

The Astonishing History of God's True Church!

by Michael H. Exton

The actual history of God's true church is simply astonishing! Read this booklet and see how God's true church has survived as a "little flock" for nearly 2,000 years—while another church, proclaiming a different Jesus and preaching another gospel has taken its place on the world scene!

Printed in the USA
Edition 3.0
August, 2008

(Edition 2.0—2001)
(Edition 1.0—1994)

Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations
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Table of Contents

Chapter One
“I Will Build My Church”1

Chapter Two
What Became of the Church Jesus Built?.....21

Chapter Three
The Light in the Dark Ages.....35

Chapter Four
The Church They Couldn’t Destroy.....43

Chapter Five
Reaching the World With Power!.....50

Acknowledgment

Much of the information contained in this booklet is from an earlier work done by the late Dr. C. Paul Meredith and those who assisted him. I will remain forever grateful to them for the fine job they did in preserving the truth concerning the actual history of God's True Church. It has been a great inspiration to me over the years and has helped me immensely by encouraging me to remain loyal to the true teachings of Jesus Christ. It is now my sincerest hope that this booklet will do the same for YOU!

“I Will Build My Church...”

Jesus Christ said, “I will build my Church.” Did He build it? That Church, said Jesus, would *never* be extinguished. “And the gates of hell (the grave) shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). Christ’s Church is to last through all ages! Has it? Where is it today? Is it divided—composed of more than 400 different, disagreeing, arguing sects? Did God’s Church rapidly grow big, become a powerful organization, exerting powerful influence on the world? Did it gradually turn to false doctrines, finally splitting up into today’s denominations? You need to ask and to answer these questions!

World Looks at the Wrong Church!

Strange to say, almost everyone for these past 19 centuries has been looking in the **WRONG PLACE** for the Church Jesus built. What **REALLY** happened—after 70 A.D.—to the Church of the Bible? Was it shifted to Rome? Where did it go? Where is it today?

The true Church did not die after 70 A.D.! But it did go to sleep! It was foretold in a parable (Mat. 25:1-13). Ten vir-

gins (the PURE Church) expected Christ's immediate return. But while He tarried, all slumbered and slept. Only after nearly 1900 years, finally, in our generation, they began very drowsily to awaken.

But where has the true Church been for these 1900 years? How and where did it sleep, and why did it awaken?

Here is what Mosheim, the church historian, admits, "Christian churches had scarcely been organized when men rose up, who, NOT BEING CONTENTED with the *simplicity* and purity of that religion which the Apostles taught, attempted innovations, and fashioned religion ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN LIKING." There were CONSPIRATORS! Men *masquerading as God's ministers* but who were really wolves in sheep's clothing!

Since the new inventions and ideas of these clever men required proof—not to be found in the writings of the Apostles—"recourse was had to falsehoods and impositions... When asked where they had learned what they so confidently taught, some produced fictitious books under the names of Abraham, Zoroaster, and Christ, or His Apostles; some pretended to have derived their principles from a secret doctrine taught by Christ."

Had the Church gone wrong? Or was this *another, a different and false church*, that was being founded by men who were really tools of Satan the Devil?

A telltale clue is found in the complete absence of historical connecting links. A great yawning gap—an unbridgeable chasm—lies between the Apostolic Church Jesus founded and the earliest beginnings of today's professing Christian churches. Nearly all the writings of the Church in the years after 70 A.D. have perished. Only prophecy remains, and the slanders of enemies!

The historian Gibbon (Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire) candidly states, "The scanty materials of ecclesias-

tical history seldom enable us to dispel the cloud that hangs over the first age of the church.” For nearly a century Church history is BLANK!

Jesse Lyman Hurlbut (*The Story of the Christian Church*) calls this period, just after Acts, the “Age of Shadows.” He continues, “...of all the periods in the church’s history, it is the one about which we know the least... For 50 years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church fathers, we find a church in many aspects VERY DIFFERENT from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul.”

Was this—when the curtain arose—really the same church? It was NOT! The true Church of God had faded from view! *Another church was now on stage!*

This booklet will now reveal the astonishing but little known facts of Church history! It will clearly identify and describe the true New Testament Church of Jesus Christ—and prove where that Church is today!

True Church to be Small

Throughout the history of mankind there have been VERY FEW who have really been faithful to God. At the time of the flood only Noah was found to be righteous (Gen. 6:5 & 7:1). In the time of Elijah there were so few that he thought he was the only faithful one (1 Kings 9:14), but God did show him that there were actually 7,000 (v. 18). Considering that there were millions of Israelites though—this was quite a small number—only a population equal to one average small town! And after Jesus had preached for three and half years there were only 120 followers of Christ (Acts 1:15)! Certainly Jesus had not been trying to save the world then! What a miserable failure, if that were His aim!

Jesus prophesied that there would be FEW that would

find the way (Mat. 7:14 & Luke 12:32), but He also said that His Church would never die (Mat. 16:18), that it would survive until His return. And of course! For Christ Himself is alive and active (not dead on some cross!), and He is more than able to guard and guide His “little flock” throughout all ages.

How the True Church Grew

After the day of Pentecost in 32 A.D. the Church got off to an incredible start (Acts 2:41, 2:47, 4:4, 5:14, 6:1, 6:7). After such a start—such booming, powerful growth—the infant Church might seem to be overwhelming the world. But it was not to last. The world does not like to hear the truth! They often MOCK and hate those in God's true Church who preach the truth (Acts 2:13, 4:2, 26:24)!

...and Was Scattered!

Jesus prophesied that His true followers would be persecuted (John 15:20 & 2 Tim. 3:12), and persecution came early (Acts 5:17-18 & 6:9-13). This devastating persecution (at the hands of Saul) led to a complete scattering of the members of the Church (Acts 8:1-3), but all of Saul's raging could not stop the progress of the gospel (Acts 8:4-6).

Why's Paul's Work Among the Greeks?

Jesus forewarned that His followers would be put out of the synagogues and that whoever would kill them would think that he was serving God (John 16:2). This began to come true in the persecution by Saul (afterward called Paul)—Acts 8:3, 26:9-11, & 1 Tim. 1:13. The earliest Christians, almost all Jewish, continued to meet in the synagogues. They regarded Christianity truly as the fulfillment of the Old Testament religion. At first the majority of unconverted Jews listened without rancor—until the Pharisees stirred them up.

Notice how in later times Paul (after he became converted) always went and preached first in the synagogues and places of prayer of the Jews, and preached there until persecution drove him out (Acts 13:5, 13:14, 14:1, 16:13).

With the conversion of Paul (Acts 9 & 10), Jesus Christ brought into the Church a man of great *zeal*, and the best of education. He had been trained "at the feet of Gamaliel" who was regarded as the greatest Jewish teacher of the day. Christ called Paul (or Saul) to be a special "apostle to the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15, 26:16, Romans 11:13). But he was also chosen to aid in the major mission of the Church, too, that of reaching the House of ISRAEL (notice carefully Acts 9:15). Years later, tradition states, after preaching all over the Greek-speaking world (Rom. 15:19) and after going to Spain (verse 29) Paul went on even into BRITAIN.

Even though Paul had a special responsibility to the Gentiles he always went first to the Jews (Rom. 1:16, 2:9-10, Acts 13:42-48). He and Barnabas always went to the larger cities in the Gentile areas. Here they expected to find significant numbers of Jews.

Being of equal rank, when Paul and Barnabas found themselves in disagreement as to how best to continue the work in their area, they separated (Acts 15:36-41). Barnabas then continued his work to the Gentiles in the area of Cyprus and Egypt. Of his later work we hear next to nothing. Probably not a great many Gentile converts were made in those areas. And there is a reason!

Why did Paul's work prosper in Greece while Barnabas' work in Egypt did not? The answer to this question lies in the nature of the special purpose Christ was working out through Paul. What was that purpose? Jesus Christ knew the days His gospel would have free course within the Roman Empire were limited. The true Church would soon be expelled. For long ages, it would have to exist beyond the

reach of the long arm of the Roman government. To enable that Church to read His Word, something would have to be provided to preserve it. That was a people to preserve (in the Roman world) the New Testament through those difficult times! That people would be Greek. They had to be people not to be persecuted from place to place, but remaining in their homeland, their possessions—including the New Testament—relatively safe from destruction.

Unlike God's Church, they must be a PART OF THIS WORLD, yet with "Christian" background and tradition. Not being themselves converted, they must nevertheless cherish and take pride in the original Greek New Testament. Their mission would be to treasure, preserve and copy the Scripture message—word for word and letter by letter—through the long dark night of the Middle Ages. It was NOT essential that they believe it.

All this Jesus Christ knew, and prepared for, when He began by the Apostle Paul what was to be essentially a one or two generation work in the Greek world. Christ knew the false church, then arising, would be centered in Egypt and Rome. Hundreds of corrupt Egyptian and "Western" (Roman—influenced) manuscripts prove Jesus was right. And even those were kept hidden lest people should read them! That is why Paul was sent to the Greek Gentiles. That is why thousands of Greeks were converted and many congregations established.

But Paul knew the Greek nation could not long remain faithful to the truth (Acts 20:29). With the great falling away prophesied (2 Thes. 2:3), these congregations would be taken over by that great false church which was even then at work (verse 7) through men *masquerading* as Jesus' ministers (2 Cor. 11:13-15). But the Greeks would still preserve the true inspired Greek New Testament. However, even after about 30 years from the Church's inception, "many thousands"—

probably the majority—of the members of the Church were Jewish (Acts 21:20).

What Was Peter's Job?

So what happened to the apostles? What was the main commission given to the Twelve? They were called specifically to go to the "lost sheep of the House of Israel" (see Mat. 10:2-6). But to do this they would have to leave Israel! For only one tribe—the Jews (house of Judah) along with two other tribes (Levi and Benjamin) of the original 12 tribes of Israel—had ever returned to Israel from an earlier captivity. The other tribes of Israel (Joseph, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Dan, Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun) were scattered about. So the apostles would have to leave the land of Israel and travel abroad in order to reach them.

When Paul returned to Jerusalem in about 38 A.D. he only found Peter (out of the original 12) still there (Gal. 1:18-19)! The James mentioned here (in the book of Galations) is the "Lord's (half) brother," also mentioned in Mat. 13:55. He was not one of the original 12, although he had become an apostle. As late as the last six months of Jesus' life, James did not believe in Him (John 7:5-8). In about 42 A.D. when King Herod martyred James, the bother of John, Peter was still in Jerusalem but the rest were long gone! When Paul again went up to Jerusalem in about 49 A.D. he once again found Peter (Cephas), James (the Lord's brother)—and John. Now it was John who was temporarily at headquarters in Jerusalem.

It is evident that most of the apostles had designated responsibilities elsewhere, which were occasionally interrupted either by trips to or temporary tours of duty at headquarters. Peter was most often at Jerusalem after the first 12 years in which the Syro-Palestinian area had been thoroughly covered. But this does not mean that Peter settled back on an

ecclesiastical throne and never left the city. As we have already noted Peter journeyed to Samaria, Joppa, and other places around Israel, and Gal. 2:11 shows Peter traveling to Antioch. Therefore, it's fairly evident, that part of Peter's job among the 12 was to travel around and to coordinate the Work of the Church to the House of Israel and the Jews in the Near East.

The Church usually sent out men by twos (Luke 10:1 & Acts 15:39). On Peter's first trip John accompanied him (Acts 8:14). Jesus Christ from the beginning designed John to be the one to supervise the whole Church after all the other apostles were dead (John 21:22-23). This does NOT mean that Peter or John was ever the head of the church or in a pontifical office over the other apostles! *Notice!* Peter and John were *sent by the apostles* collectively under Christ's inspiration! (Acts 8:14).

Nor was the apostle Peter at Rome! It was another Simon, also called a Peter (Simon Magus), who went to Rome. Rome was not a Christian headquarters at all! When Paul wrote to the Romans in about 56 A.D. there wasn't even an organized congregation there to which to write! The apostle Peter most assuredly was not there. Paul devotes a whole chapter to personal greetings to individuals (Chapter 16) yet never once mentions Peter. What a slap in the face that would be if Peter were there!

Yet some today claim a "Peter" arrived in Rome in 45 A.D., but *that Peter was NOT* the apostle whom Jesus baptized. There were scattered Christians in south Italy (Rom. 28:14-15) as well as in Rome, but at the time there were no organized congregations in either area, outside of family worship in PRIVATE HOMES. And even much later, after persecution and Roman-Jewish strife had virtually ended the work in the Palestine area, Peter was at Babylon on the Euphrates (1 Pet. 5:13)—where thousands of Jews still lived, descended

from those anciently carried there captive by Nebuchadnezzar.

Where Did the Twelve Apostles Go?

So where did the 12 Apostles go? As mentioned earlier—to the “lost sheep of the House of Israel.” But most of the Israelites were NOT in Israel. Not since the ancient Assyrians had deported them. So where were they? Let us notice where the Apostles *went* to find the answer!

As a headquarters apostle, Peter had also a certain responsibility toward the whole Church. In fulfilling this overall responsibility he wrote two epistles to congregations abroad (1st and 2nd Peter). In this first epistle he addressed provinces that were in northern and central Asia Minor (Turkey of today) along the southern shores of the Black Sea. They were non-Greek areas. The Galatia mentioned here is NORTHERN Galatia, not the southern Galatia Paul visited and to which he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians.

Archaeology has proven northern Galatia was non-Greek in language and culture. Who lived in these provinces? Peter writes to people called “strangers” scattered throughout that land. It was not their homeland. Now compare 1 Peter 2:10 with Hosea 1:10-2:1. Clearly both references are speaking of the same people—ISRAEL! In Peter’s day this region was a chief dwelling place of the “lost” tribes of Israel—brother tribes to the Jews (who were the tribe of Judah).

Peter not only wrote to these people from Babylon, he visited them in person. As overall coordinator of the Church, he met and conferred with his brother Andrew there. This region was greatly affected by the teaching of the apostles. And the effect remained for at least two generations. About 112 A.D., Pliny the younger, governor of Bithynia, wrote to Roman Emperor Trajan that the temples of the old gods were almost forsaken and Christians were everywhere a multitude!

James, the Lord's brother—another headquarters apostle—also wrote an epistle to all the 12 tribes, wherever they were scattered (James 1:1). Shortly after he wrote this epistle, James was slain—martyred—at the Temple in Jerusalem, about 62 A.D.

In addition to those in Bithynia and nearby, other Israelites were widely dispersed on three continents. But already, a major homeland was BRITAIN. Here Peter next turned his steps. We are told he spent much time in Britain! We do not know exactly when Peter died but it was probably before 69 A.D. But in 80 or 81 A.D. Anacletus, bishop of Rome, consecrated a tomb for "Peter" at Rome. Whoever was really buried there, this proves that the real apostle Peter was no longer alive—had indeed been gone for some time—or the fraud would soon have been exposed.

After Peter's death, the supervision of the whole Church under Christ was given to John, the last of the three "pillars" of headquarters (Gal. 2:9). He too wrote general Epistles to the Church at large—1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and the Book of Revelation. Such scanty information as we possess suggests that John only returned to the region of the eastern Mediterranean after many years absence. We hear nothing of him between the 40's and the 90's A.D. He may have been in Gaul, where French tradition declares Mary came (see John 19:26-27).

History tells us Peter's brother Andrew had the primary charge of the northern Asia Minor area to which Peter wrote. Andrew went all around the eastern and northeastern coasts of the Black Sea as far as the Crimea. Philip too worked in these areas, and far into Scythia.

Another apostle Philip is often confused with the first. Sometimes he is called an evangelist. We first meet this very zealous man as a deacon in Acts 6:5. He labored among the Grecian population on both sides of the Aegean Sea and in

Gaul.

Bartholomew (Nathaniel) worked among Israelites then living in Cilicia, Armenia, and beyond the Caspian. Thomas likewise went to those who still lived in the vast areas of the Iranian plateau. The northeastern part of this region was often called India in ancient times. Matthew (Levi) reached many in Scythia, on the west coast of the Caspian Sea, and in “Ethiopia” (an area of dark skinned people in India).

Thaddeus Lebbeus ministered in upper Mesopotamia, including Assyria proper. Farther west, Matthias’ sphere was Macedonia, Dacia (modern Romania), and areas in central Europe. Still farther, James of Alphaeus is said to have gone to Spain, Britain, and Ireland, while Simon the Zealot was in North Africa, in Britain, and other islands.

End of the Apostolic Era

The first GOVERNMENT persecution of the Church was initiated by Nero, the mad Roman Emperor, in 64 A.D. He falsely accused Christians of starting a devastating fire that destroyed a large part of the capital city. The infant Christian congregation at Rome was virtually destroyed. Nero’s government had in 61 A.D. released the apostle Paul after two years at Rome. Now Paul was seized again (2 Tim. 4:13), spoke personally before Nero himself, and in 68 A.D. was beheaded.

Meanwhile, in Judea the unconverted Jewish nation had risen in rebellion to drive out the Romans from Palestine. A Roman army was sent to Palestine to crush the rebellion. But the Roman army lingered outside the walls of Jerusalem, giving God’s people—the Church in Jerusalem—a chance to flee to the mountains and on to Pella, a small town just beyond the Jordan River. Behind them the Roman armies closed in rapidly on Jerusalem. The Jews were starved into submission. Jerusalem fell after horrible suffering. The

Temple of God was razed to the ground! And the Church of God everywhere in Roman lands was silenced. No meetings were allowed after 69 A.D. out of fear of revolt after the death of two Caesars already that year. Thus ended, after just four decades, the work of the Apostolic Church in Jerusalem!

Candlestick Removed From Ephesus!

The Pella congregation still called itself the Jerusalem church. It's chief elder was still pastor of "Jerusalem."

In the first decades, as congregations and conversions multiplied, the distant churches had very frequently appealed to the authority of the mother church in Jerusalem. But now a period of *declining zeal* set in for the whole Church. This condition was foretold in the prophetic messages to the seven churches (Rev. 2 & 3).

Jesus Christ highly commended the first ERA of the Church—the Ephesian Era—for its labor and patience (Rev. 2:2, 2:3, 2:6). He also stated it had to face FALSE APOSTLES, men whom Jesus Christ had not ordained! This Church era WAS COMMENDED by Christ because they could not *bear (or endure) those who were evil, and for TESTING those who said they were apostles* but were NOT—and found them to be LIARS. These people whom the TRUE MEMBERS could not bear were Nicolaitans (verse 6—I will talk more about these people later).

But Jesus Christ did have something against this particular Church era. They had left their first love and Christ threatened to remove this Church era out of its place if it didn't awaken from its lethargy (Rev. 2:5 & 1:20). This was done physically, in type—even before the prophecy was written, when the Jerusalem headquarters church was transferred to Pella. It was done spiritually when the authority and respect in which this mother church had been held was stripped from

it in 135 A.D., after a second Jewish war with Rome.

At the time John penned these words, Jesus already knew the performance record of the church at Ephesus. That church congregation was a type of the entire church in apostolic times. The Ephesus Church had let down. It had not continued its work after 69 A.D. to all nations (Mat. 28:19-20). Before 68 A.D. Paul found it necessary to warn even some MINISTERS to be more diligent (Col. 4:17). Even the evangelist Timothy, his most faithful helper, was in need of being stirred up (compare 2 Tim. 1:6 with Phil. 2:19-20). The Church and *MOST of its ministers* seem to have acquired "lazy bones." Perhaps it was because they had decided Christ's return was not imminent (Mat. 24:48)! Are we, or are YOU, making that same mistake today?

An early secondary headquarters of the Ephesian era was at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Barnabas was sent there to be its first minister (Acts 11:22). However, trouble soon arose. Eusebius' Chronicle gives Peter the credit for "establishing" it in 42 A.D. Another account tells why—he went there to withstand Simon Magus! Paul, Barnabas, and other leaders continued to work in Gentile lands from this headquarters in Antioch.

Later on Ephesus became the headquarters of the Ephesian era, to which it gave its name (Acts 19:1, 19:10, 19:17, Tim. 1:3). It was more than just a coincidence that Christ chose Ephesus to represent the first organization of the Church. John, last survivor of the original 12 apostles, and the Philip who had originally been a deacon, both died in Ephesus. (The original Apostle Philip, one of the 12, was buried at Hierapolis of Phrygia, according to Polycrates).

About 90 A.D. Emperor Domitian began the second imperial persecution. John was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea where he received the Revelation and the command to write it down. Probably the reason Christ al-

lowed John to be imprisoned was to give him the leisure to write the remaining greatly needed parts of the New Testament. But like Nero's persecution, Domitian's was local and spasmodic. Most of the slain were in Italy and in Rome itself. Once again, TRUE Christianity, if any, was driven *from* Rome.

The apostle John, when finally released from Patmos, returned to Ephesus. Here he trained Polycarp who later carried forward the work of John and Philip. *POLYCARP and later POLYCRATES are the last genuine leaders of the Church in this part of the world of which we have any record.*

But what had previously happened in Ephesus, when once the STRONG HAND of Paul was removed? Ephesus and all the local congregations in the surrounding Roman province of Asia, *were soon turned AGAINST PAUL personally, by false teachers and disloyal MINISTERS!* These men sought power and prestige for themselves (Acts 20:30, 1 Tim. 1:3, 2 Tim. 1:15). Many of these detached groups were permanently drawn away from the true Church. Ultimately, the "mystery of iniquity" already in operation long before (2 Thes. 2:7), gathered them all in by posing as the UNIVERSAL mother church of Christianity! Jesus Christ ALLOWED this because Ephesus left its first love. Fully able to protect His own, He LET the wolves devour those who had become LUKEWARM. (It happened in Pella as well, as we will shortly see). This is why John, years later, wrote the way he did! He was CONTINUALLY WARNING OF FALSE MEMBERS AND FALSE MINISTERS IN THE CHURCH! (See 1 John 2:19, 2:26-27, 4:1, & 3 John 1:9-10).

Even the literal city of Ephesus suffered the stern sentence of the LIVING Christ. "If you will not repent, I will move your candlestick out of its place." In later years, the site was completely deserted. The population moved to a higher location more than a mile to the northeast, which is today

called Ayassoluk. That name itself is nothing more than a corruption of the Greek words for "St. John, spokesman for God!" It stands thus attested—in prophecy fulfilled—that John did speak for God!

Leadership Shifts to Smyrna

At neighboring Smyrna, **Polycarp** presided over the Church for half a century after John's death. Polycarp stood up **BOLDLY** for the truth, though by this time the true Church in his area had dwindled to almost nothing. History relates that, following the example of Peter, Paul, and John, he wrote many letters to congregations and individuals, though all these have perished, save one doubtful exception.

In old age—he was about 85—Polycarp journeyed to Rome. His mission was not a success. He hoped to convince the bishop of Rome, Anicetus, to observe God's **PASSOVER** instead of Easter, but to no prevail. The following year (155 A.D.) Polycarp was burnt to death by a mob in Smyrna.

The name Smyrna (the 2nd era of God's Church: Rev. 2:8-11) means bitter. And bitter, indeed, was the era of the Church that it symbolizes! In the words of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "The steady progress of the heretical movement in spite of all opposition was a cause of deep sorrow to Polycarp, so that in the last years of his life the words were constantly on his lips, 'Oh good God, to what times hast thou spared me, that I must suffer such things!'" Such things as Anicetus—who claimed he was human head of the *Catholic (Universal) Church of God*—and **PAGAN EASTER**, being observed all over in churches **CLAIMING** to be "Christian." These Polycarp **HAD** to allow. For, indeed, there was nothing he could do to stop it. Perhaps even he did not see clearly that this **APOSTASY** was never part of the true Church—but was a **CONSPIRACY** that wormed its way **INTO** the local congregations to gain a following after itself!

The struggle—over observing *Satan's pagan holidays* instead of God's holy days—yet dragged on though Polycarp was dead. Now, it was **Polycrates** of Ephesus resisting pagan pretenses of Victor at Rome (190-198 A.D.), but to no avail. Victor (bishop of Rome) not only pretended his vast Easter-keeping organization was Christ's Church but arrogated to himself authority to “excommunicate” or “disfellowship” those in Asia who still kept the Passover.

With this generation the true Church in the Greek-speaking world had virtually disappeared. With Polycrates, its last candle flickered out. The Synagogue of Satan was now triumphant in the world!

Few people understand the real origin of the Synagogue of Satan. Salvation is of (beginning with and proceeding from) the Jews (John 4:22). Even in Old Testament times there was a people (and religion) which CLAIMED to be Jews and were not (John 4:12). Josephus, the Jewish historian, reports the Samaritans always pretended to be Jews when it favored them. Read the origin of the Babylonian Samaritans and their hybrid pagan religion in 2 Kings 17:18-33. They brought the worship of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar or Easter (Succoth-benoth) with them. From these Samaritans, under Simon Magus' leadership—he was the FALSE PETER of Rome—sprang the false church or *Synagogue of Satan* that triumphed in the world (Acts 8:9-23). God's Word plainly points out that the adversary of God's Church during the Smyrna era would be the Synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9).

The Church of “Poor People”

We have now traced the progress and decay of the Church in the Greek-speaking Roman province of Asia, where the original “seven churches” were located. We have seen also the later complete fade-out of the Smyrna era (the 2nd era) in this region. But we are ahead of our story. We

must return to the predominantly Jewish Church in Israel and Syria.

In the time of the first Apostles, the world regarded the true Church as only a sect (Acts 24:5). It also nicknamed them “Nazarenes.”

Jesus Christ characterized the 2nd era of His Church—the Smyrna Era—as “poor” in the eyes of the world, but they were actually rich (Rev. 2:9). They were rich because the LIVING Jesus Christ continued to guide and empower them—to prevent His Church from turning aside to false doctrine (Rev. 2:8, 2:10, Mat. 28:19-20). The world now called these people “Ebionites,” which means “paupers—poor, destitute!” This small Church was despised and rejected by the world and the religious organizations of the day. And no wonder! Even the apostle Paul admitted he was called a heretic—that’s how the world viewed it (Acts 24:5, 24:14)! (And that’s how the world view’s God’s true Church even today!).

Instead of being any longer a part of the apostolic “Ephesus” era (the 1st era of the Church), the time had come for the “Smyrna” era (the 2nd era of the Church) to begin—the “poor people” or Ebionites.

Here’s how it had come to pass. After the martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus, Simeon son of Cleopas (Luke 24:18 & John 19:25) became presiding elder in the Headquarters congregation. Through the declining years of the Ephesian era, Simeon, like John, lived on and on, as if he would live forever. Finally, in 107 A.D. in the reign of the Emperor Trajan, at a reported age of 120, Simeon was crucified. Thirteen more elders—all circumcised Jews—rules the Jerusalem-Pella church in rapid succession. Then, about 135 A.D., came Jesus Christ’s time to SEPARATE a LIVING “Smyrna” remnant *from the lukewarm and unspiritual* who clung to it!

The stubborn Palestinian Jews had revolted in 132 A.D. for the second time. The exasperated Romans this time completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem. They then founded a new Roman colony, of Gentiles only, on the site, renamed Aelia Capitolina. Jews were forbidden to approach it. This included, of course, Christian Jews of Pella.

And now was shown just how **WORLDLY** and spiritually **DROWSY** that church had become. Most of the Pella congregation rejected God's method of government and elected to themselves (2 Tim. 4:3) a Gentile—Marcus—to be their leader. Thus the majority found means to return to Jerusalem. There they became part of that *other religious organization* which tried to be at the same time both Jewish and Gentile (Rev. 2:9). Marcus proceeded to declare **DISFELLOWSHIPED** those **FEW** who remained faithful to the **TRUE DOCTRINES** of Jesus Christ! The Smyrna Era now began.

The Apostle Paul prophesied that this would happen — that men would turn away from the **TRUTH**, and be turned aside to fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4). And this same thing happened even earlier among the Greek congregations (3 John 1:9-10), where *a pastor IN the church spoke maliciously against the Apostle John and put the **LOYAL MEMBERS OUT** of the church!* Jude spoke about this same thing in about 66 A.D. (Jude 1:19). Within a few decades only a remnant was left. Hegesippus and Eusebius (Greek writers) tell us of faithful Zokker and James, grandsons of this Jude. In the reign of Domitian, Zokker and James were called before the Roman governor, interrogated and contemptuously dismissed—being deemed unworthy of further notice. Yes, the world now viewed the **FAITHFUL FEW** with contempt!

Ebionites in History

It was with contempt that the faithful **FEW**—truly a “little

flock”—were called Ebionites or “paupers” in reference to their SUPPOSED unbelievable stupidity or naiveté in believing the Bible. *They clung to the law of God!* The world has nothing in common with anyone who believes in OBEYING God. The world calls that STUPID!

The large PROFESSING Christian church now branded the true Christians as “heretics.” Even the name “Nazarene” was considered too honorable for them now! They still kept their headquarters at Pella, and spread themselves into villages near Damascus. There is also record of a small congregation in Boerea, now called Aleppo. Traces of Ebionites may be discovered here as late as the 4th century.

Hegesippus, afterward a famous Catholic, was once an Ebionite. He copied the example of Marcus. Hegesippus yearned to FOLLOW THE CROWD. So, determined to find the majority right, he convinced himself by finding throughout the Empire in every city the same false doctrines taught and mislabeled “Christian.” *It was he who originally drew up the list of Roman bishops, on which Anicetus and his successors—down to the Pope today—based their claim to be the successors of a Peter!* But it was not the true apostle, Simon Peter, who was in Rome; but it was a counterfeit Peter—Simon Magus—who was in Rome and of whom the Roman bishops trace their succession.

We know but little of Ebionite history. Because their own writings have perished, our information must come from their enemies. And here, clearly, truth is well-tempered with lies! Eusebius claims they rejected the virgin birth and preexistence of Christ, and the writings of Paul. But this was not true of all, for the next age of God’s True Church—revived in the place where migrating Ebionites disappear—accepted these truths! Their very distinguishing name became Paulician! It was the elaborate theology of Catholicism and Gnosticism which most “Ebionites” rejected! The intermi-

nable arguments whether God is *one person or three*—whether Jesus Christ was God or man (He was both—God in the flesh!). And a FALSE version of “Pauline” theology which claims the LAW was abolished! (Using Paul’s name to put over false doctrine began early—2 Thes. 2:2).

A rigid splinter group, also called Ebionite, was indeed antagonistic to Paul. And a third group labeled “Ebionites” had accepted some Gnostic doctrines. As the second century wore on, indeed, a considerable number had EXCHANGED the SIMPLE creed of Jesus Christ for a strange BLEND of Christianity and Essenism. All these were carnal-minded sects labeled by the same name in church history as God’s Church. In *every age* the Church has its UNCONVERTED “MEMBERS.” But there were a FEW FAITHFUL, who really constituted the Church!

What Became of the Church Jesus Built?

As stated previously, the Christian Church in Judea fled to Pella in 69 A.D. From that date the organized proclaiming of Christ's TRUE gospel ceased! For the next 100 years Church history is virtually a blank. "Scanty and suspicious" are the records which remain from this period, says the historian Gibbon (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*). But why?

The "Lost Century"

It was the incredible "Lost Century" of Church history! And when again records commence with the earliest "church fathers" we behold a "Christian" church in most vital points of doctrine and custom the very ANTITHESIS of the Church of the original apostles. Was this new and different church a continuation of that Church Jesus built? Emphatically not! This was, in fact, *a different church entirely!* It was a deliberate COUNTERFEIT of the true Church Jesus built! It stole

the name of Christ, and called itself by His name! The goal of this *false church* was to dominate the whole world by deception. Its leaders were out to subvert even Caesar. To that end it had established its headquarters in ROME.

Meanwhile, the true Church—after its first generation—became nearly invisible to the world. A FEW scattered individuals, persecuted, living in poverty, obscurity, and contempt were all that constituted the 2nd era of God's Church. Enemies called them "Ebionites," though not all "Ebionites" were really Christians. This 2nd age of the New Testament Church is portrayed in Revelation 2:8-11. It is typified by the local congregation of the Church in Smyrna.

Why Persecution?

Already we have seen two periods of persecution on Christians even during the 1st century. But both these persecutions were local. They even fell heavily on the developing Catholic Church in Rome as well. The 2nd century was similar to the 1st in this regard—in that persecution (of both true Christians and counterfeit Christians) was sporadic and local in nature. In all this, true Christians were in jeopardy along with the false! Many migrated. They knew that Christ counseled flight (Mat. 10:23 & 24:16).

Persecution by State Church Begins!

But Christ foresaw that the real persecution would come from religion and not from government (Mat. 10:17, 23:29, 23:34). Even more than governors, pseudoreligious men fear for their positions of influence over others. Especially do they persecute the *real truth*—BECAUSE IT CONVICTS THEM OF INIQUITY!

Christ revealed that the major part of the persecution on the "Smyrna" Church was to come in a specified period of ten years duration (see Rev. 2:10 and the "day for a year"

principle in Num. 14:34). This prediction has been completely misunderstood by most people. Most everyone has sought to apply it to the wrong church! Eusebius mentions that the ten years were fulfilled in the last great pre-Constantine persecution in 303-313. It lasted on Rome only three years, but in the Eastern Roman Empire it lasted ten years, and that is where God's people were!

But the true Church was not yet stamped out of the Roman Empire. That was accomplished when the false church first gained the power to persecute others! That power was given when Constantine established Catholic "Christianity" as STATE RELIGION by the Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D., and then issued edicts favoring it and anathematizing all others.

Constantine was not incensed against solely and especially the true Church. He was against all who would not join with the church he had chosen. And that certainly included all that remained of the true Church within the Roman Empire! Eusebius, always a supporter of Constantine, explicitly states that Constantine put every other church out of the Roman Empire, or exterminated them—in his lifetime, beginning in 325 A.D. Constantine himself was not a Christian. He was a worshiper of the SUN god, who foresaw how political advantage might be reaped by allying himself with "Christianity." He allied himself with the faction which offered the most immediate benefits—the strongest ally. That faction happened to be reigned over by Sylvester, bishop of Rome. *He, too, observed the day of the sun.* Sylvester could become head over all Christendom—under the Emperor, of course! Not for years, until nearing his death, did Constantine himself formally become a "Christian" by undergoing baptism.

Thus, by the "marriage" of a popularized form of Roman Samaritanism with SUN worship did SUNDAY Christian-

ity become dominant! Each party remained separate, distinct, each striving to GET more from each other. Neither did the “woman” obey any husband!

1260 Years in the Wilderness!

As protector and favorer of a COUNTERFEIT form of “Christianity,” Constantine forced everyone, pagan or Christian, either into conformity or exile. The true Church chose exile! As shown earlier, true Christians are instructed to flee whenever they found themselves in persecution.

The headquarters Church at Jerusalem had been given a special sign—armies encompassing Jerusalem—to signify the time to flee from Judea. But that flight from Jerusalem was only a forerunner of two other great flights of the Church (Rev. 12:6 & 12:14). Jesus prophesied that the true Church (symbolized as a pure “woman”) would flee to the “wilderness” for 1260 years (Rev. 12:6 and once again using the day-for-a-year prophetic principle). This flight to the “wildness” began in 325 A.D.

But what of the members and children of members of the Smyrna era during those years of persecution? What became of the remnant of Ebionites who continued faithful in Syria? As decades rolled by, as persecution raged, they gradually melted away. Some apostatized, some were martyred. But most migrated—going north and east into Armenia and Cappadocia, the farthest bounds of the Roman Empire. Other Christians found places to hide from Rome far to the west.

The “Pergamos” Era Begins

Now let's advance to the 3rd of the messages to the “seven churches.” This message was directed to the Church at Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17). Pergamos was the original seat of Roman civil government in the province of Asia (west-

ern Asia Minor). But long before, the city had already become a seat of Satan (Rev. 2:13) when one of the chief colleges of the ancient Chaldean mysteries migrated there after Babylon fell in 539 B.C.

Pergamos had her martyrs—represented in the prophecy as “Antipas” (Rev. 2:13). Antipas is merely a short form of the Greek name Antipater. It may be freely translated “AGAINST THE POPE!” Latin pater is equivalent to modern Italian papa—“Pope” in English!

Satan’s seat in the city of Pergamos was only a type. In 133 B.C., Attalus, last god-king of Pergamos, had willed all his powers to Rome. This became the legal basis of the pagan Emperors’ title of PONTIFEX MAXIMUS—HIGH PRIEST OF THE WORLD! Then in 378 A.D., Emperor Gratian conferred the title on Damasus, bishop (pope) of Rome!

Meanwhile, Constantine had built and transferred the capital of the Eastern part of the Empire to the city of Constantinople on the Bosphorus. Constantinople was now the place from which the Eastern Roman Empire was hereafter ruled. So—in the Pergamos era—“Satan’s seat” was established in Constantinople as well as in Rome.

The religion of Rome was simultaneously directed by her “Pontifex Maximus” through the secular power of a vast so-called “Christian” church state. It ordered that any religion which would not conform should be exterminated. These two facets of Satan’s earthly government—the political and the religious combined—spelled persecution for the “Pergamos” Church.

The Pergamos Church Era was a different kind of era. An age in which the true Church was actively pursued, and had to remain in hiding. No longer was any part of the true Church associated, as even Polycrates had been, with any part of “*The Catholic Church of God.*” The great conspiracy

had succeeded—it had stolen the name of Christ, and the name of God's Church. No longer need it acknowledge the existence of the genuine Church, NO LONGER PRETEND TO BE OF IT!

The Church in Armenia

The scattered remnants of God's Church were now mainly in Armenia. It was the one relatively safe and yet civilized area nearby. Most of Armenia, up until the piecemeal Islamic conquest in the 7th and 8th centuries, was nominally under the authority of the Emperor at Constantinople, but rather loosely controlled. Greek and Armenian Catholics were frequently at odds with one another. In this setting, God's people maintained a precarious existence for several centuries.

It was about 650 A.D. when God raised up an inspired leader to correct His people and to spread the gospel. *Constantine of Mananali* (not to be confused with the Emperor Constantine) was a well-educated man. He was given a gift of portions of the Bible. Upon studying it, he was utterly amazed at the truth he found revealed in it. Soon he was preaching, and with the help of trained evangelists was ministering to tens of thousands now being converted and put into the true Church.

“Antipas” in the 7th Century

Constantine of Mananali plainly taught that the Pope was NOT the representative of God, that Peter was NOT the ONLY apostle given the keys of the kingdom as the Popes claimed, but that ALL the original apostles and ALL their *true* successors shared in the knowledge and authority to guide Christians into the way of life. This man was indeed “anti— (against the) pope.” And he was martyred, true to the prophecy! After 27 years of fruitful ministry, he was stoned to

death in 684.

The reason God's minister and apostle, Constantine of Mananali, had to die, was because Jesus Christ had certain things against this Church (Rev. 2:14-16). God's Church of the Pergamos era had been on a moral and spiritual downtrend. All of Constantine's labors had not sufficed to reverse this decline. MANY who CLAIMED to be members of God's true Church were *not really converted!* These were ones who cleaved to the Church with flatteries—that is, in INSINCERITY! (Dan. 11:34—see especially NIV & NRSV). They held the false “doctrine of Balaam” (Rev. 2:14).

Jesus Christ, through John, addressed *those led by the Holy Spirit, who really constituted the Church*, the body of Christ. He STERNLY WARNED them to repent of ALLOWING those carnal minds with their pagan doctrines to assemble with them. Why? Because Jesus Christ knew what the result of this coexistence with evil would inevitably be! Such *foolish and improper fellowship* could only lead to the total corruption and resultant destruction of the Church! But the Church did not repent. So, to shake up and wake them up, Christ allowed His apostle Constantine to die. Here are the circumstances of his death.

An officer, Simeon, was sent by the Emperor at Constantinople (also known as Byzantium) to destroy the leaders of God's Church. Simeon offered to spare any who would themselves stone their leader. And it was one of those very men, who should have been disfellowshipped long before, who cast the first stone! So greatly impressed was the officer Simeon by the fortitude and sincerity of many, and especially the faith and courage with which he saw Constantine die, that he was convinced these were God's people. Three years later, he completed his duty at the Emperor's court and returned to join the humble people of

God's Church. He was placed by Christ at their head and carried on the ministry of Constantine for another three years, until he too was martyred. He was burned at the stake—accused to the Emperor by that same man!

Yet for all this, the Church did not cleanse itself of those who held the doctrine of Balaam. But who was Balaam? And what is his doctrine?

What Was the Doctrine of Balaam?

The name Balaam in Hebrew means, “conqueror of the people.” It is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek “Nicolas.” Both words denoted the office of Nimrod, dictator and arch-rebel, who first after the Flood established MAN'S political and religious government based on false principles, in opposition to the government of God. This Balaam was Nimrod's successor in that office. He was the greatest pagan prophet of his time—the PONTIFEX MAXIMUS, the chief oracle of paganism.

Note that this man's headquarters—1500 years before Christ—was called *Pethor* (Num. 22:5-7). And who today, in the same office, is headquartered in (St.) *Peter's*? The pope of course!

In Balaam's day, when the king of Moab was desperate, there was no one higher to whom he could go. That is why he sent all the way to Pethor in Mesopotamia, a place far to the north of his own country, and near the border of modern Turkey. He completely passed up his own priests, magicians, and astrologers in his own nation.

When the emissaries of Balak, king of Moab, asked Balaam to curse Israel, Balaam asked God if he might be allowed to do it (Num. 22). Perhaps you are thinking, “Would a PAGAN high priest do a thing like this?” Notice! Even Satan himself must ask God's permission to bring a curse on those under God's protection (Job 1:9-12 & 2:4-5)!

God's answer to Balaam's evil suggestion was a resounding "NO!" (Num. 22:12). But Balaam was NOT REALLY willing to accept God's answer (Num. 22:18-19, and all of chapters 22-24), instead he was determined to go as far in the way of evil as God would permit. Balaam wanted to go just as far in the wrong way as he dared. *This is Satan's way!* Beware that YOU don't ever try to go just as far as you think you can get away with, without actually bringing God's sudden wrath down on YOU! *That is sin! That was Balaam's way! That is Satan's way!* And God judges those who practice such as worthy of death (see Num. 31:8 & 31:15-17)!

But there is even more to Balaam's doctrine. If you read Numbers 31:15-17 and all of chapter 25 you will see that it was Balaam who taught Balak how to tempt the Israelites into sinning, and thus to make them bring a curse on themselves, even though God would not allow him by the power of Satan to curse them directly. Balaam doctrine is to commit sin whenever sin would seem to be profitable, or pleasant, or when you thought you could get away with it—and to TEACH OTHERS TO SIN. To have a FORM of religion—profess high ideals—yet not live by them, but instead to *take part in the ways of the world!*

Jude 1:11 and 2 Peter 2:15 flatly state that Balaam was a false prophet whose god was his GREED. His counsel to Balak (king of Moab) was to get God's people to take part in the sacrifices and worship of pagan gods and to commit fornication. This was exactly the teaching of some *false teachers* who had crept INTO the congregations of the true Church in the Pergamos era (Rev. 2:14)!

Balaamites and Nicolaitans

The Pergamos Era (the 3rd era of God's true Church) also had those who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. As mentioned previously, the Nicolaitans also existed in the days

of the “Ephesian” Church (which rightfully HATED their deeds!—Rev. 2:6). So who were they and what were their deeds?

The Catholic Encyclopedia says that these Nicolaitans “led lives of unrestrained indulgence.” They “claimed to have derived from NICHOLAS the doctrine of promiscuity.” Who was Nicholas? Not the deacon Nicolas of Acts 6:5 as some have supposed. This Nicholas of Antioch (as he was called) is identified in Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible with a Bishop Nicholas of SAMARIA, a heretic of Simon Magus’ company (Acts 8:9-24)! But why was he called Nicholas “of Antioch?” Eusebius gives us a clue. Before Simon Magus went to Rome—probably around 42 A.D.—he was in Antioch for a while. Eusebius tells us that the Apostle Peter was sent to Antioch (Gal. 2:11) to counteract the poison of Simon Magus. From there he (Simon Magus) went to ROME. It is possible that the two names refer to the same man and Nicholas of Samaria was Simon himself. Or, Nicholas was Simon’s successor after Simon left for Rome. The Nicolaitans, at any rate, are identified with the COUNTERFEIT “CHRISTIANITY” influenced by Simon Magus.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans was one of NO LAW! Their doctrine and the doctrine of Balaam sprang from the same source. Both Balaam in the days of Moses and Simon Magus in the 1st century A.D. occupied the “office” of Nimrod. But they did differ and Christ charged the Church in Pergamos with harboring both.

The doctrine of BALAAM was the ORIGINAL, universally received religion of the area. Asia Minor (where the city of Pergamos was) comprised the very heartland and stronghold of Nimrod’s religion throughout all history to that time. The PETHOR of Balaam was right at the center of this area! And now the Church of God was centered there. Naturally, *unconverted* “members” who sat in the congregations of God’s

Church were influenced by that doctrine! They were just local people *who had never really given up the common doctrine of their ancestors.*

On the other hand, the NICOLAITANS represented the MORE RECENT ORGANIZATION—an outgrowth of the old, and practicing the same old religion, but now *masquerading as Christian*, using Christian sounding names—which had its headquarters (P-T-R) in Rome. Just as during the Ephesus era, THESE WERE ACTIVELY TRYING TO *INFILTRATE AND TAKE OVER THE CHURCH OF GOD!*

The Paulicans Were Maligned!

But the Church did have those who did not deny the TRUE FAITH (the true body of beliefs) and did HOLD FAST to the name of Christ (Rev. 2:13). The world called these “Pergamos” Christians PAULICANS, just as it called the Smyrna Christians Ebionites, and Ephesus Christians Nazarenes and heretics. In its original Armenian this word meant “a follower of wretched little Paul.” See what an opinion the world holds of those willing to *obey* God! (“And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake”—Mat. 10:22).

Their congregations, in part, were descendants of the Apostle Paul’s own converts. Many of the Church leaders of this era took the name of close associates of the Apostle Paul as their own (1 Cor. 11:1). These men were indeed the followers of Paul.

Paulicans believed that the devil is the ruler of this world (2 Cor. 4:4 & Rev. 12:9) and that human nature is dominant here on earth. They also rejected the false practice of praying to saints (or to Mary). They rejected purgatory, as well as images, PICTURES, CROSSES (which were the PAGAN symbols of the religion of Balaam as found on stones of ancient Asia Minor!), incense, and candles.

They said that monks are the agents of Satan. They ig-

nored all the fasts and feasts, especially Sunday, of the Armenian and Catholic church. They rejected infant baptism but they practiced real baptism by immersion *after genuine repentance*, and cited Jesus' age of 30 at baptism as a significant example. They knew baptism signified the death of the self.

The Paulicans taught that the same Holy Spirit was in them that had been in Christ. Their persecutors, to whom this was incomprehensible, charged that the Paulican leaders called themselves "Christs," as if it were blasphemy.

Paulican Church Government

The Paulicans claimed to be THE holy apostolic Church founded by Jesus and His apostles. They taught that the *Scripture is for the layman as much as for the minister*. THEY CONTINUALLY URGED THE PEOPLE TO CHECK THE SCRIPTURES FOR THEMSELVES! (Acts 17:10-11). They taught that every Christian should study the Scriptures for himself. They also had biblical church offices (Eph. 4:11-13 & 1 Cor. 12:28): apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Soon the higher ranks ceased to be filled though, and by the time of the later Paulicans, the *astati* (teachers) were the only surviving ministers.

The succession of ministers begun by the hands of Jesus Christ have remained unbroken in the true Church through all ages. Some of the men so ordained though may prove UNWORTHY (Judas is an example). They may be more interested in physical things than in service, or the true gospel. Among the Paulicans were men, from time to time, whose works made it obvious Jesus Christ Himself had ranked them as apostles.

End of the Paulican Era

Paulicanism became an accepted faith in a vast region

along the Taurus Mountains. But with MOST it was only a *form of religion*. Truly converted members of the true Church numbered only in the tens of thousands. Often “false brethren” who lived among God’s people were confused with the true Church.

Once again God’s people were ALLOWING MANY FALSE TEACHINGS to grow in their midst. This situation eventually LED TO PERSECUTION! When being faced with persecution MANY spiritually weak Paulicans allowed themselves the latitude of mental reservation while outwardly they agreed to the persecutors’ demands. *Once started on this road of COMPROMISE, a Christian’s conscience becomes more and more blurred!* Thus MANY accepted the doctrine of Balaam, and punishment was not long on its way!

What the Doctrine of Balaam Brought its Believers

Because the Church did not repent of its error—which grew and grew—multiple thousands perished by the sword. So carnal were the VAST MAJORITY of these Armenian people, so used to their (spiritual) “fornication”—MIXING with the politics of this world—that they soon became involved with violent military activities.

Remember, MOST of these Paulicans now merely cleaved to the Church with INSINCERITY! (Dan. 11:34). They were NOT converted! Eventually the Crusades corrupted their name to Publicans, a name strangely descriptive of their apostasy—getting involved in PUBLIC affairs! Yes, even the world knew why they were rejected by Christ!

The Great Move to Europe

During this time—Paulicans in another nearby area—became known as *Bogomils* (“friends of God”). Later on, Turkish wars in the Balkans forced Paulicans and Bogomils into

central and northwestern Europe. Writings of the early *Anabaptists* in Germany display a clear recognition of them as their spiritual ancestors. From the Anabaptists come all modern Baptists and Mennonites. In the same region, after the Mongol invasion of Armenia, came the *Athingani*. They had been linked with the Paulicans of Sergius' (801-835) day and after, and portrayed as a "LEGALISTIC" "JUDEO-CHRISTIAN" SECT (as God's true Church is often disparagingly referred to by those in the world!).

The Light in the Dark Ages

In era after era of God's Church, it is a repeated *FACT* that after a few generations the local congregations are no longer generally composed of truly converted brethren, but of *UNCONVERTED CHILDREN AND HALFHEARTED BELIEVERS* of whom *MANY GO ASTRAY INTO ERROR!* (1 Tim. 4:1 & 2 Tim. 4:4). Such were those among the Paulicans in the 8th century who began to accept demon inspired visions they called "the new prophecy" (or perhaps "new understanding").

Why does God allow such heresies to tempt the weak of His people? 1 Corinthians 11:19 tells us that "there **MUST BE DIVISIONS** among you, that those who are approved may be recognized [made evident] among you!" Those who fell away from the truth in western Europe became known as Cathars. Cathar "perfects" did not marry. The result of course was rampant fornication. Neither would they eat meat, milk, or eggs (see 1 Cor. 7:2 & 1 Tim. 4:3).

The "Wilderness" in Western Europe

The Paulicans and Bogomils came into western Europe before the year 1000. The Paulicans and Bogomils in Italy

(among whom were individuals who followed Christ) came to be called Cathars, meaning Puritans. In France, as Cathars, Publicani, Bulgars, and finally Albigenses, and in Germany (particularly around Cologne) they became what the Encyclopedia Britannica calls “the abiding background of medieval heresy.” It rightly identifies these people as “the debris of an EARLIER CHRISTIANITY,” that is, of the Pergamos Era. But Christ preserved among these people a germ of His Church in the FEW who were faithful to His rule over their lives. Such was the religious situation in western Europe at the time He chose to revitalize His spiritual Church—to raise up the *Thyatira Era* (the 4th era) to do His Work.

The Thyatira Era

One of the definitions of the Greek word Thyatira is “sweet savor of contrition,” in other words—“real repentance.” About 1104 a man from the Louise Valley (part of the Waldensian Valleys) of the Alpine regions, called PETER OF BRUYS, began to preach repentance.

Peter of Bruys taught that infant baptism was useless. He baptized people *only after real repentance*. Converted followers gathered around Peter of Bruys. God's Church was beginning to do a Work again. A spiritual gospel was once again being widely preached. The numbers of truly converted—those led by the Holy Spirit—multiplied.

After about 20 years of preaching, the false church burned Peter of Bruys alive at the stake. His disciple *Henry* now took charge and carried on the Work. Henry despised and exposed worldly ROMAN HOLIDAYS, and baptism of INFANTS. During the ministry of Peter of Bruys, God's people were nicknamed *Petrobrusians*, now they became known as *Henricians!* But their own name for themselves was “the Church of God.” Henry was eventually thrown in prison and he died there in 1149.

After Henry's death the world nearly lost sight of God's Church. The Work of the Thyatira era went into temporary eclipse, lacking organization and temporarily without overall human leadership.

Last Works to be More than the First

In ancient times Thyatira was a city of merchants and weavers (Acts 16:14). Interesting enough the man God next chose to lead His Church was a wealthy merchant in Lyons, the weaving capital of Europe! As always it began in the very smallest way. The world scarcely noticed. *Peter Waldo* began to preach in 1161. Like Peter of Bruys he is said to have come from Dauphiny.

In the district of Walden, Peter Waldo's family must have known of God's Church. The sudden death of a friend at Waldo's side shocked him into serious consideration of the meaning of life. He diligently began to study God's Word. As he preached, others united themselves and their efforts to his and became known as "CO-WORKERS."

This little group became known as the "Poor Men of Lyons," but they called themselves the Church of God, or simply Christians. They spread the gospel to northern France, and to the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and especially Bohemia. Later on Waldo crossed the Alps, thus a second branch of WALDENSES was established in Italy.

A College Founded!

The Work now grew rapidly. Soon a college was founded to train qualified laborers. The college and the town of La Torre, located where the Angrogna Valley meets the Lucerna ("the valley of LIGHT"), became the new headquarters of the Work and the growing Church of God. At the college, *articles and small booklets* were written and multiple copies were produced by hand (there were no printing presses back

then). Literature was given free to those who were interested. Offerings paid the cost. As the Work expanded into different languages, the BIBLE was translated into different languages. These people took the Bible LITERALLY!

Why do we today call a written or printed work a “text?” Because so many weavers (textors) spread their written material throughout Europe in this period!

Trained Ministers Proclaim God's Word

At the college, mature men of about 25 were chosen for students. Biblical offices in Christ's ministry were restored. The FRUITS show that Waldo occupied the office of APOSTLE, though he refused to call himself anything greater than CHIEF ELDER.

Many additional *elders* as well as *deacons* were ordained. Some elders served as *pastors* of churches, and some as *evangelists*, carrying the true gospel into foreign countries. They always traveled in pairs—a younger with an older (Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1, Acts 15:39-49), thus the younger man received an opportunity to profit by the older man's experience.

Every potential minister had to memorize a large amount of Scripture, besides being able to explain it. Most learned to speak at least three languages. Each also learned a trade, to be able if necessary to earn his own living (Acts 18:3, 1 Cor. 4:12, 2 Cor. 11:7). Many were specially trained in matters of PHYSICAL HEALTH (Col. 4:14), for the world's ways, then as NOW, were diametrically OPPOSITE to God's ways, including the dietary laws He set in motion. They understood that *our healing is made possible by Christ's broken body, for which they took the unleavened bread in their yearly Passover!*

Complete Educational System

The early Waldenses practiced overcoming and education in every walk of life. They were obedient, clean, and honest. Even their enemies acknowledged they could find no fault with their lives! They acted and DRESSED MODESTLY. They were chaste, temperate in all things, and in control of their emotions. Their enemies marveled!

Below the college level, a system of elementary schools was later established. Both boys and girls attended. These schools spread rapidly and by the year 1260 there were schools in 42 parishes in Austria.

Annual Fall “Conference”

The Waldenses recognized that they were the true successors of the apostolic church. They kept the SABBATH, yearly PASSOVER, and in each September or October they held a great “conference.” Crowds gathered daily to listen to sermons. What could this gathering have been but the FEAST OF TABERNACLES (Lev. 23:34, 39)!

Under the name of Passagini, we have the clearest sort of statement that these people, about the year 1200, *observed the whole Old Testament law*, including the Sabbath and festivals.

The Work in South France

Himself going north from Lyons, Waldo apparently sent *Arnold Hot* to become pastor at Albi, where Henry had preached. From him were nicknamed the *Arnoldists* we read of in 1184 and 1224 (Arnoldists in Italy, about 1140, had been so-called from Arnold of Brescia). Arnold Hot taught that the Roman Church was ANTICHRIST, and that Christ did not establish the Mass. Arnold was burned at the stake not many years later.

Who Was “Jezebel?”

God said that the Thyatira Church was to have internal problems with the false doctrines of a false teacher. “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat THINGS (not meat) sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20).

The original Jezebel was a Gentile and she represented a false Gentile religion (1 Kings 16:31). Her character was utterly selfish, grasping, and destructive. And she dominated and ruled over the man (king) who should have been her superior (1 Kings 21). She practiced harlotry (2 Kings 9:22) and martyred the true servants of God (1 Kings 18:4).

In all these things, she was the TYPE of the “Jezebel” of Revelation 2, who made deals with and ruled over the kings of Europe during the Middle Ages.

In Revelation 17:1-6 and 18:3-7 John sees another vision of a great fallen “woman” of exactly Jezebel’s character. This great whore is a great false church dominating over nations and having a fornicating relationship with the governments of this world. While the whole world was drunk on her false doctrine and “Jezebel” herself drunk on the blood of God’s servants (Rev. 17:2 & 17:6), the persecuted, suffering true Church in the wilderness saw her clearly in all her filthiness, just as the apostle John had to be carried in vision into the wilderness to view her in proper perspective (Rev. 17:3).

Why would God call such a “woman” Jezebel? Because like the ancient Gentile Jezebel, ruling as an Israelite queen, this “Jezebel” of the Middle Ages was a Gentile church having the same old pagan religion while MASQUERADING as God’s Church, spiritual Israel, and calling herself “Christian,” when in fact she is actually the synagogue or *church of Satan* (Rev. 2:9). She even called herself a “prophetess”—arrogating to herself authority to teach and to rule over Chris-

tians (Rev. 2:20). No wonder John marveled at the splendor of her OUTWARD APPEARANCE (Rev. 17:6). Even in the “wilderness” during the Middle Ages, some were deceived into hearing and heeding her false doctrine.

How “Jezebel” Seduced God’s Servants

On the Waldensian emblem or seal were seven stars (Rev. 1:20). Directly below and pointing at the 4th star was a lighted lamp (or candle) representing the then active Thyatira Church (the 4th Church era). Around the rim was the Latin motto “*a light shines in darkness*” (Mat. 5:14-16). God’s people knew they were the Thyatira Church!

They must also have known who “Jezebel” was. One of their oldest surviving books, the Book of Antichrist, equates the Roman papacy and priests with Babylon (Isa. 47), the little horn of the fourth beast (Dan. 7), the whore (Rev. 17 & 18), the man of sin and the son of perdition (2 Thes. 2), false prophets and lying teachers (2 Pet. 2), spirit of error (1 John 4), etc.!

Half of Jesus’ message to Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29) is devoted to warning against “Jezebel.” Yet in spite of the warning, many did fall into her trap!

In the Middle Ages, the false church—the antitypical “Jezebel”—strove to bring the Thyatira members into her communion. Some of the Waldenses, not having individually repented when their group came out of the Catholic Church, were disposed to listen to her. Others were coerced by fear of persecution into following her ways—*committing spiritual fornication with the world*. They allowed “Jezebel’s” priests to “baptize” their infant children as demanded by civil and ecclesiastical law, GRADUALLY took part in her Sunday worship, and ate the “sacrifice of the Mass!” (see last seven words of Rev. 2:20).

But God clearly says we are not to take part in this idola-

try (Acts 15:29 & 1 Cor. 10:20-21)! The Waldenses considered these ceremonies and sacraments of the Catholic Church meaningless and therefore harmless. But Christ thought otherwise! This *coexistence with evil* cost following generations the understanding of real repentance, true baptism, and even of the true Creator God.

Thyatira's Reward

Christ told His people to "HOLD FAST" (Rev. 2:24-25). They were to be given no additional work to do, nothing additional to endure, only THEY HAD TO WITHSTAND THAT FALSE SYSTEM.

By 1530, only a handful refused to copy the ways of the Catholic and Protestant churches! Since the Catholic and Protestant churches refused to repent of their ways—extinction for them will come in the final "great tribulation" (Rev. 2:22-23, 17:16, 18:16-21).

Those who "held fast" in the Thyatira era will be rewarded with the very "power over the nations" which Jezebel sought by harlotry (Rev. 2:26-27)—who learned (by repentance and long-suffering) to show love and mercy.

Jesus will also give them the morning star (Rev. 2:28) to enlighten the world, because they were in their time a "morning star"—a "light-bringer" which shone brightly before dawn on a world yet dark (2 Pet. 1:19). This Scripture (Rev. 2:28) is clearly a reference to the star and motto on the Waldensian seal—"a light shines in darkness!" Could prophecy more plainly identify the Thyatira era?

The Church They Couldn't Destroy

In the Netherlands, Waldenses had become known by their enemies as “*Lollards*.” They were noted in Holland as early as 1309. In 1315, one WALTER THE LOLLARD, a chief Waldensian minister, with his brother RAYMOND carried the gospel of Christ to ENGLAND.

Bible Translated into English

By the latter 1300's John Wycliffe, a theologian and professor at Oxford, began to speak up against the abuses of the Catholic Church. Though Wycliffe may never have been a member of God's Church he was branded a “Lollard” by his enemies—the name commonly applied to God's people in Western Europe in the 1300's. His greatest contribution was translating the Bible into English. Though he didn't complete the translation, his followers did after he died in 1384, and it was distributed in all parts of England during the next thirty years.

The Later Lollards

Because Wycliffe and his many followers were labeled

“Lollards” history loses sight of the original “Lollards” as a separate people. By 1401 persecution set in and so many of God’s people spread to new parts of England and to Scotland. But the Wycliffe movement was mainly secular and most of those directly influenced by Wycliffe recanted when faced with martyrdom.

But later, many men, more influenced by the Bible and the true Lollards who constituted a part of the true Church of God, were steadfast even to death. There is evidence that scattered true followers of Christ survived for two centuries in all corners of England, although they were never again prominent after the fall of the Wycliffites. They were constantly hunted and oppressed by the established church.

They maintained that the Papacy was a “beast” (Rev. 13) and anti-Christ, and that it had never been given any authority by Jesus’ Apostle Peter. Some of them, on the other hand, clearly stated that its spiritual character was that of Simon Magus! (Acts 8). They also claimed that baptism was for mature adults *only*, and that the relics of saints and the miracles claimed to have been performed by them were nothing but fakes.

MOST of those who were stigmatized as “Lollards” however were only sympathizers. The whole Lollard movement played a big part in preparing the people and rulers of England and Scotland to accept the Protestant Reformation. And the work they did led directly to the rise of Puritanism—an attempt of carnal man to satisfy the commandments of God (especially the fourth one) WITHOUT actual repentance and obedience. But in the meantime, God’s people continued to exist on the mainland of Europe as well, though usually scattered and few in numbers.

Art of Printing Invented

About 1450 the art of printing by movable type was de-

veloped in Germany. It was not accidental that one of the first books to be printed was the Bible—the famous Gutenberg Bible. The first edition of the Bible in the vernacular of the people was the German translation of 1466. The New Testament of this first edition (1466) was derived directly from the WALDENSIAN VERSION! Later, Baptists and Mennonites preferred the Waldensian version to the Lutheran for a century.

Church Tried by Fire—and Found Wanting!

Translations of the Bible were available. Printing was possible. There was a great work to be done. But there was no strength in God's Church to perform it!

In Daniel 11:33 God said that many people in the Church would die by either the sword or by the flame, and others would be imprisoned (taken captive). This Scripture was literally fulfilled in those times.

MOST in the Church were not really converted. Once again many joined the Church in INSINCERITY! (Dan. 11:34). Many did mean well though, but LACKED THE HOLY SPIRIT. When real danger drew near, many recanted. But it was necessary for some of the faithful to be martyred to make them perfect (Dan. 11:35).

In the 15th century many of the Waldenses settled in Bohemia, trying to escape persecution. Eventually the Bohemian brethren DIVIDED. *The LARGER PART adopted a modified, easier religion, more acceptable to the WORLD!* They denied they were Picards—the remnant of God's Church. The smaller, more religious group soon disappeared from public view.

Sabbath Keepers Throughout Europe

In the 1400's and 1500's there were scattered Sabbath keepers throughout Europe: in Norway, Russia, France,

Moravia, Bohemia, Sweden, and Finland (where the common people were persuaded that the hard times which had come on them were for “not observing the seventh day called Saturday”). Some of these Sabbath keepers separated themselves from the established churches (Catholic and Lutheran), but most did not separate themselves. These were observing Mass and the Sabbath too! They were following the practice that many of the Waldenses had begun 300 years before! *They were involved in spiritual fornication—illicit relationships with Satan’s established churches!*

End of 1260 Years of Persecution

God prophesied through Daniel (Dan. 7:8, 7:21, 7:25) that the “little horn” (the Papacy!) would wear out the saints, and indeed the Waldenses were completely “worn out.” When Luther appeared, only a few scattered Sabbath keepers remained. Even those people not in God’s Church and known only as “anabaptists” (re-baptizers) were weary with persecution, and ready to surrender completely to the Roman Catholic Church.

Many found *Rome was not the only persecutor* however. More people were martyred after the success of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin than ever before. Worst of all in their persecution of Anabaptists were the *Calvinists*. The 16th century was a time of great intolerance and cruelty. One did not have to be right, but only to differ, to be martyred.

Daniel said it would take 1260 years (Dan. 7:25) to wear out the saints. And in Revelation we are told that the true Church was to exist in the “wilderness” (that is, away from main centers of civilization) for 1260 years. The true Church which Jesus built was reduced until it was practically non-existent, all but dead, at the end of this 1260 year period of persecution. But it could NEVER die, for Christ had said, “the gates of hell (the grave) shall not prevail against it” (Mat.

16:18).

Waldenses, Cathars, and others during the Middle Ages were in unanimous agreement in stating the time when God's true Church first became an outcast and fled to the wilderness. They began it with the agreement between Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester. There is no mistaking this time. From Constantine's decree in 325 A.D. and the consequent initiation of persecution on non-Catholics, 1260 years brings us to the time immediately following 1585.

By this time the Church had almost died out, but starting in 1586 the Church slowly started to grow once again. In 1586-1587 the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, removed for the last time the threat to Protestant Britain of the renewal of Catholic domination by way of the throne. And then with the defeat of the Spanish Armada, by a miraculous storm at sea, Europe's strongest Catholic power was lowered to second-rate. Israelite Britain was now supreme, and in the political and moral climate of a freedom-loving, Protestant Britain, God's Work could again develop! Christ's Church would yet use the power of the printing press!

The Church of Thyatira Continues

Meanwhile, Christ called to His service a rich Hungarian noble, *Andreas Eossi*. In the year 1588 he began to lead a group who formerly listened to Francis David. Under his direction they began to live by EVERY word of God and put into practice the WHOLE Bible (both the Old Testament and the New Testament).

They kept the seventh day Sabbath and recognized in it a type of the future state of "spiritual marriage" when the Church would be married to Christ. They rejoiced each Sabbath adorning themselves for it in their best attire. They knew the seventh day typified that great time of rejoicing in which they could be a part of the "bride of Christ," ruling with Him

in the seventh thousand years (the seventh millennium).

They also kept ALL the annual Sabbaths or Holy Days. They kept the true PASSOVER with unleavened bread, understanding it was the continuation of the Old Testament Passover, but now in remembrance of the Redeemer who died for the sins of all mankind.

They declared *Christmas, Easter*, etc. were the inventions of popes, and they even made a distinction between CLEAN AND UNCLEAN MEATS. But most important of all, they inculcated the moral conduct emphasized by Jesus Christ—love for God and man, moderation in all things, respect for authority, honor to those in civil offices, etc.

About the year 1600 they compiled and printed a *hymn book of 110 paraphrases of Psalms* and other poetic books of the Bible. Of the 110, 44 relate to the Sabbath, 5 to the new moon, 11 to Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread, 6 to Pentecost, 3 to the Feast of Trumpets, 1 to the Day of Atonement, and 6 to the Festival of Tabernacles.

Andreas Eossi died in about 1600 and then his adopted son Simon Pechi became leader of the Sabbath keepers. Pechi held several important public offices, but *one cannot be both a part of this world and a true Christian at the same time!* Pechi was suddenly seized and imprisoned for three and a half years and afterward placed in retirement (about 1619-1623). In 1638 Pechi was again imprisoned (after becoming involved in public offices again!), but he was later freed, having taken an oath to renounce the Sabbath!

A Large Thyatira Church?

In the 14th century it is said there were as many as 80,000 Waldenses in the Austrian Empire and 800,000 in all of Europe, but in the history of God's Church *it has been repeatedly true that "many who are not sincere will join them!"* (Dan. 11:34—NIV). The Thyatira era was no excep-

tion. MOST of them were, at best, only co-workers—perhaps sincere, but unconverted—who had never given themselves completely and unreservedly to God. THESE PEOPLE WERE NOT THEMSELVES THE TRUE CHURCH, though the true Church was among them. THAT IS WHY THEY BEGAN SO SOON TO COMPROMISE WITH ERROR, AND TO COMMIT “SPIRITUAL FORNICATION!” The Church is a “little flock,” but with the sheep are the GOATS—representing the “fringers” and “hangers-on”—who cleaving to them with insincerity would usually OUTNUMBER THE “SHEEP!”

Reaching the World With Power!

MOST of the later Waldensians during the long Thyatira Era were NOT converted. These people merely sympathized with the truth. When the going got rough, they dropped away from what *truth* they had received. By the end of the Middle Ages the number of true Christians was reduced to almost the vanishing point.

Approaching Modern Times

From such a background—where the truth of God was about to perish (Rev. 3:2) and only a VERY FEW were converted members of the true Church—Jesus Christ raised up a new era of God’s Church. It was in England that He chose to raise up the “*Sardis*” Era (the 5th era of the Church). But, sadly, the lack of real spirituality continued to permeate this era of the one true Church of God.

Character of the Sardis Era

The “Sardis” Era began at a time when God’s truth was in danger of being completely forgotten. These people were exhorted to get busy (become watchful or “wake up”) and

strengthen the things which remained but were ready to die (Rev. 3:2). Much was lacking in the doctrine and practice they received from the latter end of the Thyatira era.

Sardis had a “*name*” as one of the seven LIVING churches of God, but was as if DEAD (Rev. 3:1)! For there were only a FEW in the Sardis era who had not defiled their garments, spiritually speaking (Rev. 3:4).

How the Sardis Era Began

God’s Church began to revive in England about 1585, almost immediately after the end of her 1260 years in the wilderness. Sabbath keepers now commonly came into historical view, and several books were published urging the keeping of the seventh day.

Theophilus Brabourne was one such man, he published books in 1628 and 1632 advocating the true Sabbath. Of him, Cox says (Cox’s Literature of the Sabbath Question), “He may be regarded as the founder in England of the sect at first known as Sabbatarians, but now calling themselves Seventh Day Baptists.” In actuality they then called themselves the “Church of God!” It wasn’t until later that some (the MAJORITY!) organized themselves as Seventh Day Baptists, while a SMALL MINORITY continued as the Church of God.

Another book in defense of the Sabbath was written by *James Ockford*, and published about 1642. His enemies called him an Anabaptist. At this time, those who called themselves the Church of God were commonly and falsely called Anabaptists by those outside the Church.

The Church of God in England

Not much is known of the congregations and local members of the true Church during the first decades of the 1600’s. We know that one of the London churches goes back at least to the time of *John Traske* and the four evangelists whom

he ordained. Evidence is that this “*Mill Yard*” congregation dates from 1607 or even the 1580’s. Positive evidence is extant for the existence of several other congregations in the 1650’s.

By 1668, there were in England, “nine or ten congregations besides numerous scattered believers in other places.” So wrote the famous seventh day minister, *Edward Stennett*, to RHODE ISLAND MEMBERS not yet organized into a local church. Stennett addressed the Rhode Island members as “the remnant in Rhode Island who KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD and the testimonies of Jesus” (see Rev. 12:17). The famous Stennett family provided ministers for the Church of God in England for four generations.

Another family that Jesus Christ worked through were the *Bampfild brothers—Francis and Thomas*. Both of them wrote and published books on the Sabbath, creation, the law of God, etc. And in Francis Bampfild’s book (pages 28, 58, 59, and 60) the name of the Church is “The Church of God” (Dugger and Dodd, *A History of the True Church*, page 241).

Following the 1662 Act of Conformity Francis Bampfild spent much of his remaining life in various jails. He raised up a small Sabbath-keeping congregation within the walls of Dorchester jail. When released, he began to hold meetings in London in his own hired house (much like the apostle Paul in Acts 28:30-31), and he then organized a congregation that continued over a hundred years. When seized again, he soon died in prison. Edward Stennett then became the pastor of this Church.

A Prophetic Warning

In Revelation 3:3 Jesus Christ exhorts His people in the Sardis era to remember how they had received the TRUTH. They received it from those in the preceding Thyatira era who had *held fast* (Rev. 2:25)—even to the death! Not from

those who had fallen away from the TRUTH! Yet, through fear of persecution, many of God's people continued to fellowship with those who had FALLEN AWAY FROM THE TRUTH, and even with some of the churches of this world!

Many of the successors of the Waldensians had now become Puritans within the established Church of England. Others, outside that church, had become Baptists. Unfortunately some of the ministers of the early Sardis era of God's Church maintained fellowship with these people. Jesus Christ was concerned about the inevitable result of this *relationship with the world* that some of His people maintained. They allowed (and even encouraged) the circulation of more and more false doctrine among His people, causing many to fall away from the truth!

In Rev. 3:3 Christ commanded His "Sardis" people to repent. They should have profited by the experiences of (and Christ's messages to) the Thyatira and Pergamos eras of the Church before them. They should NOT have tolerated the unconverted and unbelievers in their midst!

However, God's people throughout the Sardis era felt they must always "*have love*" for those of differing opinions. They did not realize that **CONDONING FALSEHOOD**—which does harm both to the believer and the hearer—is **NEVER SHOWING REAL LOVE!** That false concept is one of the primary reasons why the Sardis Church is "dead!"

The apostle Paul made it very plain that condoning evil in the Church is NOT "showing love" (1 Cor. 5:1-13). *It inevitably results in the whole Church being harmed* (1 Cor. 5:6). Christ warned the "Sardis" people that their ways would eventually leave them completely unprepared (not ready!) for His second coming (Rev. 3:3)!

The Bitter Fruit of Neglect

By the later 1700's the "Sardis" people had so *adopted*

Protestant viewpoints that they began to elect their ministers, instead of relying on Jesus Christ to select them. The natural result was an almost total lack of feeding the flock of God, or promulgating His truth. No wonder Christ calls the Sardis era “dead,” for the Church was sound asleep spiritually. Those in the Sardis era needed more of God’s Holy Spirit to strengthen them (Eph. 3:16 & Zech. 4:6). But they neglected the gift of God. Error continued to weaken them. “With the 18th century, THEIR ZEAL VANISHED” (Andrews, A History of the Sabbath, page 733). The cause? Being willing to remain in *fellowship with false churches* (page 734)!

The Sardis Church in America

Sabbath keepers were never very numerous in England. By about 1800, they had become almost extinct again. As no “seventh day” pastor could be found in Europe, the three remaining English congregations imported an American. He led them to limited prosperity again, but no longer as the Church of God. They now called themselves Seventh-day Baptists. But before these early congregations were completely swallowed up in the Seventh Day Baptist denomination, Jesus Christ had caused His Church—the Church of God—to be established in AMERICA.

In 1664, *Stephen Mumford* was sent from the “Bell Lane” Church of God in London, England, to *Newport, Rhode Island*. For a while he associated with the members of a Sunday Baptist church, and persuaded several of them to embrace his views. After seven years, a seventh day congregation of seven members was raised up from these people. They identified it as (a part of) The Church of God (Seventh-day Baptist Memorial, page 36, vol. 1).

The Church in Rhode Island became the mother church in the United States. In the very early 1700’s another congregation was added—the Westerly (or Hopkinton) congre-

gation. This new location became the headquarters church and retained the original records.

Around the same time a number of other congregations were formed (mostly of new converts and immigrants from England), in such places as New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. One of the most important local congregations was founded in Piscataway, New Jersey, in 1705. The record of its founding uses the name “the Church of God.”

The connection of this church with the Rhode Island headquarters is clearly demonstrated by the fact that its minister was sent to Westerly for ordination (Seventh-day Baptist Memorial, vol. 2, number 3, page 121).

At Shrewsbury, New Jersey, also, the record plainly speaks of “the Church of God dwelling at Shrewsbury.” Outsiders sometimes spoke of the “Sabbatarian” church of such and such a place. But none of these was the official name. It was simply called “The Church of God.”

Emergence of Other Seventh-Day Congregations in America

Only a “few” in Sardis were truly dedicated commandment-keeping Christians (Rev. 3:4). All during the 18th century many other Sabbath-keeping congregations were being formed in America. But unfortunately MANY of these people had NOT become truly converted nor acquired the *habit of prayer and Bible study*. They had merely accepted the doctrinal “argument” of the Sabbath.

Among them were some individuals who had “*crept IN unawares*”—just as they had in Jude’s day (Jude 1:4) as well as throughout the history of God’s Church—for the express purpose of drawing away converts to their OWN style of belief! Beliefs often VASTLY DIFFERENT from the true teachings of the Bible and God’s true Church.

One of these was an “evangelist” who is very important

historically in connection with the future development of the Seventh Day Baptist denomination in America—*William Davis*. After founding his own seventh-day church near Philadelphia, Mr. Davis came among the members of the Newport, Rhode Island, Church of God in 1706 and applied for membership. He was turned down on the grounds that he held **WRONG DOCTRINES!**

Approval was finally granted four years later, though some still objected, and in 1713 he was authorized to preach and to baptize.

But had this man become a true member of God's Church? His **FRUITS** show he had **NOT**. He was in trouble with the Church, and was "in" and "out" of fellowship for the rest of his life. To his death he maintained the "rightness" of his own views and argued with God's Word.

Listen to a bit of this letter he wrote, defending himself and accusing the truth. "Now all this enmity against me among seventh-day men arose against me originally from a noted seventh-day man and soul sleeper (referring to those who disbelieved in the **FALSE** doctrine of the immortality of the "soul") in this country, who over twenty years ago opposed me about my principles of **IMMORTALITY OF HUMAN SOULS**, and afterward proceeded to differ with me about my faith in Christ and the **TRINITY**, who having poisoned several other seventh-day men with the mortal and atheistical notion, and set them against me, he secretly conveyed this drench (enmity or accusation) against me over to Westerly to the persons beforenamed, ('old' Mr. Clarke, Joseph Crandall, Thomas Hiscox—the elders and pillars of the Church of God in Rhode Island), who, complying with him in their judgments (doctrines) in the Socinian and Anti-Trinitarian error, drank it greedily down *BEFORE I came among them...*" (Seventh-day Baptist Memorial, vol. 21, number 3, pages 101-108).

Notice how he continually accuses his opponents of being “against” him, at the same time tacitly admitting it was really his FALSE DOCTRINES they were against—doctrines which were totally at variance to the TRUTH the Church had long held “*before* (he) came among them!”

In later years, a host of his descendants and followers were located in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. And this was how it came to be that as early as 1776 some Sabbath-keepers began to take part in WAR and believed in a TRINITY and an IMMORTAL SOUL. They called those among them who knew the TRUTH as “soul sleepers.”

By 1800 these and other PROTESTANT DOCTRINES were prevalent in the Sabbath-keeping congregations. Many began to try to organize, so that at first seven or eight, and later a MAJORITY of the congregations united to form a denomination. This group officially adopted the name in 1818—“SEVENTH DAY BAPTISTS.”

They spoke disparagingly of other Sabbath-keepers, calling them “FANATICAL and UNWORTHY” (The Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America, pages 153 and 175). *As always, the few had refused to go along, and had remained FAITHFUL to the name and doctrine of the Church of God!*

Next—the “Adventist” Movement

About a generation later a great movement began among the Sunday churches. Basing their hope on *William Miller’s* false interpretation of Daniel’s prophecy of the “2300 days,” many began to expect the return of Christ to earth in the year 1844. They became known as *Adventists* (from “advent,” meaning coming or arrival).

When Adventist expectations for 1844 proved to be an illusion they split up into various groups, but then a Seventh Day Baptist woman in New Hampshire called the Sabbath to the attention of some of these Adventists in 1844. After

about two years the seventh day became widely publicized among them. But they did not join the Seventh Day Baptists. Instead they began to assemble with the remnant of the Church of God with whom they had come into contact. This is shown by the fact that they gave up their former belief in a TRINITY, an IMMORTAL SOUL, etc. (doctrines in which the Seventh Day Baptists also believed).

They then began to call themselves by the Biblical name, The Church of God. Their first song book was dedicated to The Church of God, and some of them were active in publishing a periodical in the name of The Church of God.

These Adventists were never spiritually a part of the Church of God, however. They had only associated themselves with God's Church for a season. Later, the majority of them began following a woman whom some considered a prophetess and by 1860 they rejected the name "The Church of God" and officially adopted the name of SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS. As usual, a FEW faithful members—but only the FEW—of the Church of God did NOT go along!

A Remnant Remains Faithful

When the Adventists organized themselves as a denomination in 1860, only a FEW—mostly in the states of Ohio, Iowa, and Missouri—did NOT go along. The printing plant and the magazine formerly published in the name of The Church of God were taken over by the Adventists. But a group of the FAITHFUL in 1861 began the publication of a new monthly paper called "*The Remnant of Israel*," later changed to the "*Sabbath Advocate*," and finally the "*Bible Advocate*." Through the remainder of the century their numbers slowly increased, though they still remained relatively few.

Certain strong families provided the Church of God a tenuous continuity. These came to be located mainly in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Oregon. Some of them even retained

a knowledge of GOD'S HOLY DAYS and the IDENTITY OF MODERN ISRAEL.

During the same period, Church of God ministers began missionary-like work in Mexico, Chile, Argentina, the Philippines, etc. A few thousand of their converts and/or their descendants remain throughout Latin America to this day. Spanish-speaking congregations in Chile and Argentina *kept the holy days* continuously from their beginning in the 1890's until the middle of the 20th century!

The Church Spiritually Dead

For seventy years after the departure of the Adventists, the Church in the United States remained spiritually powerless. A characteristic of the modern remnants of the Sardis era of Christ's Church is the lack of true spirituality (Rev. 3:2). As a whole, this era of the Church of God did not "remember how" it had received the TRUTH (Rev. 3:3) from earlier Christians who were FAITHFUL even to death by fire. Nor did it, like those, "HOLD FAST" (Rev. 3:3) what truth it had. It also did not watch (Rev. 3:2 and Mat. 25:13).

During those last seventy years, only a FEW individuals really repented and strengthened the TRUTH that was ready to perish in their midst. Many of their ministers were not diligently seeking to serve God. *The result of rejecting Christ's direction was increasing doctrinal deviation and lack of true conversion among the members.* These were the people HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG came in contact with in 1927.

The Beginning of the Philadelphia Era

Six months before Herbert Armstrong's conversion, an elderly woman who was a member of the "Sardis" Church of God in Oregon introduced his wife to the truth about God's Sabbath. Mrs. Armstrong gladly accepted this truth because God had opened her mind, but Mr. Armstrong was

anything but pleased. He was worried about what their friends would think!

Herbert Armstrong was challenged to study the Bible for the first time in his life. He tried to DISPROVE this seemingly “crazy, wacky” notion that his wife had accepted. Instead, he found the Sabbath absolutely proven to be the day God commands us to keep holy today.

That led Herbert Armstrong to proving the existence of God, and that the Bible is indeed His Word. He studied each question intensively, from all angles. That initial intensive study lasted six months.

Immediately Herbert Armstrong began to search for the one true Church which he knew must exist. Somewhere there had to be the Church Jesus Christ said He would build (Mat. 16:18). These Church of God people in Oregon seemed to have the TRUTH—certainly they were the closest of any. But something was wrong. They were spiritually DEAD!

In Acts 2:38 the gift of the Holy Spirit is promised to those who have *truly repented*. And one of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to lead and guide Christ's Church into ALL TRUTH (John 16:13). As soon as Herbert Armstrong was baptized the *fruits* of the Holy Spirit began to manifest in his life. He continued to study and PROVE ALL THINGS, as we are instructed to do in 1 Thes. 5:21. As he studied much of the TRUTH which the Sardis Church had allowed to perish began to be brought to his attention by God's Spirit. Immediately he began to expound this knowledge to the remnant of God's people in the state of Oregon and he was finally ordained by the Oregon Conference of the Church of God in June, 1931.

God revealed the *true identity of the modern House of Israel* to Herbert Armstrong. He also came to see that God's ANNUAL FESTIVALS were commanded to be kept today along with the weekly Sabbath. He began to understand their mean-

ing, but it was seven years before any others in Oregon kept God's ANNUAL Sabbaths with Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong.

End of the Sardis Era

By 1933, in an effort to strengthen the hands of men at top, it was decided to reorganize the Church. Government of the Church was to be placed in the hands of "12 to look after the spiritual affairs of the Church, and 7 to take charge of the financial business, and also 70 to go forth two by two in giving the WARNING MESSAGE for the hour" (Dugger and Dodd "A History of the True Church," page 299).

The date was November 4, 1933. An appeal was made to the "lot" (Acts 1:23-26) to choose from among the names presented. Prior to the meeting, a call for prayer had been sent to God's people around the world "that God would again choose men to lead His Church as in the former time."

GOD ANSWERED THAT PRAYER! But not in the way they expected!

As the hands of the clock neared high noon on that fateful Sabbath day, the drawing of names for the "seventy elders" reached number forty. The fortieth name was Elder Herbert Armstrong of Oregon" (The Bible Advocate, Nov. 6, 1933, page 5).

No one knew it then, least of all Herbert Armstrong, who was not present at the meeting, but *Jesus Christ had made His choice*—with the number forty—of a man to revive His Work in the end time. *Forty* signifies the completion of testing. Now the time of trial and test for the Sardis Church had run out. And as with ancient Belshazzar, the Sardis era of God's Church had been "weighed in the balance and found wanting" (Dan. 5:27).

As a result of neglecting to "watch," the last generation of the Sardis era is going to be surprised when Jesus Christ suddenly returns (Rev. 3:3). But we today MUST learn from

Christ's message to "Sardis," and from the sad experiences of this era (Rev. 3:6).

Christ Opens a "Door"

At this critical moment in Church history, the living Jesus Christ **separated** a mere handful of people in Oregon to begin the present "*Philadelphia*" Era (the sixth era) of His Church (Rev. 3:7-12). He began to use Herbert Armstrong, and the small group He had called to assist as co-workers, to reach the world with the *good news of the coming Kingdom of God* (Mat. 24:14).

Christ promised to set an "open door" before the Church in the Philadelphia era (Rev. 3:8). The "door" mentioned here is an opportunity to disseminate Christ's gospel (1 Cor. 6:9 & Col. 4:3).

This Church era has only "a little strength" of itself, but it is **MAGNIFIED** greatly through the modern "doors" of radio, television, and the printing press—and most important of all, *through the power of the Holy Spirit!* (Zech. 5:6).

The Era of "Brotherly Love"

Philadelphia means "brotherly love" or "those who love their fellowmen as brothers." It expresses the characteristic which is the motivating **ZEAL** of the Philadelphia era of God's Church. The Church shows **LOVE** to mankind by carrying out God's commission—that of warning the world of the impending destruction that hangs over it. It is revealing how Jesus Christ will soon rescue humanity from cosmocide and teach man the way of peace, happiness, and prosperity. *The goal of the "Philadelphia" Church is the ultimate salvation of all mankind!*

This Church has "not denied" Christ's name (including His nature, character, personality, and power), and kept (that is, both believed and **PRACTICED**) His Word (Rev. 3:8).

It is significant that the ancient Anatolian city of Philadelphia still lives today, unlike dead Sardis which is in ruins. Its Turkish name, Allah Shair, indicates the destiny of the Church it portrays. Translated it means “the City of God!” (see Rev. 3:12).

The “Philadelphia” Church is promised a PLACE OF SAFETY for her *faithful service and obedience* (Rev. 3:10 & 12:14). As the ancient city of Philadelphia has been kept from destruction to this very day, so will the “Philadelphia” Church be preserved from the Great Tribulation which Satan will soon bring upon all the earth.

But when those in “Philadelphia” are taken by God to a place of safety, ANOTHER PART OF GOD’S CHURCH WILL BE LEFT BEHIND! (Rev. 12:17). The “remnant” left behind will constitute the seventh and last era of God’s Church—the “*Laodicean*” Era—which will last but a very short time.

The Laodicean Church

Notice what has happened (since 69 A.D.) to the preaching of the good news of God’s coming Kingdom. Instead of proclaiming that message worldwide, the Church as a whole went to SLEEP! Only briefly, as during the days of Peter Waldo, the Church stirred in her slumber, but did not fully awaken to do the Work of God.

The parable in Matthew 25 about the ten virgins (five were wise and five were foolish) explains this long slumber. The “virgins” represent the members of God’s Church through the ages. The Apostolic Age expected Christ’s return momentarily (1 Thes. 4:15). But when He did not immediately appear, they grew drowsy, lost their first love (Rev. 2:4) and went to sleep on the job.

For nearly 1900 years God’s Church continued to slumber and sleep. Then in 1934, a voice on the radio began to

proclaim that the intervention of Christ in the affairs of this world is near (Mat. 25:6). The Philadelphia era of the Church of God began to ZEALOUSLY do Christ's Work (verse 7)!

But at the end of the Work of "Philadelphia," MANY will lack a sufficient supply of "oil" (the Holy Spirit)! (Mat. 25:8). The five unprepared "virgins" are told to go and figuratively buy a supply of the Holy Spirit (Mat. 25:9), and Rev. 3:17-18 clearly shows that the typical Laodicean also belongs in this category.

These members of God's Church can still be born of God if they do as Christ instructs. But they will have to PROVE their spiritual dedication to God by overcoming in the midst of the Great Tribulation—very likely through martyrdom!

In spite of Christ's warning and the constant repetition of the message by the Philadelphia Work over a period of years, the spiritual condition of the "Laodiceans" is just LUKEWARM—neither hot nor cold, *not really stirred up about OVERCOMING (Rev. 3:15).*

The name Laodicea is Greek. It means "*the (self) righteous people.*" It is significant that the ancient city of Laodicea lies a great ruin today—and like Sardis it is COMPLETELY DEAD!

The Laodiceans will find themselves in such a pitiable state because they will have been SELF-DECEIVED. They "know not" that they themselves are "the ones pitiable and beggarly and blind and naked." They thought they had made proper preparation for the return of Christ. They will say, "I have become rich (physically and spiritually)... and have need of nothing" (Rev. 3:17).

The ancient city of Laodicea was famous for its money transactions and its soft wool. Laodicea was almost a synonym for SOFT, LUXURIOUS LIVING. Not far from the city was a pagan temple with a great MEDICAL school.

Naturally, Laodicea produced some famous SKEPTIC

PHILOSOPHERS!

The modern “Laodiceans” will be products of this modern age of *skepticism, unbelief, creature comforts, medicine, and PERMISSIVENESS!* They are TOO CLOSE TO THE WAYS AND FALSE GODS OF THIS WORLD to get really “shook up” about God’s TRUTH until finally shaken out of their lukewarmness by having to suffer in the Great Tribulation!

The Laodiceans actually have been begotten of God’s Spirit. Their lamps are lit, but are going out (Mat. 25:8), because the supply of “oil” (the Holy Spirit) has not been continually replenished and increased.

Christ will actually be showing love to these people by allowing them to suffer in the tribulation (Rev. 3:19 & Heb. 12:6-11), and He stands ever ready to receive the OVERCOMERS—to give them eternal life and rulership with Him (Rev. 3:20-21). But they must OVERCOME and give their life for Christ!

So how might a “Laodicean” recognize his spiritual condition in ADVANCE of the Tribulation? Luke 6:26 says, “Woe to you when MEN SPEAK WELL OF YOU, for so did their fathers to the FALSE prophets.” In sharp contrast, Jesus Christ tells us in John 15:19-20 that the world hates whoever is a dedicated BELIEVER AND DOER of God’s Word. Christ also says through the apostle Paul, “let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall!” (1 Cor. 10:12). That is how one can avoid becoming a Laodicean—by *not becoming part of the world* and by not becoming OVERCONFIDENT. In contrast, by OVERCOMING, *remaining humble*, and HOLDING FAST TO THE TRUTH one can be sure that he or she won’t have to die as a Laodicean in the soon coming Great Tribulation, but can instead go to a “place of safety” with the *faithful* “Philadelphia” members of God’s true Church!

The Laodiceans Take Over!

When I first wrote this paper in 1992 I ended it right here, but since that time something very big has occurred. AS HAS HAPPENED SO OFTEN in the recorded history of God's true Church, *God has once again SEPARATED the FEW faithful members* of His Church who have remained loyal to Him and His way of life from the VAST MAJORITY who have watered-down the true teachings of Jesus Christ.

For the last few years God's Church has continually COMPROMISED with the world, *weaving* together the true doctrines of the Bible with the false religious beliefs of this world. Once again Satan, the master deceiver, has planted FALSE MINISTERS IN the Church who have wormed their way to the top, beguiling unsuspecting members. And has happened so often in the past when a true and loyal minister of God has died (Herbert Armstrong passed away in January of 1986), these false ministers quickly moved in to liberalize and protestanize the true teachings of Jesus Christ!

The Philadelphians Separated Once Again!

So once again, most of the *few* dedicated and zealous members of God's true Church have SEPARATED from the overwhelming majority—those who are *lukewarm* and who refuse to live by EVERY WORD OF GOD.

So where are the "Philadelphians" now? Apparently, they are scattered about in *several* different organizations today. But unfortunately, most of these organizations are not "Philadelphian" at all, but are "Laodicean," with perhaps a few Philadelphians scattered among them.

The Conclusion

With this I conclude the astonishing history of God's true Church. I hope you have enjoyed this amazing story, but even more importantly I hope you have learned the lessons

contained in it so that someday you may hear the following words spoken to YOU: “Well done, good and *faithful* servant; you were *faithful* over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord!” (Mat. 25:21).

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