declaration that adopted the weekly

The deliberate attempt by Rome to wipe out every trace of the history concerning those refusing to



which developed momentum in the first two to three centuries after the Church of God was founded and which resulted in many compromises of Jesus Christ's original teachings and intent. These doctrinal and liturgical concessions were compounded with the coming of the *second* movement: the Protestant Reformation some centuries later.

Few are aware of the long and bitter controversy known as the *Quartodeciman Controversy*. This issue, of whether the pagan festival of Easter should *replace* the biblical Feast of Passover observed by the first Christians that commemorates the death of Christ, was

observance of Sunday, replaced Passover and the weekly Sabbath left in place by the examples of Jesus and the Apostles. Constantine further ordered that those who observed the Passover were to be restricted from assembling for worship and their places of worship be confiscated.

In order to escape the tyranny of Rome and the Universal (Catholic) Church, the

comply with its decrees is articulated by the Baptist historian and preacher David Benedict (1779-1874). Notice:

*“It was the settled policy of Rome to obliterate every vestige of opposition to her doctrines and decrees, everything heretical, whether persons or writings, by which the faithful would be liable to be contaminated and led*

astray. In conformity to this, their fixed determination, all books and records of their opposers were hunted up, and committed to the flames. Before the art of printing was discovered in the fifteenth century, all books were made with the pen; the copies, of course, were so few that their concealment was much more difficult than it would be now; and if a few of them escaped the vigilance of the inquisitors, they would soon be worn out and gone. None of them could be admitted and preserved in the public libraries of the Catholics, from the ravages of time, and of the hands of barbarians with which all parts of Europe were at different periods overwhelmed."

Extreme and excessive persecution was used to wipe out every historical trace of the Sabbath-keeping, Feast-keeping Church of God, which stood up for the doctrines left by the Apostles. As the Church of God struggled to survive, moving from place to place, it took on various 'nicknames' in different territories.

Names like the *Paulicians*,  
*Waldenses*, *Leonists*,  
*Vaudas* *Cathars*,



and

*Albigensians* were all attached at some time or another throughout the centuries, describing these people and their movements.

These groups are classified in Church history as *heretical* sects, but this is because the predominant source of information about them comes from the writings of their detractors.

Therefore, it's necessary to go beyond the traditional sources of Church history for additional information about these groups.

For example, Orthodox Christians date the Waldenses as originating in the twelfth century and named after a wealthy French merchant Peter Waldo, who was founder of a radical ascetic Christian movement. But much information has come to light proving the Waldenses existed as early as the second century.

The recent work of Andrew N. Dugger and Clarence O. Dodd, titled, *A History of the True Church*, and Richard C Nickels' *Six Papers on the History of the Church of God*, have done much to preserve some of the earlier writings about these groups. Such writings include *The Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont* by French Protestant pastor and author Pierre Alex and the work of Dr. Samuel Kohn, Chief Rabbi of Budapest, entitled *DIE SABBATHARIER IN SIEBENBURGEN* which was partly translated by Gerhard O. Marx in his book, *Beliefs and Practices of the Church of God in Transylvania During the Period 1588-1623*.

In defending the antiquity of the Waldenses, Pierre Alex quotes Raynerus, an inquisitor who lived before the middle of the thirteenth century, as saying:

*"The Waudois, or poor people of Lyons, was of great antiquity... amongst all sects, there is none more dangerous to the Church than that of the Leonists, and that for three reasons: the first is, because it is the sect that is of the longest standing of any; for some say it hath been*



*continued down ever since the time of Pope Sylvester, and others, ever since that of the Apostles. The second is, because it is the most general of all sects; for scarcely is there any country to be found, where this sect hath not spread itself"*

Alex goes on to quote other ancient sources that attest to the antiquity of these groups and their Judeo-Christian beliefs and practices. Not only did the Sabbath-keeping, feast-keeping Church of God predate the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, it remained active throughout the centuries despite every attempt to exterminate it. Although it was forced underground, geographically, it outpaced the Roman Catholic Church, reaching into parts of Europe centuries ahead. The English Catholic writer and priest Alban Butler in his book *Lives of the Saints* (Walsh, concise edition) states:

*"Catholicism was not established in Britain, until the conversion of the Angles in the 6th century by Augustine of Canterbury. According to Butler, Ethelbert, king of Kent, was converted to Catholicism at Pentecost 597AD with some 10,000 subjects baptized at the pagan midwinter Christmas festival of 597. The Christians of Britain were up until that time, predominantly, Sabbath-keepers, who kept the food laws and the Holy Days."*

Alex explains that the groups extant at the time of the Waldensians, particularly in Southern France and Spain, were termed Cathars and Albigensians. They observed the Sabbath and Holy Days and followed the food laws, as the Paulicians seem to have done.

There is no doubt that the keeping of God's commandments, including the weekly Sabbath and annual Holy Days, were the cardinal reasons for the fierce persecution against the Church of God. The distinguished Jewish scholar and historian Cecil Roth, in his book, *The Spanish Inquisition*, states:

"... some of these groups not only appeared to be Sabbath-keepers in these early times, but were persecuted for keeping the biblical Holy Days."

In its paper: *General Distribution of the Sabbath-keeping Churches* (No. 122), the

- Pentecost, [Trumpets,] Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, the Last Great Day.*
- 2. *The Ten Commandments.*
- 3. *The Health Laws (no eating of blood, pig, strangled animals).*
- 4. *The Millennium to last 1000 years, & at the beginning of which Christ will return and re-gather Judah and Israel.*
- 5. *The use of God's sacred calendar.*
- 6. *Two different resurrections: one to eternal life at Christ's coming; the other to judgment at the end of 1000 years.*
- 7. *Saved by grace, but laws still need to be kept.*
- 8. *It is God who calls people into His truth. The world in general is blinded."*

millennium of 1,000 years at the beginning of which Christ will return and re-gather Judah and Israel.

They used God's calendar based on the New Moons. They taught two resurrections, one to eternal life at Christ's Coming and another to judgment at the end of the Millennium.

They taught salvation by grace, but that the law still needed to be kept. They held that God calls people and that the world in general is blinded.

The paper continues,

"By 1637 there were believed to be between 15,000 and 20,000 Sabbatarians in Transylvania. In 1867, the Hungarian parliament gave complete religious freedom to all religious confessions, including the Jews. Many Sabbatarians now left their Christian churches and revealed themselves as Sabbath-keepers. Since their doctrines and way of thinking correspond very greatly to that of the Jews, most Sabbatarians went over to the Jews. By and large, from this period, Sabbath-keeping incurred an almost enforced migration to America. Stephen Mumford, the first Sabbath-keeper in America came from London in 1664 (J. Bailey History of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference, pp. 237-238). In 1671, the Seventh Day Baptists had broken from the Baptist Church in order to keep Sabbath (see Bailey History, pp. 9-10). However, the Pilgrim Fathers were from a Sabbath-keeping tradition (cf. the paper *The Pilgrim Fathers*)."



Christian Churches of God cites the work of Dr. Samuel Kohn, which was partly translated by Gerhard O. Marx in his book, *Beliefs and Practices of the Church of God in Transylvania During the Period 1588-1623*. According to Kohn:

"Of the Christian groups in Transylvania during this period, there were those who restored the original and true Christianity, in that they actually accepted and practiced Jewish religious customs and statutes which the Old Testament prescribes and which original Christianity observed as binding and only later discarded (Kohn, p. 8). They were similar to the Ebionites and other Judaic-Christians of the first few centuries after Christ. The Sabbath-keepers of the Carpathians formed a loosely knit structure before 1588, when Andreas Eossi became their leader... He enjoined the following doctrines upon his followers:

On pages 62-67 of Kohn's work the *Old Sabbath Songbook* is discussed. It consisted of 102 hymns:

- ✠ 44 for the Sabbath;
- ✠ 11 for Passover and Unleavened Bread;
- ✠ 6 for the Feast of Weeks;
- ✠ 6 for Tabernacles;
- ✠ 3 for New Year;
- ✠ 1 for Atonement; and
- ✠ 26 for everyday purposes.

The Christian Churches of God, in Paper 122, provides us with convincing evidence that throughout the centuries the Church kept the Holy Days. In addition, they practiced adult baptism and kept the Sabbaths and Holy Days, including Passover, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Atonement, Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day.

Therefore, it can be seen that throughout the centuries God's Church, the True Church of God, despite consistent persecution was never conquered by these hostile religious "movements," namely the Universal (Catholic) Church and its Protestant daughter movements—and though at times came close to extermination, it never failed to contend for the faith that was once and for all times given to the saints.

Clearly, the words of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, declares a truth of certainty:

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."  
(Luke 12:32, emphasis mine)

- 1. *The Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread,*

Their doctrines encompassed the physical

# Who Changed the Sabbath to Sunday?

BY LLOYD W. CARY

There can be no doubt that Christ, His disciples, and the first-century Christians kept Saturday, the seventh-day Sabbath. Yet, today, most of the Christian professing world keeps Sunday, the first day of the week, calling it the Sabbath. Who made this change and how did it occur?

**N**o serious student of the Scriptures can deny that God instituted the Sabbath at Creation and designated the seventh day to be kept holy.

*“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.” (Gen. 2:2-3)*

It was later codified as the fourth commandment (Exod. 20:8-11).

The Word of God makes it expressly clear that Sabbath observance is a special sign or “mark” between God and His people. There is also no uncertainty that Christ, His disciples, and the first-century Christians kept the seventh-day Sabbath as commanded—the day we now call “Saturday” (Mark 2:28; Luke 4:16).

## IS THERE ANY BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR SUNDAY OBSERVANCE?

There is absolutely no New Testament text stating that God, Jesus, or the apostles

changed the Sabbath to Sunday—not a text, not a word, not even a hint or suggestion. If there were, those chapters and verses would be loudly heralded by Sabbath opposers. Had Paul or any other apostle taught a change from Sabbath to Sunday, the first day of the week, an absolute firestorm

falsely accused Christ of breaking the Sabbath because He violated the added man-made rules and traditions they placed upon the Sabbath (Mark 2:24). The total absence of any such controversy over a change in the day of worship is one of the best evidences showing the apostles and other New Testament Christians did not change the day.

On the contrary, we have a record of many Sabbaths that Paul and his traveling companions kept long after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Read of them in your own Bible in Acts 13:14, 27, 42-44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2; and 18:4. Acts 13:42-

44 are especially significant in that Paul and Barnabas. When speaking at a Jewish synagogue, they were invited to speak again the next Sabbath.

This would have been Paul’s golden opportunity to tell the people to meet with him the next day rather than waiting a whole week for the Sabbath. But, “on the next Sabbath almost the whole city [Christians and Gentiles alike] gathered

to hear the word of the Lord” (Acts 13:44).

Yet today, most of the Christian professing world keeps Sunday, the first day of the week, calling it the Sabbath. The question arises then, who changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and how did it occur? The answer may amaze you!



of protest would have arisen from conservative Jewish Christians. The Pharisees and Scribes would have insisted that Paul or any other person even suggesting such a thing be stoned to death for the sin of Sabbath breaking. This would have been a much larger issue than the controversy over circumcision!

The self-righteous Pharisees had already

# Related Quotes

“Sunday is a Catholic institution, and its claims to observation can be defended only on Catholic principles. . . From beginning to end of Scripture there is not a single passage that warrants the transfer of week public worship from the last day of the week to the first.”

*(Catholic Press, Sydney, Australia, Aug. 25, 1900)*

“The Sabbath was binding in Eden, and it has been in force ever since. This fourth commandment begins with the word ‘remember,’ showing that the Sabbath already existed when God wrote the law on the tables of stone at Sinai. How can men claim that this one commandment has been done away with when they will admit that the other nine are still binding?”

*(Dwight L. Moody, Weighed and Wanting)*

“The Pope is not only the representative of Jesus Christ, but he is Jesus Christ Himself, hidden under a veil of flesh”

*(The Catholic National, July 1895)*

“About 590, Pope Gregory, in a letter to the Roman people denounced as the prophets of Antichrist those who maintained that work ought not to be done on the seventh day”

*(James T. Ringgold, The Law of Sunday, p. 267)*

“I have repeatedly offered \$1,000 to anyone who can prove to me from the Bible alone that I am bound to keep Sunday holy. There is no such law in the Bible. It is a law of the holy Catholic Church alone. The Bible says, ‘Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.’ The Catholic Church says: ‘No. By my divine power I abolish the Sabbath day and command you to keep holy the first day of the week.’ And lo! The entire civilized world bows down in a reverent obedience to the command of the holy Catholic Church”

*(T. Enright, C.S.S.R., in a lecture at Hartford, Kansas, Feb. 18, 1884)*

“1) Question: Which is the Sabbath day?

Answer: Saturday is the Sabbath day.

2). Question: Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

Answer: We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church in the Council of Laodicea, transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday”

*(Peter Geiermann, C.S.S.R., The Converts Catechism of Catholic Doctrine Third Edition)*

can see the forerunner type documented in history.

## THE WATERING DOWN OF THE SABBATH IN THE FIRST 300 YEARS

The Christians during the apostolic era, from about 35 to 100 A.D., kept Sabbath on the designated seventh day of the week. For the first 300 years of Christian history, when the Roman Emperors regarded themselves as gods, Christianity became an “illegal religion,” and God’s people were scattered abroad (Acts 8:1). Judaism, however, was regarded at that time as “legal,” as long as they obeyed Roman laws. Thus, during the apostolic era, Christians found it convenient to let the Roman authorities think of them as Jews, which gained them legitimacy with the Roman government.

However, when the Jews rebelled against Rome, the Romans put down their rebellion by destroying Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and again in 135 A.D. Obviously, the Roman government’s suppression of the Jews made it increasingly uncomfortable for Christians to be thought of as Jewish. At that time, Sunday was the rest day of the Roman Empire, whose religion was Mithraism, a form of sun worship. Since Sabbath observance is visible to others, some Christians in the early second century sought to distance themselves from Judaism by observing a different day, thus “blending in” to the society around them.

During the Empire-wide Christian persecutions under Nero, Maximin, Diocletian, and Galerius, Sabbath-keeping Christians were hunted down, tortured, and for sport, often used for entertainment in the Coliseum.

## CONSTANTINE MADE SUNDAY A CIVIL REST DAY

When Emperor Constantine I—a pagan sun-worshipper—came to power in 313 A.D., he legalized Christianity and made the first Sunday-keeping law. His infamous Sunday enforcement law of March 7, 321 A.D. reads

as follows:

*“On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed.” (Codex Jus-*

### BIBLICAL TESTIMONY

The New Testament plainly shows we are to continue keeping the commandments (Matt. 5:17-18; 19:17; 28:20)—all ten of them.

Where, then, do men get the ‘authority’ to change the fourth commandment by substituting Sunday for the original Sabbath Christ and the apostles kept?

The Bible prophesied many centuries earlier

“The Pope is not only the representative of Jesus Christ, but he is Jesus Christ Himself, hidden under a veil of flesh.” (The Catholic National, July 1895)

that the time would come when men would think to change times and laws (Dan. 7:25). Many Bible prophecies are “dual” in nature—that is, they have a type and antitype, an earlier and a later fulfillment. Though speaking specifically of the soon-coming antichrist, we

tinianus 3.12.3, trans. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5th ed. (New York, 1902), 3:380, note 1.)

The Roman Papacy officially confirmed the Sunday law. The Council of Laodicea in 364 A.D. decreed,

*“Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday but shall work on that day; but the Lord’s day they shall especially honour, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ.”* (Strand, op. cit., citing Charles J. Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, 2 (Edinburgh, 1876) 316)

Cardinal Gibbons, in *Faith of Our Fathers*, 92nd ed., p. 89, freely admits,

*“You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we [the Catholic Church] never sanctify.”*

Again,

*“The Catholic Church, . . . by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.”* (*The Catholic Mirror*, official publication of James Cardinal Gibbons, Sept. 23, 1893)

*“Protestants do not realize that by observing Sunday, they accept the authority of the spokesperson of the Church, the Pope.”* (*Our Sunday Visitor*, February 5, 1950)

*“Of course the Catholic Church claims that the change [Saturday Sabbath to Sunday] was her act... And the act is a MARK of her ecclesiastical authority in religious things.”* (H.E. Thomas, Chancellor of Cardinal Gibbons)

*“Sunday is our MARK of authority... the church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact.”* (*Catholic Record of London, Ontario* Sept 1, 1923)

What a shocking admission!

## A PROPHECY COME TO PASS!

At this point we need to note an amazing prophecy. Daniel 7:25 foretold,

*“And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws.”* (emphasis mine)

Quoting Daniel 7:25, Adam Clarke’s Commentary says:

*“He shall speak great words against the Most High.” Literally, Sermones quasi Deus loquitur; ‘He shall speak as if he were God.’ So Jerome quotes from Symmachus. To none can this apply so well or so fully as to the popes of Rome. They have assumed infallibility, which belongs only to God. They profess to forgive sins, which belongs only to God. They profess to open and shut heaven, which belongs only to God. They profess to be higher than all the kings of the earth, which be-*

“During the first crusade, Pope Urban II decreed at the council of Clermont (AD 1095) that the Sabbath be set aside in honor of the Virgin Mary.” (History of the Sabbath, p. 672)

*longs only to God. And they go beyond God in pretending to loose whole nations from their oath of allegiance to their kings, when such kings do not please them! And they go against God when they give indulgences for sin. This is the worst of all blasphemies! And shall wear out the saints’ By wars, crusades, massacres, inquisitions, and persecutions of all kinds. What in this way have they not done against all those who have protested against their innovations, and refused to submit to their idolatrous worship? Witness the exterminating crusades published against the Waldenses and Albigenses. Witness John Huss, and Jerome of Prague. Witness the Smithfield fires in England! Witness God and man against this bloody, persecuting, ruthless, and impure Church!*

*‘And think to change times and laws.’ Appointing fasts and feasts; canonizing persons whom he chooses to call saints; granting pardons and indulgences for sins; instituting new*

*modes of worship utterly unknown to the Christian Church; new articles of faith; new rules of practice; and reversing, with pleasure, the laws both of God and man.—Dodd”* (emphasis his. Clarke’s Commentary, Volume IV, p. 594).

## WHO CHANGED THE SABBATH TO SUNDAY?

Your Bible says,

*“But in vain [uselessness] they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”* (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7)

*“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word [the Bible], it is because there is no light in them.”* (Isa. 8:20)

*“Prove to me from the Bible alone that I am bound to keep Sunday holy. There is no such law in the Bible. It is a law of the Catholic Church alone. The Catholic Church says, by my divine power I abolish the Sabbath day and command you to keep holy the first day of the week. And lo! The entire civilized world bows down in reverent obedience to the command of the Holy Catholic Church.”* (Thomas Enright, CSSR, President, Redemptorist College [Roman Catholic], Kansas City, MO, Feb. 18, 1884)

*“The Pope has power to change times, to abrogate laws, and to dispense with all things, even the precepts of Christ. The Pope has authority and has often exercised it, to dispense with the command of Christ.”* (Decretal, de Tranlatic Episcop)

It is a matter of Biblical and secular history that God never changed His holy Sabbath or transferred its solemnity to Sunday. Who did?

**Rome, in concert with the Roman Catholic Church, changed Sabbath to Sunday!**

What will you believe? Whom will you follow: the God of your Bible—or the traditions of men?

The choice, dear reader, is yours.



# A History of Church Buildings

BY WAINE-ANN MCLAUGHLIN



**T**he origin and development of the Christian church building is a real story from “rags to riches.” It is especially remarkable when one considers that the original church meetings were conducted in the homes of the first Christian followers. There was nothing like the ostentatious cathedrals we have today.

So where did these big cathedrals and magnificent architectural feats of achievement come from? Who started the idea of the Christian church “building” becoming such spectacles of grandeur and splendor, arrayed in such vaunting architecture? How did the Christian church, the assembly, move from worshiping in homes to worshiping in a *building* called a church or cathedral?

This article will attempt to shed some light on what influences led the Christians to move from homes to the edifices we have come to call ‘churches.’

## THE TRIUNE OF HINDUISM

In the religious world, there are diverse sects and each has its own belief system. One of the oldest is Hinduism. Hinduism originated in India. The tenet of this religion is that all life is sacred and God is universal and is everywhere. The name attributed to this omnipres-

ent god is Brahman. This one god is a combination of a pantheon of other lesser gods with all aspects of one divine spirit. The structure of the Hindu god is a triune one with The Brahman, the creator of all; Vishnu is the preserver of all, and Shiva the Destroyer.

The believers of this religion built temples to enshrine the images of their gods, goddesses, or saints of the religion. Each temple is dedicated to one of the many gods they worship. They built the temples so that they looked distinct from their homes in the community in order to reflect their purpose as a spiritual center for worship. The temples were also used for educational, cultural, and recreational functions in the community. These temples were richly designed with carved sculptures and ornaments on the interior and exterior.

## THE TEMPLES OF BUDDHA

Siddhara Gautama, the son of an Indian chief or prince who was raised in the Hindu religion, founded the Buddhist religion. Siddahara founded Buddhism as a result of his search for answers to the condition of human suffering. After the death of Siddahara, his followers used symbols to remember him. As Buddhism spread throughout Asia, images of Buddha were created and became an object of reverence. The Buddhists later

erected mounds of stone to guard the relics of Buddha. These structures were large circular mounds of stone and called stupas, pagodas, or dagobas.

Buddhist temples differ from country to country. They are usually ornate, inside and out, with fancy carvings and bright colors—mainly blue, red, and green. They also incorporate precious stones, glass set into plaster or gilded wood, and tiles. The Buddhist temples in countries like Japan are more simple and





constructed of unfinished wood.

### ANCIENT SHINTOISM

Shintoism is a traditional ancient religion of Japan, which originated as nature worship. The name of the Shinto's god is Kami. The Shinto religion teaches that all natural objects and phenomena are assigned to Kami. In the eighth century, when Chinese culture influenced the Japanese people, Shintoism was overtaken by Buddhism, which spread into China from India.



The influence of Buddhism on Shintoism led to a merging of the two religions into one religion called Ryobu Shinto, *The Twofold Way of the Gods*. Adherents believe Kami was the incarnations of Buddha and Bodhisattvas (Bliss Body) of the Celestial realm, according to in Mahayana Buddhism. The Shinto shrines can be any natural spot. They also have constructed shrines that are generally simple in design and constructed of wood.

### JUDAISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

Judaism dates back to 2500-2000 B.C.E. and recognizes a Hebrew man named Abram as one of the original Patriarchal fathers. Abram lived east of the Mediterranean Sea in Ur of the land of the Chaldees (Gen. 11:31). This area is known as the Middle East where religion and cultural norms included the worship of statues or idols. In the time of Abram, pagan and idol worship saturated his cultural environment. God called him out from his father's house, out of his surroundings, and revealed Himself to Abram as the one and only true God.

*"Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1-3).*

God instructed Abram to leave his home and go to a new land—Canaan (Gen. 11:31). Abram (Abraham) is known as the father of the Hebrew nation, Israel. Today, the Jews who are one of the twelve tribes of Israel are the last remaining Israelite tribe still practic-

ing the religion called Judaism.

Before the Israelites built their first temple they congregated in tents to worship Yahweh, (the name of the eternal God). The desire to build a temple came from the second King of Israel named David. He was a man from the Tribe of Judah (2 Sam. 7).

The Old Testament tells us that King David would not be the one to build the temple, but his son Solomon would (1 Chron. 22:1-9). Solomon was the third King of Israel and he built the first temple for Israel. It is interesting that the Scriptures mention that a temple could not contain God, as He does not dwell in temples. Notice:



Photo by Brian Jeffery Beggery

*"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You" (1 Kgs. 8:27).*

However, God allowed the building of the Temple because it was the desire of King David. This idea may have been influenced by the surrounding cultures of people who worshiped their gods in temples. Clearly, we do not know the level of influence Solomon's many wives had on him that may have driven him to complete the temple.

But regardless, we absolutely know the scriptures indicate that God did indeed ordain

the construction of the Temple, allowing David to collect the material and Solomon to build it according to the plans God revealed to him (1 Kgs. 6). The result was pleasing to God (1 Kgs. 9:1-5).

Sadly, over time, history proves Israel failed God and the Temple Solomon built was destroyed during the Babylonian sieges in about 585 B.C.E. However, a limited number of Jewish people returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah by order of Cyrus, King of Persia, and some 70 years later re-built the Temple a second time.

But, unfortunately, once again an invasion occurred by Antiochus Epiphanies, a Syrian King, a Seleucid descended from Alexander the Great, ruining and defiling the Temple—but not totally destroying it. Antiochus tried to force Greek culture on the Jewish people in approximately 175-168 B.C.E.

Some years later, the Temple was remodeled and enhanced by Herod after the Machabees revolted and emancipated the Temple, but again, this time it was totally destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. The result of this destruction caused the Jews to disperse throughout the known world which in history is called the "Diaspora." Yet, wherever they settled they built synagogues. The synagogues were sometimes small and simple and sometimes they became large and highly elaborate depending on the size and wealth of the congregation (Hiller, p. 48).

continued on page 22

# Heresies : Ancient and Modern

BY VANCE STINSON

Jesus Christ warned,  
*“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”*  
 (Matt. 24:4-5)

He further warned,

*“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”* (verse 24)

Christ’s prediction proved true. False teachers began bringing their pernicious doctrines into the church within a few years after the first Christian congregations were established. Over time, some false teachers would claim to be the Christ, or Messiah, while others would come in Christ’s name, claiming to be His authoritative representative.

Jesus prophesied of those who would call Him “Lord” and claim to have prophesied, cast out demons, and done many great works in His name, but because of their lawlessness they would not be permitted to enter His Kingdom (Matt. 7:21-23). The apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to watch out for anyone who came preaching “another Jesus whom we have not preached...or a different gospel which you have not accepted” (2 Cor. 11:4). Paul explained to the Galatians that the perversion of the true gospel amounts to nothing less than “a different gospel,” and that anyone who preaches or practices such a “gospel” is to “be accursed” (Gal. 1:6-9).

In approximately A.D. 52, Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to avoid being apprehensive about the Coming of Christ. He ex-

plained that the day of Christ’s Coming “will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thess. 2:3). This “son of perdition,” Paul explained, would “exalt himself above all that is called God ...showing himself that he is God” (verse 4). This could mean that the future lawless one will actually claim to be God, but the expression “showing himself that he is God” is most likely Paul’s way of speaking of the lawless one’s self-exaltation above all that is worshipped.

Interestingly, though the lawless one will appear on the scene in the future and will be alive when Christ returns, the “mystery of

Since the true church is at the center of God’s program, Satan’s efforts are directed particularly, though not exclusively, at the church.

## MANY ANTICHRISTS

Many “antichrists” had come before the close of the first century. The Judaizers began spreading their heretical notions in the early years of the Gentile mission. They restricted salvation to the sphere of their own experience and understanding of the Mosaic economy—hence their insistence that Gentile converts to the Messianic faith be “circumcised according to the custom of Moses” (Acts 15:1). In other words, they believed Gentiles had to become Jews to be saved.

This early heresy was dealt with decisively at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), though it persisted for a good many years afterwards. The heresy was a serious threat, especially to ‘babes’ in the Christian faith, but it could hardly be described as “lawless,” or antinomian. The problem was a *wrong use* of the law, not

a *rejection* of the law as a rule of life—so Paul apparently had something else in mind when he warned of the “mystery of lawlessness” and of the “lawless one” who would appear in the last days.

Paul’s (and other New Testament writers’) use of the term “lawlessness” (an apparent reference to antinomianism, or “anti-law” doctrine) and John’s descriptions of “antichrists” who practice lawlessness and deny that Christ had come in the flesh (1 John 2:18-23; 3:4-10; 4:1-3) may point to an early form of Gnostic dualism, a religious system whose major features would be imposed upon the Gospel narratives and blended with Christian beliefs, thus yielding a different Jesus, another gospel, and a foreign spirit. The system, under

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Jesus prophesied of those who would call Him “Lord” and claim to have prophesied, cast out demons, and done many great works in His name, but because of their lawlessness they would not be permitted to enter His Kingdom (Matt. 7:21–23)

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lawlessness” that will produce this lawless one was “*already at work*” in Paul’s day (verse 7, emphasis added). The final apostasy (“falling away,” verse 3) and revelation of the lawless one will occur only after the removal of the restraining power that presently prevents the mystery of lawlessness from full manifestation (verses 7,8). The mystery of lawlessness, restrained but not extinguished, was at work in Paul’s day and has been at work in this world ever since. It has given rise to many antichrists and will bring forth the final Antichrist (1 John 2:18).

The mystery of lawlessness is not a single, organized system or well-orchestrated historical conspiracy; it is the sum total of the Devil’s efforts to thwart God’s plan for humankind.

the guise of 'Christianity,' would emerge full-bloom in the second century.

## GNOSTICISM

The 'Christian' Gnosticism of the second and third centuries was not a unified movement. Beliefs among those identified as Gnostics varied considerably, but there were some common features among them. One of the most important features was their radical dualism, or belief that only God is good and everything else—the entire material creation—is inherently evil and is the work of an inferior god, or demiurge. God is the ultimate Reality, and human spirits are a part of that Reality. Unfortunately, many of these spirits, or sparks of divinity, are presently trapped in evil material bodies and bound to an evil material world.

For the ancient Gnostics, salvation was not a way by which human beings could be reconciled with God; it was *knowledge* (hence the designation *Gnostic*, meaning "to know") of one's divine identity—an awakening, a deliverance from ignorance.

Gnostic dualism requires a radical revision of the Gospel narratives.

**First**, the God-sent Savior could not be a flesh-and-blood human being because flesh and blood is a part of the material creation, which is evil; so biblical Christology had to be radically redefined. The Christ may *appear* to be human, but he is not. He could not have been crucified, so the "crucifixion of Christ" must have been a case of mistaken identity.

**Second**, the divine self needs liberation through knowledge of its true identity, not "atonement" through deliverance from sin; so the purpose of Christ's coming had to be radically revised.

**Third**, since the divine self is temporarily trapped in the prison of an inherently evil body, death is a friend, not an enemy; so the biblical concept of death as the "last enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26) must be thrown out.

**Fourth**, God's goal, according to Scripture, is the renewal of the cosmos—a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1; Rom. 8:19-22). The Gnostic system, which sees the material creation as the work of an inferior god, must reject this goal.

**Fifth**, biblical salvation includes "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). For the Gnostics, the goal is to escape the body, leaving the material creation behind to return to God, the ultimate spiritual Reality. The concept of a bodily resurrection is meaningless—perhaps despicable—in Gnostic thought.

**Sixth**, the Gnostic perception of material things as evil requires a different understanding of morality, since morality is based on biblical (and natural) law, which teaches respect for and the proper use of the body and other

*of no relevance for religion or morality."* (*The Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Development*, p. 402, InterVarsity Press, 1997)

Other conservative biblical scholars agree with Scholer's assessment. Some Gnostic dualists probably argued that since salvation pertains to the soul and the body is irrelevant, indulgence of the flesh (lawlessness) doesn't matter. Others Gnostics—the majority—probably reasoned that since the body is inherently evil, all passions and pleasures should be suppressed. The former were lascivious, while the latter most likely forbade marriage and sexual relations, avoided meat and wine, and embraced poverty—but it is quite possible, even probable, that both extremes grew out of the same philosophy of dualism.

The Gnostics also believed in intermediary beings who inhabit the realm between God and the material world. Perhaps the apostle Paul was confronting an early form of Gnosticism in his epistle to the Colossians. He mentioned the "worship of angels" (Col. 2:18), a possible allusion to an excessive emphasis on intermediary beings. He also mentioned "regulations—"Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle" (verses 20-21), a certain reference to the rigorous rules of asceticism.



material things.

According to New Testament scholar David M. Scholer,

*"Many church fathers, especially Irenaeus and Epiphanius, portrayed the Gnostics as immoral libertines, who indulged the body and its passions.... Many scholars doubt the accuracy of these portrayals, since none of the primary texts written by the Gnostics themselves indicate any tendency toward or approval of that type of lifestyle. Yet the church fathers may well have described what was a social reality for some Gnostics, and it is logically possible to understand that an ideology that believes that the body is fundamentally evil could lead not only to asceticism but also to indulgence of the body, since it is*

All Gnostics did not share the same customs and did not adhere to a single creed or set of tenets. They varied considerably in religious practice and identified themselves by various names, but their dualism called for drastic reinterpretation or wholesale rejection of the apostolic doctrine of Christ and the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

*The Gnostic movement lasted until the fourth century.* To what extent its dualism with its emphasis on intermediary beings and asceticism (with lawlessness, or antinomianism, as a possible feature in some circles) affected the broader church is uncertain. What is certain is that strong opposition on the part of the early church fathers indicates that they saw Gnosticism as a serious threat to Christianity.

## MARCIONISM

Another second-century heretical movement believed by some to be connected to Gnosticism came to be known as Marcionism, named for its founder, Marcion, a native of Pontus in Asia Minor. Marcion was born in about A.D. 80 and began developing aberrant theological views fairly early in life. Later, partly due to the influence of a Roman Christian philosopher named Cerdo, Marcion's views would become a fully developed system of belief.

A council of elders in Rome excommunicated Marcion in A.D. 144 on charges of heresy. Marcion, believing his system of belief represented a restoration of the true faith, formed his own movement.

Marcion believed Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, was a just—but inferior god, and that the Father of Jesus Christ—the God of the New Testament—was a good God. With these ideas at the foundation of his belief system, Marcion edited the Scriptures, forming his own canon. He rejected the Old Testament entirely; threw out all the Gospels except an edited form of Luke's; and accepted ten of Paul's epistles, throwing out the pastorals. The purpose of Marcion's revisions was to rid Scripture of Jewish corruptions. He believed his edited version of the scriptural canon was the key that unlocked the mystery of the true gospel.

Marcion believed too much Jewish religion had been assimilated into the broader church's doctrine and practice. The good God of the New Testament, he believed, should not be confused with the inferior god of the Jews; nor should He be worshipped according to Old Testament ordinances.

Marcionism spread throughout the known world and became quite popular. Its popularity was due primarily to its anti-Judaism, which had already infected much of Christianity and was widespread among pagans. Other factors contributing to its popularity were (1) its solution to alleged contradictions in the Gospels and (2) its simple solution to the seeming paradox between the existence of evil and belief in a good God.

Many scholars believe Marcion was in some measure influenced by Gnosticism. He rejected the material world and the flesh, believing them to be inherently evil. He forbade sex, marriage, drinking wine, and eating meat. Like the Gnostics, Marcion believed that Christ did not have a material body.

While Marcionism was ultimately condemned by the broader church and stamped out, the very fact that such a bizarre belief system could be so well received among Christians illustrates how powerful an influence a sentiment or prejudice—in this case, anti-Semitism—can be, and how such influences, if left unchecked, can lead to full-scale apostasy.

## MONTANISM

Another second-century deviation that had

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“Today we see the same unscriptural ideas—the same patterns of apostasy, if you will—coming up again and again in various religious movements.”

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considerable influence was an apocalyptic movement that began in a Phrygian village when a traveling preacher, Montanus, fell into a trance and supposedly began prophesying under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Later, Prisca (Pricilla) and Maximilla, two women who accompanied Montanus, began falling into trances and prophesying. They were said to be the embodiment of the Holy Spirit who inspired Montanus. Pricilla was eventually excommunicated for claiming that Christ appeared to her in female form.

The three traveled about, spreading their new brand of Christian experience. The movement grew; it came to be known as Montanism. Its greatest defender was Tertullian, who left what he called “the church of a lot of bishops” and was drawn into the movement, perhaps due to theological agreement on certain issues, particularly the Montanists' view that Christians who fell into serious sin could not be restored.

Montanus prophesied the time of Christ's return and identified a Phrygian village as the site of the New Jerusalem. His prophecies

failed to come to pass; nevertheless, the movement persisted for several centuries. Many church leaders denounced it, denying that the Montanists were true prophets, even claiming that they had introduced into the Christian church pagan ecstatic prophecy. Indeed, ecstatic prophesying and ecstatic speech—“speaking in tongues”—were features of certain pagan religions, but it is doubtful that the Montanists were influenced by paganism.

Montanists believed the Second Coming was near. They strongly emphasized chastity, avoidance of sin, fasting, and church discipline. Remarriage was forbidden. They saw their movement as one of restoration and revival—a new movement of the Holy Spirit.

The fact that such a movement could gain the approval of many believers and even influence a learned theologian of the caliber of Tertullian illustrates how a “little leaven leavens the whole lump.”

## CHRISTOLOGICAL HERESIES

Other significant heresies that appeared in the early centuries of Christian history include Christo-

logical aberrations such as *adoptionism* and *modalism*. The early adoptionists—identified today as *dynamistic monarchians*—believed that Jesus, though miraculously conceived by the operation of the Holy Spirit, was a mere man who became the Son of God by adoption. This view is expressed in *The Shepherd of Hermas*, which was written in about A.D. 150. *Modalistic monarchians*, by contrast, emphasized the full deity of the Son but denied that the Father and the Son were personally distinct. In the third century, Sabellius of Rome taught that God was one divine Person who projected Himself in three different modes—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the most famous of all the early Christological heresies was Arianism, named for Arius, a fourth-century Alexandrian theologian who denied the full deity of the pre-incarnate Christ. “There was a time when He [Christ] was not,” Arius famously said. He argued that Christ was a created being and the agent through whom God created the universe but was not God in the absolute sense.

Arianism took forms ranging from radical to

semi-orthodox. It was so divisive that the emperor Constantine convoked an ecclesiastical council in A.D. 325 and called on the bishops of the church to settle the matter. In the end, Arianism was defeated, but only after a hard-fought battle.

Many other theological disputes arose in the subsequent centuries—and the consequences have been significant. While most of these issues were settled through one means or another, they did not just go away without affecting the beliefs and customs of historic Christendom.

Gnostic dualism, antinomianism, Christological heresies, and the wide array of disputes—from different doctrinal ideas to the clash over the use of images to cultural influences like Greek philosophy and pagan practices—played a significant role in shaping the doctrinal creeds and ecclesiastical traditions of the historic visible church. And, as the old saying goes, there's nothing new under the sun. Today we see the same unscriptural ideas—the same patterns of apostasy, if you will—coming up again and again in various religious movements.

### OLD HERESIES IN NEW PACKAGES

Marcion simply threw out those parts of Scripture he believed to be corrupted. Today, the liberal critics do essentially the same thing when they attempt to separate the “authentic sayings of Jesus” from the sayings His disciples supposedly put on His lips. Of course, the critics' edits are based on their own preconceived notions, including their tendency to rule out the existence of the supernatural. Thus, neither Christ's miracles nor His resurrection could have occurred.

But softer forms of Marcionism have also appeared in modern times. Many hyperdispensationalists accept the Old and New Testaments, but they divide the contents of Scripture in such a way as to make only a

small part of it applicable to Christians. They establish a radical discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments and between Israel and the church. Some go so far as to declare that only certain of Paul's writings pertain to Christians today.

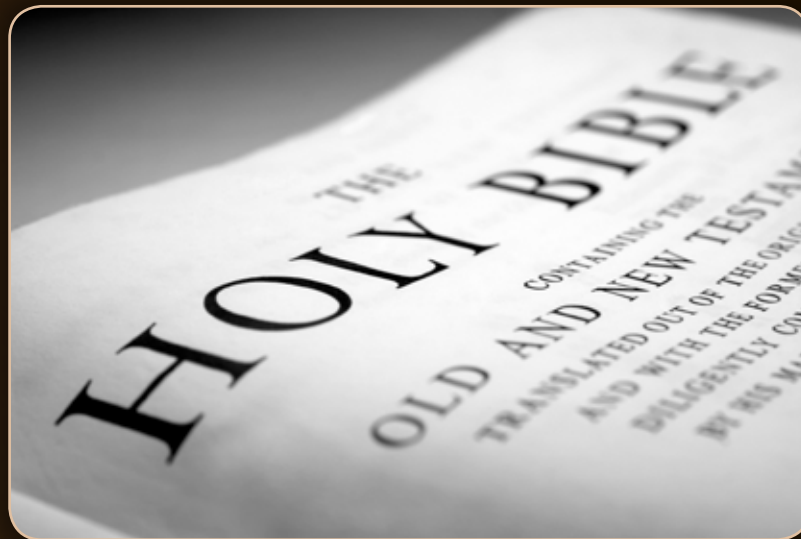
We also see softer forms of antinomianism today. The “once saved, always saved” advocates do not deliberately encourage sinful behavior, but their teaching that sinful behavior

together as if married, so-called gay marriage, and euthanasia. Even taking a pro-abortion (‘pro-choice’) stance is seen as ‘loving,’ as it is opposed to those mean old Bible-thumping ‘fundamentalists’ who oppose ‘reproductive rights’ and ‘choice.’

And then there are the modern modalists who, like the modalists of old, make God a solitary Person who operates through three modes; the modern Arians and adoptionists, who strip Christ of His full divinity and make Him a part of Creation; the modern Montanists, noted for their emphasis on ecstatic prophecy and ecstatic utterance, or ‘speaking in tongues;’ the modern Gnostics, who blend Christian beliefs with New Age spirituality; and on it goes.

### AN OLD ADMONITION—STILL GOOD FOR TODAY

There can be no doubt that the Christianity that has come down to us was in many ways shaped by the torrent of heresies, cultural influences, and theological disputes that have come and gone over the centuries. But—make no mistake—yesterday's heresies never really went away. They have simply been brushed up a bit and repackaged—but they're still with us.



“Marcion simply threw out those parts of Scripture he believed to be corrupted. Today, the liberal critics do essentially the same thing...”

on the part of a true Christian can never sever his relationship with God is, nevertheless, a form of antinomianism.

A form of antinomianism is also seen in the view that the believer now relies completely on the influence and promptings of the Holy Spirit, and has no need of biblical law to inform him on godly behavior. This view resembles yet another form of antinomianism—the view that replaces biblical commandments with the sentiment of ‘love.’ The result is that sentiment (often called ‘love’) takes precedence over the plain commandments of God, resulting in ‘justification’ for all kinds of immoral behavior—couples living

For this reason, the people of God today would do well to heed an old—but not outdated—admonition:

*“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” (Jude 1:3, emphasis mine)*



A History of Church Buildings ...

continued from page 17

**CHRISTIANITY: THE CHURCH THAT JESUS BUILT**

This brings us to the Christian era. Christianity began with a Jewish prophet named Jesus who claimed to be the promised Messiah. Jesus taught a simple message: love God first above all things and secondly, love your fellow man as yourself. This message, according to Jesus is the key to the Kingdom of God. Jesus' message resonated with many people and produced many loyal followers. Jesus specifically chose 12 men from among His followers to be His disciples. After the death of Jesus, His disciples continued in His name, preaching the message of the Kingdom of God.

In the beginning of the church, Jesus being a Jew (Heb.7:14) gained mostly Jewish followers. He and His followers practiced Judaism and therefore the Torah was the primary Scripture they used at that time. In Christianity, the Torah and other Jewish scriptures namely the Prophets, and the Writings, (together forming the Old Testament) were fundamental to Jesus Christ's teachings.

Later, documented letters and other writings by the Apostles (Disciples) of Jesus, (later to be called the New Testament) became accepted as Scripture along with the Old Testament. The Christians of the first century used the Old Testament as their source of reference to establish the Christian religion (Eph. 2:19-22). Later, Christians used both the Old and New Testaments as their reference and foundation to Christianity.

It would be remiss not to mention the Christians of the first century were also influenced by the cultures around them as the Jews were. Just as the Jews desired to build their Temple for worship as was originally directed by King David, so too did the Christians want their own places of worship. However, just wanting a place to worship was not the sole reason why today Christians worship in 'churches' or 'cathedrals.'

**THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN CHURCH EDIFICES**

In order to understand this more clearly, some background is necessary for context. Christianity began in the time when the Greco-Roman-Hellenist Empire was in control of the land of Palestine, where Christianity originated. Christianity remained unnoticed by the Roman officials after the death of Jesus Christ.

Followers of the faith carried on with some resistance from the Jewish officials, but little or no disturbance from the Roman government.

However, the climate changed when the Apostle Paul, a devout Benjamite who was

brethren. Note further, in Philemon 1:2, Paul writes "to the beloved Apphia, Archip'pus our fellow soldier and to the church in your house." After Paul's death, the meetings continued in the homes of the brethren. The dining room was usually the place for the meeting because the meetings usually involved a meal.

The homes were not large homes because most of the converts were generally from the lower to middle class, with the occasional upper class folks. The homes would consist of one family building a house up to four storeys high. The dining room was usually the only large room and was generally situated on the top floor. The furniture would be a table with three surrounding couches. If a home didn't have a formal dining room, the largest room in the house would serve for the gathering (Krautheimer, 1981 3rd Ed., p. 24).

As congregations became too large for the homes, with baptisms being conducted in the courtyard of the house, in bathrooms or in small privately owned public baths, the need for larger spaces grew. Oratories above or below ground were built, from the simplest to very lavish, but on a small scale.

Unfortunately, as Christians grew in number they gained attention

from the State and began to attract persecutions from the Romans. When the Christians were being persecuted, they would meet secretly in the homes of members. The church went through persecutions, commencing from its inception on through the next four centuries (Acts 8:1-4; 12:1-5; Rev. 2-3).

Many of these persecutions resulted from government perceptions that the Christians would not compromise the original teachings that were being changed, as the State of Rome adopted a new diluted form of Christianity. Therefore, they were viewed as criminals and religious heretics.

Undeniably, many don't realize that shortly after 100 C.E., Rome began to intensely adopt the Christian movement and blend its pagan influences with Christ's teachings. Over the



converted to Christianity by a personal supernatural experience, took the Greco-Roman world by storm and turned the 'world upside down' by his widespread evangelistic ministry of the Gospel throughout Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, and North Africa.

Paul spread this Good News of the Kingdom of God to both Jews and Gentiles. The results of Paul's evangelism took root in those areas and resulted in new converts from those communities, who at that point would meet and gather in any suitable place. They met in places like the Jewish temple precinct, a synagogue, or a street corner (Krautheimer, 1981); and yes, even in their homes (Rom. 16:5, 10-11).

Before the death of Paul, regular gatherings would take place in private homes of the

next few centuries this encroachment became more pronounced, forcing thousands of Christians into hiding or exile.

As Rome's *paganized* version of Christianity became the state religion, those Christians who insisted on keeping the original traditions and liturgy of Christ's teachings were branded as criminals and hunted down, persecuted, jailed, or killed. However, those who were able continued meeting and conducting services in their homes, or in and among the Jews in the synagogues.

The temples of the Greeks and Romans became the worship buildings for the state's version of the Christian religion.

By 450 C.E., the persecutions had subsided and 'Christianity' had experienced a complete change in doctrine, worship, and structure. This was now the era of the great Roman Catholic (Universal) Church and its many alleged patriarchal fathers. The church had moved from small groups of lower to middle class members, meeting in each other's homes, to larger congregation under the influence of Rome in an organized structural style of Babylonian sun worship, branded now, however, as 'Christian' worship.

As time went by, the role of the Church changed with the church fathers. The congregations were more organized and their activity increased to include charity, tending to the cemeteries, and administration of property and instruction classes for proselytes.

The roles of bishop, elder, and deacon changed into a hierarchy of professionally ordained priests fashioned after the Roman government. It was the Bishop Dionysius who brought order to the organization and liturgy, which spread throughout the Roman Empire: one bishop presiding over the 'Christians' in each town.

As the role of the church changed to include all the duties and functions of the clergy, so did the structure of the Church. Space requirements grew for the larger congregations and these needs gave birth to the idea of developing more grandiose and ornate 'Christian' architectural structures.

Surprisingly, the cemetery played a major role in the process of moving from home to church buildings. Krautheimer informs us,

*"it is suggested or believed that the early Christians acquired property by incorporating as funeral associations and held property under that title" (1981, p. 26).*

In times of persecutions, the Christians would revert to meeting in private houses and in the cemeteries. Also they built small structures on their property and used them as community centers or meetinghouses.

The design of the buildings was in the tradition of utilitarian domestic architecture and also subject to the regional variations of third-century buildings within the Roman Empire (Krautheimer, p. 27). *The Encyclopedia Britannia* states that the earliest churches were based on the plan of the Roman Basilica or Hall of Justice (Ceara Delice 031 New 1997).

In 250–313 C.E., the pre-Constantine era building styles used for meetings were community houses and catacombs. The catacombs had a two-fold purpose, to bury their dead in the underground cemetery and hold services above ground.

During the Constantine era, he granted the Church official standing and it became the official religion of Rome. This occurred in 325 C.E., at the Council of Nicea. Incorporating into the Roman culture produced more changes for the church administration and with that came more structural changes also. Krautheimer informs us,

*"The new official and hieratic character of the Church required a new ground plan. The sanctuary where Mass was said and where the clergy were assembled had to be architecturally distinct from the lay part. All ecclesiastical architecture had to be differentiated from, and rose above, ordinary buildings. Finally, the official and hieratic overtones of the Church and the dignity of her Imperial patron demanded an architectural vocabulary corresponding to the highest class of public buildings, palaces and temples" (1981, p. 40).*

As all religions of old, from Hinduism to Christianity, have their distinctive temples, synagogues, cathedrals and edifices of worship, sadly, they so often become just misappropriated idols that disintegrate into the caricatures of the individuals who worship there.

Jesus noticed this and clearly warned the women at the well of the problem with "misappropriation." His own Jewish people had misappropriated the Temple God told David to build. Notice, talking about the *unimportance* of the *place* of worship Jesus said,

*"Women, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father... But the hour cometh, and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth... God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:20-24).*

The decision for allowing the place of worship to influence our personal relationship with God for better or worse is misguided at best. As Solomon, the King of Israel once said, "all is vanity" (Eccl. 3:19).

Meeting in a nice building can be an enhancement to the Christian worship service, but when it becomes a distraction or the center of our affection toward God, it misses its true purpose which is simply to accommodate and facilitate worship. Undoubtedly, the Roman Catholic/Eastern Orthodox Church *building culture* stands out because the historical record proves it is the desire of man to outdo each other.

This competitive attitude has contributed to the church "building" or "cathedral" construction of edifices that have literally taken food out of the mouths of those who contributed and supported it. Though we may agree that this event began with the Eastern Orthodox competing with the Western Orthodox—clearly and unfortunately, it is still going on far to much today within the general Christian community.

We must not forget that *the church* is and always has been *the people*, not the buildings where they meet.



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# How Passover was Replaced by Easter

BY BILL WATSON

Unquestionably, Jesus Christ was Jewish and observed Passover. Jesus never kept an Easter in His life! So how was this holy day changed? And who changed the day He observed, chose, and instituted as the holy day for taking His sacrificial emblems, representing His body and blood?

Where is the Biblical record confirming the authority for this replacement?

Church history is a fascinating story. There are many angles and approaches one can take when exploring the nuances of the ecclesiastical record. However, the means by which Passover was abandoned and replaced with Easter is fairly straightforward and clearly documented as to who, and how, it was done. The real question underscoring this issue is: did they have the right to do it and more importantly, is that what *Jesus* wanted?

Before we answer those questions, let's review the historical facts of how and who made this change so we can put this event into its proper context. Otherwise, we might marginalize the significance of the result and overlook the real tragedy of this *unauthorized* change.

## HOW PASSOVER WAS ABANDONED AND REPLACED

When reviewing the historical record of the Passover/Easter controversy, it is undeniable that the early New Testament Church did *not* observe Easter. They continued observing Passover, but with a new significance and understanding. Notice:

*"There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers... The first Christians continued the observance of the Jewish [God's] festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th edition, p. 828).*

In addition, we are informed,

*"Neither the apostles, therefore, nor the Gospels, have anywhere imposed... Easter... The Savior and His*

*apostles have enjoined us by no law to keep this feast [Easter]... And that the observance originated not by legislation [of the apostles], but as a custom the facts themselves indicate." (fourth century scholar, Socrates Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History, Book V, chapter 22)*

The Apostle Paul confirms he maintained the customary observance of Passover, as was given to him by Christ Himself, when he said,

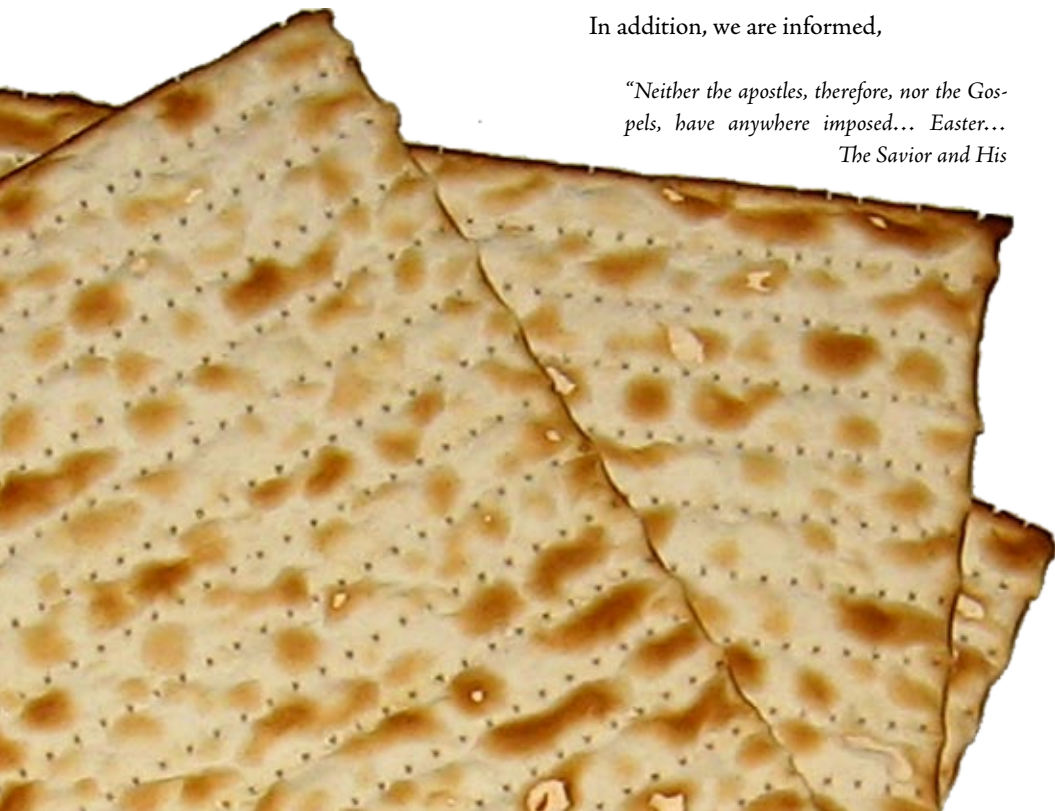
*"For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed [not Easter Sunday!] took bread." (1 Cor. 11:23).*

Keep in mind, Jesus Christ was betrayed during the night of Nisan 14 (Luke 22:15-22), which was considered the evening portion of the day of Passover (Exod. 12:6-13). Remember, God begins a new day at evening, commencing at sunset (Gen. 1:5).

With this *established fact* and connection in mind, how then was it changed from the 14th of Nisan (Passover) to the *Sunday* following the first full moon after the vernal equinox, and then assigned the pagan name Easter (*Ishtarte*)?

Unquestionably, this is no minor change from the original observance that Jesus Christ exemplified (especially since people *died* refusing to obey this change). And furthermore, to supersede the authority of Jesus' own example is obviously presumptuous at best; and at worst, it is outright heretical!

*How* could such a blatant act of contradiction and disregard for our Lord's example and commands be allowed to take place? This is





a question all of us should seriously ask ourselves!

Assuredly, we must first understand the contention between the Western congregations led by Rome and the Eastern Asiatic congregations. This debate intensified during the second century, and is historically known as the *Quartodeciman Controversy*.

*Quartodeciman* is simply a Latin term that means fourteenth. What the ecclesiastical record of the second century reveals is that there was a controversy over the fourteenth—specifically, it concerned the *change* from the fourteenth of Nisan (Passover) to Easter, with all of its pagan connections, associations, and typologies of fertility and fecundity. This was unequivocally contested and rejected by the congregations of the Asiatic East. It came to a head when Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna (who was personally taught by John the apostle), faced off with Anicetus, the preeminent bishop of Rome, in about 150 A.D.

Notice what history tells us from the Catholic Church itself, concerning this second century controversy:

*“The dioceses of all Asia, as from the older tradition [Passover], held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should always be observed as the feast of the life-giving Pasch [Passover]... However, it was not the custom of the churches in the rest of the world [primarily the West, represented by Rome] to end it at this point [allegedly a non-biblical based fast ending on Easter Sunday], as they observed the practice, which from apostolic tradition has prevailed to the present time... Synods and assemblies of bishops [not Jesus Christ’s example or the Gospel records!] were held on this account and all with one consent through mutual correspondence drew up an ecclesiastical decree [superseding Christ’s personal example as recorded in the Gospels] that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be celebrated on no other day but, the Sunday [Easter] and that we should observe the close of the paschal fast on that day only. A letter of Saint Irenaeus is among the extracts just referred to, and this shows that the diversity of practice regarding Easter had existed at least from*

*the time of Pope Sixtus. Further, Irenaeus states that St. Polycarp [bishop of Smyrna], who like the other Asiatics, kept Easter on the fourteenth day of the moon [which is really the Passover], whatever day of the week that might be, following therein the tradition which he [Polycarp] claimed to have derived from St. John the Apostle, but could not be persuaded by Pope Anicetus to relinquish his Quartodecimen observance. The question thus debated was therefore primarily whether Easter was to be kept on a Sunday, or whether Christians should observe the holyday of the Jews... Those who kept Easter [Passover] with the Jews were called Quartodecimans” (Catholic Encyclopedia, emphasis mine).*



Clearly, the historical record from the Catholic Church proves that they themselves (not Jesus Christ) chose to exercise authority to change and sever the connection of Passover. Undoubtedly, there was a long-term agenda to shift and undermine any and all associations connecting Jewish Israeli underpinnings that were foundational to the early Christian Church.

Remember, Paul said, the household of God (the Church) is,

*“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets [not Synods, Councils, and bishops], Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20).*

There was absolutely *no* authorization to change the framework of this major point of doctrine, disconnecting from Jesus Christ’s own appearance of worship exemplified by His life, habits, and customs (1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6). It is important we remember: Jesus Christ *never* kept an Easter in His life! Unequivocally, it is undeniable that Easter has *no* Biblical connection, foundation, or authority on the name of Jesus Christ that requires observance and/or recognition by any who claim Christ as their Savior.

Yet, regardless of these verifiable facts, this trend finally became law in the year A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicaea. Notice again, from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*:

*“The emperor himself [Constantine] writing to the churches after the council of Nicaea, exhorts, ‘At this meeting the question concerning the most holy day of Easter was discussed, and it was resolved by the united judgment of all present [regardless of the example/commands of Jesus Christ and the original apostolic fathers, Matthew 26:17–30] that this feast ought to be kept by all and in every place on one and the same day [Easter Sunday]... And first of all it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin... for we have received from our Savior a different way [Where, then, is the Biblical proof or Christological authorization?] ... and I myself [Constantine] have undertaken that this decision should meet with the approval of your sagacity in the hope that your wisdoms will gladly admit that practice which is observed [Easter Sunday] at once in the city of Rome and in Africa, throughout Italy and Egypt... with entire unity of judgment.”*

And finally, in the article *Councils* in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* again, we read about the purpose of the Council of Nicaea.

*“The first ecumenical, or council, of Nicaea (325 A.D.) lasted two months and twelve days. Three hundred and eighteen bishops were present. Hosius, bishop of Cordova, assisted as legate of Pope Sylvester. The Emperor, Constantine, was also present. To this*

*council we owe the Creed of Nicaea, defining against Arius the true divinity of the Son of God [Arius challenged the divinity of Jesus Christ], and the fixing of the date for keeping Easter [which opposed the Quartodecimans who observed Passover].”*

It was now made ‘official.’ Easter Sunday, the day after the first full moon, after the spring equinox, became the day to celebrate Jesus Christ’s resurrection. This was a serious and critical shift of theology. Critical, because it not only changed the day of the observance, but changed the focus, the meaning of the observance. It now became an observance and celebration of His resurrection, contrary to the Biblical admonition of remembering His death!

Notice what Paul says,

*“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death [not His resurrection] till he come”*  
(1 Cor. 11:26).

There is a purposeful point of significance our Lord placed exclusively on Passover concerning His death. It’s very fundamental, but crucial to understand; Passover was intended to distinctly address the impeccable fact that it was by Jesus Christ’s sacrificed life and shed blood that we have access to eternal life. Unfortunately, merging His death and resurrection into one holy day, as Easter describes, blurs the deep profound meaning of both these events by taking away the emphasis that each so richly deserves.

Sadly, on a broader scale, the abandonment of the observance of God’s holy days has contributed to this greatly. Understanding the additional holy days throughout the year, their enriched meanings and sequence they portray, would clarify how each step in the salvation/atonement process is remarkably explained for our understanding and spiritual appreciation. (Request our FREE booklet, *God’s Seasonal Plan.*)

**SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFYING WHO MADE THE CHANGE**

After the Council of Nicaea, the Roman government became more entangled with the ecclesiastical matters of the Church, derailing

it further from the original intent by multiple means.

“Emperor Theodosius (A.D. 78-398) made Christianity the State Religion of the Roman Empire, and made church membership compulsory. This was the worst calamity that has ever befallen the Church. The forced conversion filled the churches with unregenerate people... Christ had designed to conquer by purely spiritual and moral means. Up to this time conversion was voluntary, a genuine change in heart and life. But now the military spirit of Imperial Rome had entered the Church. The Church had conquered the Roman Empire. But in reality the Roman Empire had conquered the Church, by making the Church over into the image of the Roman Empire. The Church had changed its nature, had entered its great Apostasy (2 Thess. 2:1-12), had become a political organization in the Spirit and pattern of Imperial Rome, and took its nose-dive into the millennium of

“Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.” (Mark 7:6-9)

Papal abominations. The Imperial Church of the 4th and 5th centuries had become an entirely different institution from the persecuted Church of the first three centuries. In its ambition to rule it lost and forgot the Spirit of Christ.” (Halley’s Bible Handbook, *Paganization of the Church*, p. 760)

Regrettably, the combination of Rome’s secular power and the integration of fertility symbols and observances, adopted from many of the existing pagan religions that saturated Rome, took its toll; and by means of forced compliance and/or persecution, marginalized the true Church, reducing its influence. Notice again,

*“Conversion of the Barbarians, the Goths, Vandals, and Huns who overthrew the Roman Empire accepted Christianity; but to a large extent their conversion was nominal and this further filled the Church with pagan practices... Even as every generation seeks to interpret Christ in terms of its own thinking, so, no sooner had Christianity made its appearance than it began its process of amalgamation with Greek and Oriental philoso-*

*phies; and there arose many Sects...”* (Halley’s Bible Handbook, “Paganization of the Church,” p. 761)

Throughout history, the Christians remaining faithful to the commandments and testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:17) have been comparably small when measured against the traditional Christian community that has emerged and been so heavily influenced by the Hellenistic teachings of Greco-Roman culture. The liberties taken by the Catholic Church and many of the popes, bishops, councils, synods, and emperors to rearrange the theology of Christ’s original teachings are unconscionable. Unfortunately, the hard reality is, much of traditional Christianity, (Protestant and/or Catholic) is not theologically correct.

Notice what Jesus says:

*“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye who work iniquity [lawlessness].”* (Matt. 7:22–23)

Seriously, it would do all of us some good to consider this possibility. It is very plausible one can think he is pleasing God when in fact he is not. It’s important to our Lord we worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Love of the truth is living the truth. It’s easy to say we love and believe the truth, but we must love by “doing” (1 John 3:17-18). The hearers are not justified. Acting on what we know, or living our faith, is key to justification and pleasing the true God (Jas. 2:15-26). Notice:

*“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like.”* (Luke 6:46-47)

Read the remaining verses located in Luke 6:48-49. They are revealing in light of the historical record you just read. We are expected to believe and obey. God expects those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them (Rom. 8:9) to be an example to others by living the Faith.

It is the height of arrogance, vanity, and ego to circumvent God in areas He reserves exclusive prerogative to define 'what is to be.' The historical record of the Passover/Easter controversy is a prime illustration of how man endeavors to evade God, avoiding His authority.

History reveals the combination of the Greco-Roman government, implemented by the ecclesiastical authority of the Popes and Catholic Councils over the centuries, replaced Passover with Easter. There is absolutely no Biblical directive or Christ-like example throughout the whole Bible authorizing the institution of Easter as a Christian holy day!

It's simply a man-made tradition, adopted, concocted, and assimilated with ancient pagan fertility rites and symbols that are well connected to the 'sun-worshipping' religions of Babylon that came down to us through the Greco-Macedonian/Roman cultures. Unfortunately, over the years, it has simply contributed to misdirecting much of the vast Christian community, causing it to render the laws of God to no effect because of the traditions of men. Even Jesus Christ had to personally deal with this same principle during His ministry and cautioned against it. Notice what He said.

*"Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." (Mark 7:6-9)*

Without a doubt, this being the case, why not consider following the example Jesus Christ left us and begin keeping the Passover instead of Easter, as was originally intended? Because, as was mentioned at the outset, what underscores this issue is not that Passover was replaced—that is an obvious historical fact. Instead, the real heart of this issue is: *which laws will you obey—Jesus the Christ's—or the decrees (traditions) of men?*



# Polycarp and Polycrates: Defenders of the Faith

For some sixty years, Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna and student of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, had been faithful to the Christian 'way.' In approximately the year 154 C.E., he found himself at the center of a controversy with Anicetus, the Bishop of Rome over a foundational teaching of the emerging Christian Church: whether or not the Passover should be observed. Historically, this contention was labeled the *Quartodeciman Controversy*.

Fundamental to this dispute was that the Eastern Asiatic Churches of which Polycarp represented, maintained they should continue in the ways the apostle John had taught, which clearly directed them to continue observing the Passover on the fixed date of Nisan 14. However, the churches of the West, represented by Anicetus, insisted they abandon the Passover observance, replacing it with a Mithras oriented holyday, but branding it as Christian. They named this holiday *Easter* after the ancient pagan queen of heaven, *Ishtar*, on the Sunday after Passover.

In reference to the Passover, historian Eusebius mentions,

*"For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe it [the Passover], because he had always observed it with John the disciple of our Lord, and the rest of the apostles, with whom he associated: and neither did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe [Passover], who said that he was bound to maintain the practice [Easter] of the presbyters before him."*

Sadly, this controversy continued for many more years causing much division and hard feelings between the two views.

In approximately 180 C.E., Victor, Bishop of Rome, by threatening excommunication hoped to force the Eastern Churches to concede Passover, replacing it with the observance of Easter. However, Polycrates (not Polycarp) refused to obey the order of Victor and de-

spite the *violent* opposition, Polycrates and many of the Eastern congregations refused to bow to the edicts of Victor, preferring instead to continue the Passover celebration in accordance with scripture.

Regrettably, however, the controversy raged on incurring an enormous amount of pain and persecution throughout the second and third centuries, until finally it was officially addressed at the Council of Nicea, in 325 C.E. At this council meeting, Emperor Constantine instituted legislation that outlawed the observance of Passover as a Christian Holyday. Central to this was the objective to eliminate the appearance of anything connected to Judaism and therefore distance this freshly crafted and unusual 'Christian religion' from its Jewish/Hebrew roots.

Rome had 'adopted' Christianity and was now creating and defining a *version* that would be more compatible and consequently, more acceptable for the pagan population of Rome. The forced abandonment of many original teachings passed down from the apostles was accomplished. From this point on, anyone caught observing the Passover, as a Christian, was essentially considered a heretic and anathema to Christ.

For more details please read our article, *Who Changed The Passover To Easter* on page 24.



For additional information about God's Church and how those early years were influenced by the Greco-Roman culture, request your FREE CD set on Church History-101-102-103. It will add insight to how the Christian Church of today was influenced by the Hellenistic environment it was surrounded by at that time.

Call 903-939-2929, email us at [info@cgi.org](mailto:info@cgi.org) or write to us at:

Church of God, International  
P.O. Box 2525  
Tyler, Texas 75710

# Is Christmas Christian?

BY LLOYD W. GARY

“**W**hat a strange question,” most would object. “Of course Christmas is Christian! Why, it commemorates the birth of the Savior of the world—Jesus Christ—*doesn’t it?*” Does it *really*? Or is it something we have been unconsciously spoon-fed and taken for granted? Do not make up your mind before you examine the facts.

There is no time that is more nostalgic than Christmas. It reminds us of home, of family, of ‘the good old days’ when we were children. We think back to Norman Rockwell-like settings of sleigh bells, Christmas trees, Yule logs burning in the fireplace, caroling, and of children shouting in glee as they unwrap presents ‘Santa’ has brought them for being good. It may come as a shock to most to learn that despite all these warm, fuzzy feelings, Christmas has pagan origins and is not a Christian festival at all.

Many have an immediate emotional reaction when confronted with this truth, but we must remember the Proverb that says,

*“He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.”*  
(Prov. 18:17)

In other words, if one is steeped from childhood in the belief that Christmas is a Christian holiday, the information that it is indeed pagan will tend to be staunchly rejected. Another Proverb states,

*“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”*  
(Prov. 18:13)

We need to examine these facts with open minds, searching out the truth, not with minds clouded with emotion and tradition.

The plain truth is that nowhere in the Bible are believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or of Jesus Christ, required to celebrate Christmas. You may search your Bible from cover to cover only to find that it just isn’t there. Upon close examination you will



find that the early Christian church not only did *not* celebrate Christmas but, instead, God’s people kept the sacred festivals that God ordained in the Bible as outlined in Leviticus chapter 23. (Write for your *FREE* copy of our booklet, *God’s Seasonal Plan*, also available online at [www.cgi.org](http://www.cgi.org).)

## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Consider these amazing facts from historians and reliable sources:

*“Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church...the first evidence of the feast is from Egypt.”* (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1911 edition)

The 25th of December was celebrated in ancient days as the birthday of the unconquerable SUN god, (variously know as Tammuz, Mithra, Saturn, Adonis or BAAL) centuries before Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem.

*“Christmas customs are an evolution from times that long antedated the Christmas period—a descent from seasonal, pagan, religious and national practices, bedged about with legend and tradition... In the beginning many of the earth’s inhabitants were sun worshippers because the course of their lives depended on its yearly round in the heavens, and feasts were held at its return from distant*

*wanderings. In the south of Europe, in Egypt and Persia the sun-gods were worshipped with elaborate ceremonies at the season of the winter solstice, as a fitting time to pay tribute to the god of plenty, while in Rome the Saturnalia reigned for a week... The exact day and year of Christ’s birth have never been satisfactorily settled, but when the fathers of the church in A.D. 340 chose the day of the winter solstice, which was firmly fixed in the minds of the people and which was their most important festival.”* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, article “Christmas,” p. 642)

*“In a famous letter to Augustine, Pope Gregory directs the great missionary to accommodate the ceremonies of the Christian worship as much as possible to those of the heathen, that the people might not be startled at the change, and in particular the Pope advised Augustine to allow converts to kill and eat at the Christmas festival a great number of oxen to the glory of God, as they had formerly done to the Devil”* (The Story of Christmas by Michael Harrison, p. 28).

*“It is nevertheless almost certain that the 25th of December cannot be the nativity of the Savior, for it is then the height of the rainy season in Judaea, and shepherds could hardly be watching their flocks by night in the plains.... Not casually or arbitrarily was the festival of the nativity celebrated on the 25th*

of December. One of the principal causes that co-operated in fixing this period was that almost all the heathen nations regarded the winter solstice as the turning point of the year—the beginning of the renewed life and activity of the powers of nature, and of the gods who were merely the symbolic personifications of these. In more northern countries this fact must have made itself peculiarly palpable—hence the Celts and Germans, from the oldest times, celebrated the season with the greatest festivities. At the winter solstice the Norsemen held their great Yule-feast in commemoration of the fiery sun-wheel, and believed that during the twelve nights from the 25th of December to the 6th of January they could trace the personal movements and interferences on earth of their great deities, Odin, Beretha, etc. Many of the beliefs and usages of the old Germans, and also of the Romans, relating to this period, passed over from heathenism to Christianity, and have partly survived to the present day” (Chambers Encyclopaedia, 1908 Edition, Vol. 11, p. 222, article “Christmas”).

“There is no authoritative tradition as to the day or month of Christ’s birth.... The winter solstice was regarded as the birthday of the sun and at Rome, a pagan festival of the nativity of ‘sol invictus’ was introduced by the Emperor Aurelian on the 25th of December, 274. The church, unable to stamp out this popular festival, spiritualized it as the feast of the Nativity of the Sun of Righteousness. When Christianity spread northwards it encountered a similar pagan festival also held at the winter solstice—the great Yule feast of the Norsemen. Once again Christmas absorbed heathen customs. From the various sources came the Yule log, the Christmas tree introduced into England from Germany and first mentioned in 1789.” (Chambers Encyclopaedia, 1970, p. 538, article “Christmas”)

As you can see, there is no shortage of historical evidence that Christmas long antedated Christ. Scholars have known these facts for centuries. They can be easily confirmed in any reference library. In short, we see

that each year, on December 25, the ancient pagans held a festival in honor of the sun god. In order to win Gentile converts to the Christian faith, the Roman Church, centuries after times of the apostles, adopted this ancient pagan winter festival of the sun god and renamed it the “Mass of Christ”—or in its shortened form, “Christmas”—mistakenly thinking that the play upon words would shift the honor to the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

What, then, does God think of this pagan honor bestowed upon him?

“Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.” (Jer. 10:2)

He then goes on to mention one such custom.

“For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.” (Jer. 10:3-4)

Do you  
k n o w  
of any

such custom today? Again, in Deuteronomy 12:30–32 God warns,

“Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.’ Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” (emphasis mine)

As shocking as it may seem to most, there in your very own Bible God says He hates those pagan customs that are attributed to Him! (Be sure to request our FREE booklet, *Facts You Should Know About Christmas*.)

#### MORE AUTHORITATIVE QUOTATIONS

Now that we understand that our Savior was not born on December 25, but in the autumn of the year, perhaps on the Feast of Trumpets or during the Feast of Tabernacles, let us consider further what various historians say about how December 25 came to be celebrated as the Savior’s birth.

In *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon says,

“The Roman  
C h r i s -



tians, ignorant of his (Christ's) birth, fixed the solemn festival to the 25th of December, the Brumalia, or Winter Solstice, when the Pagans annually celebrated the birth of Sol" (vol. ii, p. 383).

Grolier's encyclopedia says:

"Christmas is the feast of the birth of Jesus Christ, celebrated on December 25.... Despite the beliefs about Christ that the birth stories expressed, the church did not observe a festival for the celebration of the event until the 4th century... since 274, under the emperor Aurelian, Rome had celebrated the feast of the 'Invincible Sun' on December 25. In the Eastern Church, January 6, a day also associated with the winter solstice, was in Italy preferred. In course of time, however, the West added the Eastern date as the Feast of the Epiphany, and the East added the Western date of Christmas."

"The festivals of Rome are innumerable; but five of the most important may be singled out for elucidation—viz., Christmas-day, Lady-day, Easter, the nativity of St. John, and the Feast of the Assumption. Each and all of these can be proved to be Babylonian." (The Two Babylons by Alexander Hislop, p. 91)

"Within the Christian Church no such festival as Christmas was ever heard of till the third century, and that not till the fourth century was far advanced did it gain much observance. How, then, did the Roman Church fix on December 25th as Christmas-day? Why, thus: Long before the fourth century, and long before the Christian era itself, a festival was celebrated among the heathen, at that precise time of the year, in honor of the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven; and it may fairly be presumed that in order to conciliate the heathen, and to swell the number of the nominal adherents of Christianity, the same festival was adopted by the Roman Church, giving it only the name of Christ. This tendency on the part of the Christians to meet Paganism half-way was very early developed ... Upright men strove to stem the tide, but in spite of all their efforts, the apostasy went on, till the Church, with the exception of a small remnant, was submerged under Pagan superstition. That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival is beyond all doubt. The time of the year, the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated prove its origin. In Egypt, the son of Isis, the Egyptian title for the queen of heaven, was born at this very time, 'about the

time of the winter solstice" (The Two Babylons by Alexander Hislop, p. 93).

Even where the sun was the favorite object of worship, as in Babylon itself and elsewhere, at this festival he was worshipped not merely as the orb of day, but as God incarnate. It was an essential principle of the Babylonian system, that the Sun or Baal was the one and only god. When, therefore Tammuz was worshipped as God incarnate, that implied also that he was an incarnation of the Sun. In the Hindoo mythology, which is admitted to be essentially Babylonian, this comes out very distinctly. There, Surya, or the Sun, is represented as being incarnate, and born for the purpose of subduing the enemies of the gods, who, without such a birth, could not have been subdued.



"It was no mere astronomical festival, then, that the Pagans celebrated at the winter solstice. That festival at Rome was called the feast of Saturn, and the mode in which it was celebrated there, showed whence it had been derived. The feast as regulated by Caligula, lasted five days; loose reins were given to drunkenness and revelry, slaves had temporary emancipation and used all manner of freedoms with their masters. This was precisely the way in which, according to Berossus, the drunken festival of the month Thebeth, answering to our December, in other words, the festival of Bacchus, was celebrated in Babylon... The Christmas tree, now so common among us, was equally common in pagan Rome and pagan Egypt. In Egypt, that

tree was the palm-tree; in Rome, it was the fir; the palm tree denoting the pagan Messiah, as Baal-Tamar, the fir referring to him as Baal-Berith" (The Two Babylons by Alexander Hislop, p. 96-97).

### SO HOW DID CHRISTMAS GET INTO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge gives a clear explanation in the article, Christmas:

"How much the date of the festival depended upon the pagan Brumalia [December 25] following the Saturnalia [December 17-24], and celebrating the shortest day of the year and the 'new sun'... cannot be accurately determined. The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence.... The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and in manner. Christian preachers of the West and the Near East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ's birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia accused their western brethren of idolatry and sun worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival." (emphasis added)

The Roman Empire had been totally pagan, and prior to the 4th century, Christians were few in numbers and persecuted by both the government and pagans. Then the Emperor Constantine professed Christianity, placing it on an equal footing with paganism. Christianity suddenly became popular.

However, most of the 'converts' had been brought up in pagan customs, the chief of which was December 25. They enjoyed this festival of joy and merrymaking, and they did not want to give it up!

The pagan Manichaeism identified the Son of God with the physical sun, giving the new 'converts' an excuse to call December 25 (re-birth of the sun) the birthday of the Son of God.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, some Latins, as early as A.D. 354, may have transferred the birthday of Christ from January 6, to December 25, which was then a Mithraic feast or birthday of the unconquered sun. The Syrians and Armenians, who clung

to January 6, accused the Romans of sun worship and idolatry, claiming the December 25 festival was invented by the disciples of Cerinthus.

### MANY 'GODS,' SAME BIRTHDAY

Upon further examination, we find that there were many others who celebrated the 25th of December as the birthday of *their* gods before it was agreed upon as the birthday of Jesus.

There are the people of India who rejoice, decorate their houses with garlands, and give presents to their friends on this day.

The people of China also celebrate this day and close their shops. The pagan god Buddha is believed to have been born on this day when the "Holy Ghost" descended on his virgin mother Maya.

The great savior and god of the Persians, Mithras, is also believed to have been born on the 25th of December *long* before the Coming of Jesus.

The Egyptians celebrated this day as the birthday of their great savior Horus, the Egyptian god of light and the son of the "virgin mother" and "queen of the heavens" Isis. Osiris, lord of the dead and the underworld in Egypt, the son of "the holy virgin," also was believed to have been born on the 25th of December.

The Greeks celebrated the 25th of December as the birthday of Hercules, the son of the supreme god of the Greeks, Zeus, through the mortal woman Alcmena. Bacchus, the god of wine and revelry among the Romans (known among the Greeks as Dionysus), was also born on this day.

Adonis, revered as a "dying-and-rising god" among the Greeks, miraculously was also born on the 25th of December. His worshippers held him a yearly festival representing his death and resurrection, in midsummer. The ceremonies of his birthday are recorded to have taken place in the same cave in Bethlehem which is claimed to have been the birth place of Jesus.

The Scandinavians celebrated the 25th of December as the birthday of their god Frey, the son of their supreme god of the heavens, Odin.

The Romans observed this day as the birth-

day of the god of the sun, Natalis Solis Invicti (Birthday of Sol the Invincible). There was great rejoicing and all shops were closed while the people turned to fun and games. Presents were exchanged, and the slaves were indulged in great liberties. Remember, these are the same Romans who would later preside over the council of Nicea (A.D. 325), which led to the official Christian recognition of the 'Trinity' as the 'true' nature of God, and the so-called 'fact' that Jesus was born on the 25th of December, as well.

Christmas is not the only Christian festival that was borrowed from ancient paganism and foisted upon the religion of Jesus. There is also the Venerable Day of the Sun (Sunday). There is also: *Easter, the Feast of St. John, the Holy Communion, the Annunciation of the Virgin, the Assumption of the Virgin*, and many others. These all have their roots in ancient pagan worship and have crept into professing Christianity today.

### CHRISTMAS IS A PAGAN FESTIVAL

Christmas is a pagan festival! But what if we just honor Christ during the Christmas season, and don't take part in any of these pagan customs? What does the Bible say about this?

The Scriptures declare,

*"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*  
(John 4:24, emphasis mine)

*"We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."* (1 John 4:6)

God's Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (John 17:17) and the Spirit of Truth does not lead us to the truth through error, half-truths, lies, or false doctrine. Truth slices through and exposes falsehood every time.

*"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Heb. 4:12)

Consider the following: worshipping Christ through honoring His birthday on a day that is *not* His birthday, and borrowing many pa-

gan customs in the process, is *not* worshipping Him "in spirit and in truth!" On the contrary, it is actually taking His name in vain.

*"Howbeit in vain do they worship me," Christ said, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).*

God is supreme. It is He that determines when and how He will be worshipped, not puny, sinful little men.

### NOW WHAT?

If this information is new to you, your head may be spinning. You may be wondering, "How does this information affect *me*? What shall I do?" Perhaps you now find yourself in an impasse. If all this about Christmas is correct, then how should we respond? To ignore truth is obviously not a safe policy to follow, especially when it concerns the choice between *Baal worship* on the one hand and *obedience to the commandments of God* on the other. If you are intellectually honest, we challenge you to go to the library and check it out. Read as many encyclopedias, dictionaries, and other reference works to see if these things are true.

The Bible commands us to,

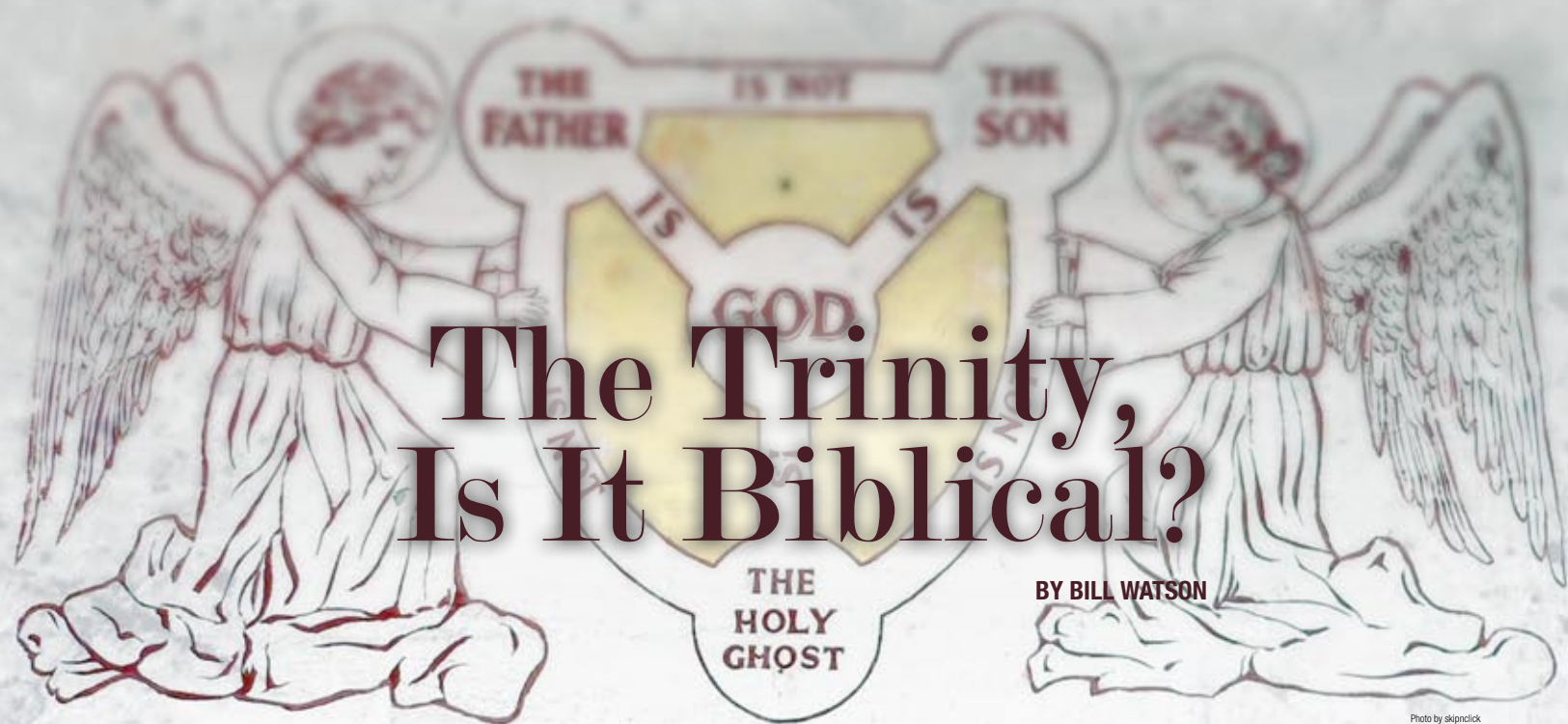
*"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good"*  
(1 Thess. 5:21).

The inference is, if it is *not* good and true, do not hold fast to it—let it go. We prove all things by comparing what we hear with the Word of God, and if our beliefs and customs—however cherished they may be—do not agree with the Bible, we need to reject them. If they do, receive, believe, and practice them. God does not require "blind faith." Hearers of the gospel are bound to inquire, examine, and judge whether what they hear is—or is not—according to the Scripture. Any man, or body of men who deny us this right, or hinder us from exercising it, are violating the revealed will of God.

When you have thoroughly studied the matter you are left with a choice: you can either go along with the pagan festival of Christmas... or obey the Almighty's commandments.

There really is no other option.





# The Trinity, Is It Biblical?

BY BILL WATSON

Photo by skipnck

How do the trinity and the traditional view of the nature of God compare with the Bible?

Can we find substantiation in our Bibles for this widely held belief? This is no small matter since some would have you believe that if you're not in agreement with this teaching, you cannot be a real Christian.

Can this be true?

The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, made an interesting statement in the course of this epistle that reveals a truth most Trinitarians would deny. He said,

*"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." (Rom. 1:20, emphasis mine)*

Unmistakably, what he is saying is that we can understand the spiritual (the invisible) clearly, by understanding the things that are made

(the visible). In other words, the "spiritually invisible things" are understood by observing the "visible material things" that are made; but notice what this includes: "even His eternal power and Godhead!" This is contrary to what all Trinitarians will tell you. As far as they're concerned, you cannot understand the trinity, which defines for them the Godhead. Yet the Bible tells us we can understand the Godhead, along with His eternal power!

Obviously, the Trinitarian belief that states

truth of the matter is that it was developed over hundreds of years by the many councils conducted by the Catholic (Universal) Church. Officially, it began to formulate and take on some definition at the Council of Nicaea, in 352 C.E. In 381 C.E., the Council of Constantinople determined the Holy Spirit was on the same level as the Father and Christ the Son. Over the following centuries, it finally became a dogmatic creed, defining God as "three eternal coexistent persons" (one god in three persons).

"The trinity is a corruption borrowed from heathen religions, and ingrafted on the Christian faith." (A Dictionary of Religious Knowledge, Lyman Abbott, 1875, page 944)

you cannot understand the Godhead is in conflict with the Bible. However, if we approach this without bias, it's easy enough to understand how this happened. Undeniably, the historical record of how the Trinitarian concept developed is easy enough to investigate and determine how and who advanced it and ultimately defined it. In summary, the

Sadly, due to the severe pressure of the pagan religions surrounding the development of the early Christian Church, in conjunction with the adoption of Christianity by the Roman Empire, the Church became compromised. Christian thinking was strongly influenced by

the heathen cultures throughout the Roman Empire.

*"The missionary requirements of the task of the early Christian theologian were dictated, naturally, by the kind of theology then emerging from the dominant religious vision of the culture within which emerging Christianity*



then had to grapple.” (Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, p. 582)

The Trinitarian teaching was just one of many dominant heretical doctrines throughout the area where the original Christian Church was forming. Ancient Babylonians, Assyrians, Siberians, Indians, and even the Japanese all had their ‘three in one’ gods.

“...[T]he recognition of the Trinity was universal in all the ancient nations of the world.” (The Two Babylons, p.18, Alexander Hislop)

Many centuries prior to the time of Christ, belief in *triads of gods* was common and prominent throughout Egypt, Babylon, India, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Kampuchea, and Palmyra. Pagan deities such as Brahma, Siva, Vishnu, Osiris, Isis, and Horus were just a few that were typified in triune fashion.

Much of this contributed to the mind-set for Greek philosophers, such as Plato, Socrates, and others who were affected by these concepts and later became the influential force behind the Hellenistic movement, whose teachings encroached on the early New Testament Christian Church. *Modalism*—the belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different modes, or forms, of the same Person—also developed very early and is found in some churches today.

## SO WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

If the Bible doesn’t teach Trinitarianism or Modalism, what does it teach? Unequivocally, the Bible tells us that it *is* possible to understand YHWH’s “eternal power and Godhead.” So if we can, what is it? How does the Bible explain it?

The following scriptures and commentary should help to clarify the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a listing to help us identify *what the Bible says and defines* as the relationship these three have with one another. The Bible should always remain our final authority, not the councils or traditions of men (Matt. 15:7-9).

### Genesis 1:26:

“And God [Elohim] said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

Elohim is the plural of Eloah. It requires more than one deity. Otherwise, YHWH is talking to Himself.

### Matthew 1:18, 20 (cf. Hebrews 1:5):

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when

as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy [Spirit]... the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy [Spirit].”

Jesus did not beget Himself. He was “begotten” by His Father, using the power of His Holy Spirit. Otherwise, if we accept the Trinitarian view, the Holy Spirit would be the father, and the Father would be the uncle.

### Matthew 7:21:

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Clearly, Jesus is making the statement that His Father was in heaven while He was on Earth, undeniably indicating they were two separate individuals.

### Matthew 20:23:

“And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.”

Undoubtedly, Jesus is saying it was not within His authority to award these positions. That was reserved for the Father exclusively, proving again they were separate, with distinctive authority.

### Psalms 110:1 (cf. Matthew 22:44):

“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

The Old Testament corresponds with the duality of the Godhead. Jesus was not saying anything new. His ministry simply clarified the distinction.

### Matthew 26:39:

“And He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

This is a clear indication that Jesus is doing the will of another. Otherwise, He wouldn’t have said, “nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

### Matthew 27:46 and Mark 13:32:

“...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”

Unquestionably, this shows there are two deities working separately, knowing separate things the other doesn’t know. There is no doubt the Scripture explains Jesus does not know everything the Father does.

### Luke 23:46:

“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”

The Greek word “ruach” means “breath of life”—Jesus gave up His breath, putting Himself, His life, in total trust to the Father, who is characterized as a separate deity in this context.

### John 1:18:

“No man hath seen God [the Father] at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

The Bible is emphatic: no one has seen the Fa-

ther. Some saw Jesus before His human birth as the “God” of the Old Testament. They also saw Him when He was flesh, and after He was resurrected. But nobody has seen the Father, only Christ Himself—clearly indicating there are two beings.

### John 8:17-18:

“It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bears witness of myself, and the Father that sent me bears witness of me.”

We are distinctly told that the Father and Christ make up a single family of two individuals. One witness, plus one additional witness, equals two witnesses, but a single family, a team.

### John 14:28:

“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.”

Jesus differentiates between Himself and the Father by conceding the fact that the Father is greater than Himself.

### John 16:7-14:

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter [Greek *parakletos*] will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him [it] unto you... Howbeit when he [it], the Spirit of truth, is come, he [it] will guide you into all truth: for he [it] shall not speak of himself [itself]; but whatsoever he [it] shall hear, that shall he [it] speak: and he [it] will shew you things to come. He [it] shall glorify me: for he [it] shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

Jesus explains this “parakletos” as a power that will guide His followers into all truth. The pronoun “he” is grammatically correct, because the word “parakletos” is a masculine noun. The “he” does not mean the Holy Spirit is a person.

### John 17:1:

“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy son also may glorify thee.”

Obviously, Jesus was not praying to Himself. He undoubtedly knew that His Father was there, and He was concerned about representing Him honorably under these conditions.

### John 17:3:

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

Jesus is clearly illustrating that there is a sender and one who is sent. His Father is the sender. He was the One who was sent by the Father. Jesus Christ is God’s Apostle, which means “one who is sent” (See Hebrews 3:1).

### John 17:20-21:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.”

Here, Jesus is illustrating that His followers should become one as He and the Father are one. Obviously, that does not mean the loss of one’s individual sovereignty as a separate being. We have seen that Christ and His Father are separate beings functioning as one in unity of Spirit.

# Quotes About the Trinity

**"The Trinity** of God is confessedly a great mystery, something wholly beyond the possibility of complete explanation."

*(New Scofield Reference Bible, page 1046)*

**The Trinity:** "The mind of man cannot fully understand the mystery of the Trinity. He who has tried to understand the mystery fully will lose his mind; but he who would deny the Trinity will lose his soul."

*(A Handbook of Christian Truth by Harold Lindsell and Charles Woodbridge, pp. 51-52)*

**Pagan Origin:** "The doctrine of trinity is of pagan origin. Trinity, like the false doctrine of the soul's immortality, crept into the theology of the church gradually during the early centuries... Pagans who apparently were not thoroughly converted became members of the visible church. As these men assumed places of leadership as teachers and theologians, the theology of the church gradually was paganized. The teachings of the Bible were re-interpreted and adjusted to fit the teachings of pagan theology."

*(Systematic Theology, A.G. Huffer, 1960, p. 65)*

**"The 'trinity'** is a corruption borrowed from the heathen religions, and ingrafted on the Christian faith."

*(A Dictionary of Religious Knowledge, Lyman Abbott, 1875, page 944)*

**"The Platonic trinity,** itself merely a rearrangement of older trinities dating back to earlier peoples, appears to be the rational philosophic trinity of attributes that gave birth "

*(T. Enright, C.S.S.R., in a lecture at Hartford, Kansas, Feb. 18, 1884)*

## **"1) Question: Which is the Sabbath day?**

Answer: Saturday is the Sabbath day.

## **2) Question: Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?**

Answer. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church in the Council of Laodicea, transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday"

*(Peter Geiermann, C.S.S.R., The Converts Catechism of Catholic Doctrine Third Edition)*

### **1 Corinthians 8:6:**

*"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."*

One Father and one Lord Jesus Christ equals two beings working together as one, unified in purpose. Both are immortal deities serving in different functions.

### **1 Corinthians 11:3:**

*"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."*

God the Father is over all, including Jesus Christ, just as a man is over a woman, but undeniably they are separate beings—beings described as different, not the same!

### **1 Corinthians 15:15:**

*"Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not."*

God the Father raised Christ from being completely dead! If God were a trinity, only one-third of God would have died! We are told Christ came in the flesh so He could die (Hebrews 2:9), and that Jesus purged our sins by Himself (Hebrews 1:3). Clearly, this God being, Jesus Christ, died for mankind, and the Father raised Him up.

### **1 Corinthians 15:24:**

*"Then cometh the end, when he [Jesus] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."*

Jesus intends to hand over the kingdom to the Father eventually. He is not handing it over to Himself. This is a clear indication they are separate beings

working toward a common goal for each other.

### **Colossians 1:15:**

*"[Jesus] Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature."*

Adam was created in God's image, yet Adam was not a part of any triune relationship. He was a separate being from the Father. Jesus was also made in the image of the Father but He, too, was a separate entity.

### **1 Timothy 2:5:**

*"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*

Clearly, this illustrates there are two beings functioning in different roles, making up this present family.

### **1 John 4:15:**

*"Whosoever shall confess [by his words and life style] that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."*

We do not become part of a trinity if we confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world. We remain separate individuals retaining our own sovereignty as independent beings, free to express our own unique personalities.

### **John 10:34-36 (compare Psalms 82:6):**

*"Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"*

Notice that Jesus says He is the Son of God rather than the Father Himself, unquestionably proving that Jesus was a separate sovereign being, but according to the Law, considering Himself a God.

Though many more scriptures could be used to illustrate the distinction between these two beings and the Holy Spirit, the above listed scriptures serve to substantiate they are indeed two sovereign deities making up a family, currently of two. The Holy Spirit is the power by which those who are called will be empowered to overcome their human nature, becoming part of the divine nature of God (see John 16:7-15 and 2 Pet. 1:3-4); and ultimately inheriting sonship, by adoption, with Christ making them co-heirs with Him (Rom. 8:11-23).

Understanding the Godhead and His eternal power is *not* about the trinity at all. Instead, understanding His Godhead and eternal power is all about being adopted and becoming part of the family—the God family! (See Eph. 3:14-15 and Rom. 8:15-17). What an awesome destiny we've been given, providing we submit to our Savior, Jesus Christ, and live according to His values!



BY HORANE SMITH

# Letter from Polycrates

Controversy was brewing again, not a bit unusual in the Second Century, since the departure of the highly respected and last living apostle 'Saint' John.

It was near the close of the Second Century in Ephesus, Asia Minor, an area where great men of God such as the apostles Paul and John, had trod the dusty and sometimes muddy roads to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and His coming Kingdom.

In the First Century, Paul had written a letter to the church at Ephesus, admonishing the brethren there: "Stand therefore having your loins girth about with truth..." (Eph. 6:14). But now, those stalwarts of the faith were sleeping in their graves, and that very truth was about to be tested.

As these Pillars of the Church passed on, more followed suit, striving to adhere to the "faith once delivered to the saints." One such faithful adherent in the Second Century was *Polycrates*, who presided over the Church of God at Ephesus. He came from a family of eight Christian Bishops, all firm believers in the truths taught by the apostles. They were passed down from the apostle John to another great student and Christian martyr Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who had died a martyr in Ephesus, for resisting the change from Passover to Easter.

In Rome, the controversy was far from settled. Bishop Victor wanted a consensus on a proper date to celebrate Easter, rather than the Paschal Feast known as Passover. All the parishes of Asia remained faithful to the older tradition, heralding that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should be observed as the feast of the Saviour's Passover (Eusebius, Church History, Book V, Chapter 23). Victor of Rome was pressuring them to abandon this observance.

However, to their credit, the bishops of Asia led by Polycrates, stood their ground and were not about to compromise on this truth. Polycrates was adamant that "we ought to obey God rather than man." It was time to write a letter to Pope Victor.

"We observe the exact day; neither adding, nor taking away," was the first line of the letter, a reminder to the Pope that he had no doubts about the time of Passover. Polycrates went on:

"For in Asia also, the great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming, when he shall come with glory from heaven and shall seek out all the saints," the letter continued.

Without a doubt, these great men were not in heaven, but sleeping in their graves, Polycrates went on to name some of them. "...Philip, one of the twelve apostles who fell asleep at Hierapolis...John, who was both a witness and a teacher and who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord...fell asleep at Ephesus. Polycarp, in Smyrna, who was a bishop and a martyr, and Thraseas, a bishop and martyr from Eumenia. Why need I mention the bishop and martyr Sagaris, who fell asleep in Laodicea, or the blessed Papius, or Melito, the Eunuch, who lived altogether in the Holy Spirit, and whom lies in Sardis, awaiting the episcopate from heaven when he shall rise from the dead?"

Polycrates bolstered his position about retaining the Passover by naming these martyrs, knowing personally at least one of them, Polycarp, who had "endeavoured to keep the unity of the Spirit."

"All these observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the gospel, deviating in no way respect, but following the rule of faith. And I also, Polycrates, the least of you all, do according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have closely followed. For seven of my relatives were bishops: I am the eighth. And my relatives always observed the day when people put away the leaven. I therefore, brethren, who have lived 65 years in the Lord, and have met with brethren throughout the world, and have gone through every Holy Scripture, am not affrighted by terrifying words. For those greater than I have said 'we ought to obey God rather than man. I could mention the bishops whom I summoned at your desire, whose names, should I write them, could constitute a great multitude. And they, beholding my littleness, gave their consent to the letter, knowing that I did not bear my gray hairs in vain, but had always governed my life by the Lord Jesus' (Early Christian Writings).

Despite his arguments, Polycrates and the bishops who supported him were ex-communicated from the church by Roman Bishop Victor. However, Victor reversed his decision later on, after several bishops, including Irenaeus, intervened.

It's uncertain what happened after Polycrates' reinstatement. Sadly, despite his bold attempts to remain faithful to God, the date for Passover was changed and replaced with a man-made holy day, known as Easter, instituted shortly thereafter.

Today, the majority of the traditional Christian world observes Easter, but there are still small groups of people who celebrate the Passover or Lord's Supper, on the same date that the apostles of God, as well as Polycrates and Polycarp fought so bravely to keep. They all held on to their beliefs and for each of them, when facing death, martyrdom was the worthy option. To God's glory, Polycrates' letter to Bishop Victor was not written in vain. †

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