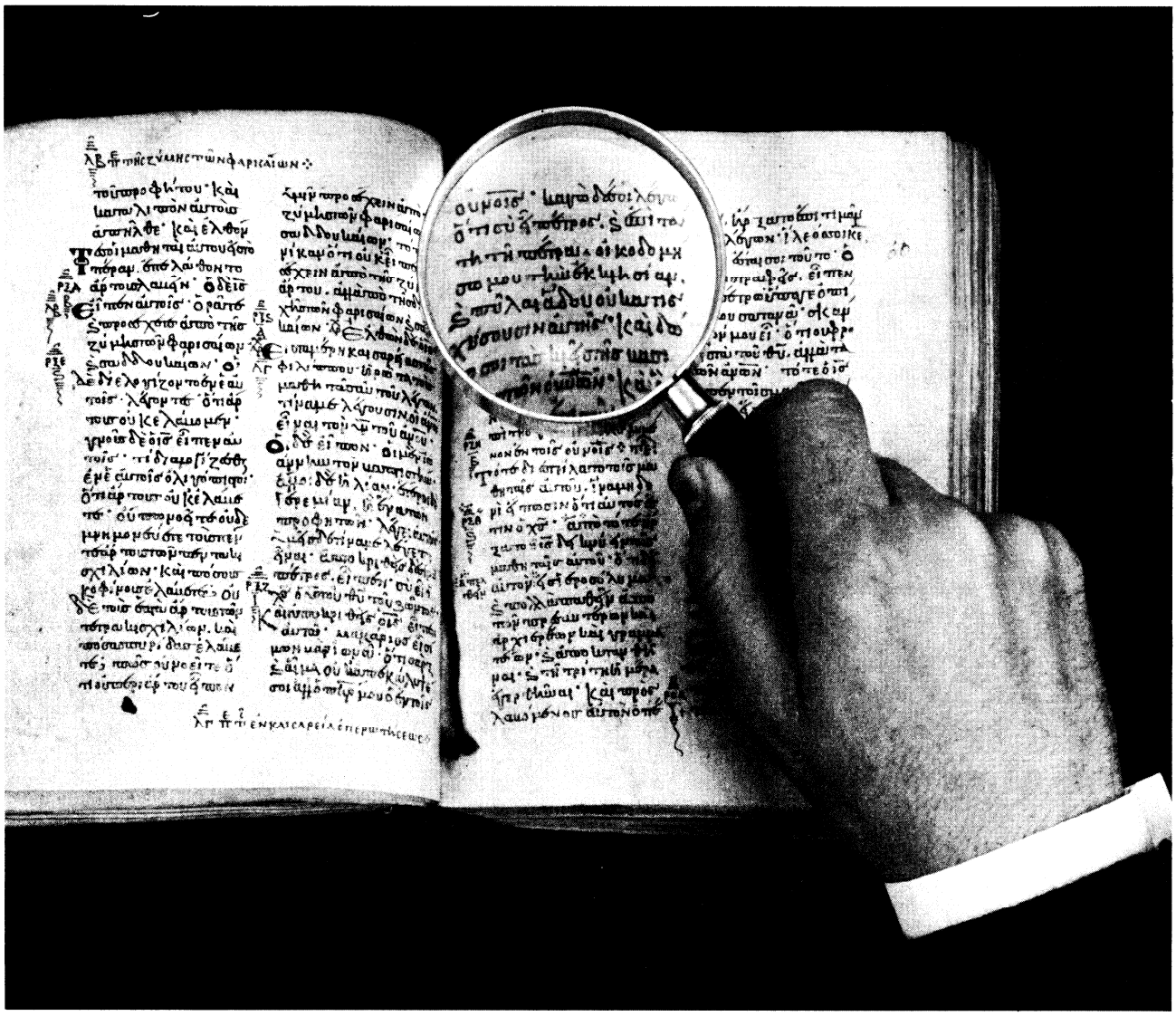
Feb 25 '68

AMBASSADOR COLLEGE

BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE



Matthew 16:18 — "I Will Build My Church"

LESSON 49

What our STUDENTS SAY

Rededication

"Dear Mr. Armstrong: I have already thanked God — now I thank you for Lesson #48 of the Correspondence Course. It is causing a complete turn about, a rededication in my life... I appreciate all your work and labor. Also that of your helpers and pray that He will help all of us to really be dedicated, to be true and to allow Him to work a work in us so that someday He will be happy and pleased when we finally become His sons."

— Mrs. T. W., Chicago, Illinois

Key to Overcoming

"Just want to write you, and say, I just received my 48th lesson. I have to admit, I'm about as dumb and thick headed as an Israelite can be. Here I've been in God's Church 5 years and baptized 4 years. I've been wondering why I've felt my prayers were useless or not heard. But now I see in this 48th lesson the cause for about 90% of my trouble and feeling of lack of spiritual growth. This lesson is really the key to our lack of spiritual growth and overcoming."

— Roy I., Kansas City, Missouri

"Thank you for the Correspondence Course lesson on fasting. That's one thing we always are postponing until a more favorable day and that day somehow has a propensity for just never coming."

— Jack S., Detroit Lakes, Minnesota

Light Can't Be Hid

"Now I begin to know it's not the enjoyment I get out of doing my lessons, but how diligently I apply it in my own life, and how much it shows through in my every day life, that counts. And do you know a person knows when he or she is a nicer person? By surrounding circumstances, they can know by the people around them, and by the kind of conversation that holds itself up, and the comments from casual acquaintances. Yes we can know even before our lesson tests come back to show us in writing (smile). Thank you forever for these wonderful lessons. And I thank God for such a source to help people to grow."

— M. L., Mount Vernon, New Jersey

AMBASSADOR COLLEGE
BIBLE
CORRESPONDENCE COURSE
LESSON 49

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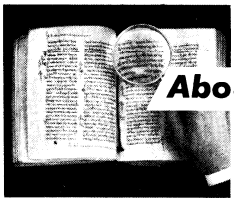


About Our Cover . . .

A tenth century Greek vellum manuscript, from Calabria, Italy, of the four Gospels — in the Ambassador College Library, Pasadena — illustrates one of the purposes for the life-work of the apostle Paul.

Magnified is verse eighteen of Matthew 16: "And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, [petros — a little stone], and upon this rock [Petra — a boulder or rock ledge] I will build my church; and the gates of [the grave] shall not prevail against it."

What that Church is — and what that petra is — will be explained in this and succeeding lessons.

Ambassador College Photo

"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]," He said, "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?

World Looks at the Wrong Church!

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.

Strange to say, almost everyone — for these past nineteen 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? What DID happen?

Missing History Foretold!

The True Church *did not die* after 70 A.D.! It went to sleep. It was foretold in a parable (Mat. 25:1-13). Ten virgins (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. Only half of them were found ready to carry on the work of warning the world at its midnight hour.

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 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 True Church gone wrong? Or was this *another*, a DIFFERENT and FALSE church, that was being founded by men who were 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 ecclesiastical 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 fifty 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 on stage!

But the life and the mission of the *True* Church was not finished!

This and following lessons will show you the astounding, 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.

LESSON 49

True Church to Be Small

1. Have those really faithful to God ever been many? Consider the time of the Flood. Gen. 6:5 and 7:1. Were there so few in Elijah's time that he thought he was the only faithful one? I Kings 19:14. Did God show him He had reserved a mere 7000 to be His own? Verse 18. Out of millions in Israel, only a population equal to one average small town!

2. Had Jesus led — in three and one-half years — an even smaller number? Acts 1:15. Certainly Jesus had not been trying to save the world *then!* What a miserable failure, if that were His aim!

3. Did Jesus prophesy there would be few that find the way? Mat. 7:14. Compare Luke 12:32.

4. What did Jesus tell His Apostles to do? Mat. 28:18-20. Did He say He would build a Church? Mat. 16:18.

5. Does Mat. 16:18 imply that at times the True Church would be so small as to seem in danger of completely dying out? But *would* it ever die? Same verse.

COMMENT: The gates of hell (original Greek means "the grave") *could* never prevail over Christ's Church. Of course! For Christ Himself is alive and active — more than able to guard and guide His "little flock" throughout all ages.

6. Would it have been possible for civilization as a whole to have ever been influenced greatly by the truth? John 1:5; 3:19. Compare I John 3:1; 4:6 with this. Surely *few* COULD ever have been converted.

How the True Church Grew

1. Had Jesus prepared the way for the founding of His Church? Mat. 4:24-25; Acts 26:26, last part. How many were added to the New Testament Church in its first day of existence? Acts 2:41. Did it continue to grow? Verse 47.

2. Were miracles again performed by the same POWER that had been in Jesus Christ? Acts 2:43; 3:7; 5:12, 14-15, 16; 6:8.

3. Did Peter and all the Apostles continue to *speak boldly*, the same POWER of the Holy

Wide World Photo

Sheep naturally follow a leader. Christ likens His Church to sheep — a little flock. Christ said His sheep will hear His voice — and follow Him. The world does not hear Him, and will not follow.

Spirit motivating *them?* Acts 2:14, 40; 3:4, 6, 12, 14-16; 4:8-10.

4. Was the True Gospel heard and known by a great many — the majority of all people living in Judea at the time? Acts 2:6; 3:9, 10; 4:21. How many now were members of the Church? Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7.

COMMENT: These *came out* of the world — they LEFT their Jewish denominations. They were no longer *of* the world, but were *filled with the Holy Spirit* (John 17:15-17; Rom. 8:9).

. . . and Was Scattered!

After such a start — such booming, *power*ful growth — the infant Church might seem to be overwhelming the world. But it was not long to be so!

1. What kind of reception does the world give God's Church? Acts 2:13; 26:24. Does the truth make some people *mad?* Acts 4:2. Had Jesus prophesied persecution? John 15:20; II Tim. 3:12.

2. Did persecution come early? Acts 5:17-18; 6:9-13. To what did this lead — to a complete scattering of the members of the Church? Acts 8:1, 3.

3. But could all of Saul's raging stop the progress of the gospel? Acts 8:4-6. To whom at first did scattered Christians spread the Word? Acts 11:19. But then to whom? Verses 20 and 21.

COMMENT: This was done according to the will of the *living* Jesus Christ to work out His PLAN here below. For salvation was not to be limited to Judea.

4. To whom did *Philip* go? Acts 8:5, 6.

COMMENT: The Samaritans were Gentiles, descendants of Babylonian and other immigrants placed there by Assyrian kings and later rulers. Their religion was the old Babylonian religion, but much mixed with elements adopted from the neighboring Jews. Of all the Gentiles, the Samaritans would seem to have been the most prepared to accept the religion of the New Testament.

Simon, the chief in the Samaritan religion, was among those who listened to Philip. Who he was and what part he played in Church history will be made plain later.

5. What did the Apostles do when they realized Christ was calling Samaritans? Acts 8:14.

6. Had David sung of the day the gospel would go to Gentiles? Ps. 96:1, 3, 10. And did the prophets predict it? Isa. 11:10. Note that the Greeks were true Gentiles. The Samaritans were already partly mixed with Jewish renegades and also had circumcision and a perverted form of the law of Moses.

7. Did Peter still have to be shown at the time of Cornelius' conversion that all peoples could really become one in Christ? Acts 10:28, 34. Did God then use Peter to officially inaugurate salvation to the Gentiles, with the same special "one-time-only" manifestations of the Holy Spirit as when first it was confirmed for the Jews? Compare Acts 10:44-47 with 2:1-4.

COMMENT: Some today falsely claim Peter was still so completely a Jew in his outlook, that he led a so-called "Judaizing party" within the Church. This is a lie! The proof lies overlooked here in Acts 11:6.

Peter was staying at the house of one Simon a *tanner*. Under Jewish ceremonial law, a tanner, by virtue of his occupation — tanning the raw hides of dead animals — was considered unclean. Had Peter been the thorough-going Judaizer some claim him to be, he would certainly have lodged elsewhere!

Here is proof Peter knew and practiced the same freedom from *ceremonial* prohibitions as did Paul (Col. 2:20, 21).

A little later we find Peter freely living and eating with Gentiles — whose very persons were "unclean" and contaminating in Pharisaic doctrine. He mistakenly withdrew only when others arrived for fear *they* might not yet understand (Gal. 2:12).

8. Meanwhile, did Philip continue to preach the gospel to other Gentiles who had been prepared by previous conversion from heathenism to the Jewish religion? Acts 8:26, 27, 40.

COMMENT: Azotus is the city of Ashdod — one of the five ancient royal cities of the Philistines.

9. Does this mean that Christianity is, or ever could become, a Gentile religion? John 4:22; Rom. 9:4, 5; Mat. 10:5, 6.

Why Paul's Work Among the Greeks?

1. Had Jesus forewarned that His followers would be put out of the synagogues? John 16:2. That whoever would kill them would think he was serving God? Same verse. Did this begin to come true in the persecution by Saul (afterward called Paul)? Acts 8:3:; 26:9-11; I Tim. 1:13.

COMMENT: 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 rancour — until the Pharisees stirred them up. Notice how in later times Paul 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, 14; 14:1; 16:13, etc.).

2. Did Jesus Christ strike Saul down and con-

vert him? Read the whole of chapter 9 and the first part of chapter 22.

COMMENT: Paul's conversion 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.

3. Did Jesus Christ call Paul for a particular mission? Acts 9:15; 26:16; Rom. 11:13.

COMMENT: Note that Christ called Paul or Saul to be a special "apostle to the *Gentiles*." But he was also chosen to aid in the *major* mission of the Church, too, that of reaching the House of Israel. Notice it carefully in Acts 9:15.

Years later, tradition states, after preaching all over the Greek-speaking world (Rom. 15:19) and after going to Spain (verse 28) Paul went on even into Britain.

4. Did the other apostles recognize Paul's special responsibility of going to the Gentiles? Gal. 2:8, 9. But did Paul and Barnabas always go first to the Jews (the only Israelites in that area)? Rom. 1:16; 2:9, 10; Acts 13:42-48.

COMMENT: Paul and Barnabas always went to the larger cities in the Gentile areas. Here they expected to find significant numbers of Jews. Many such cities boasted a synagogue and an organized congregation.

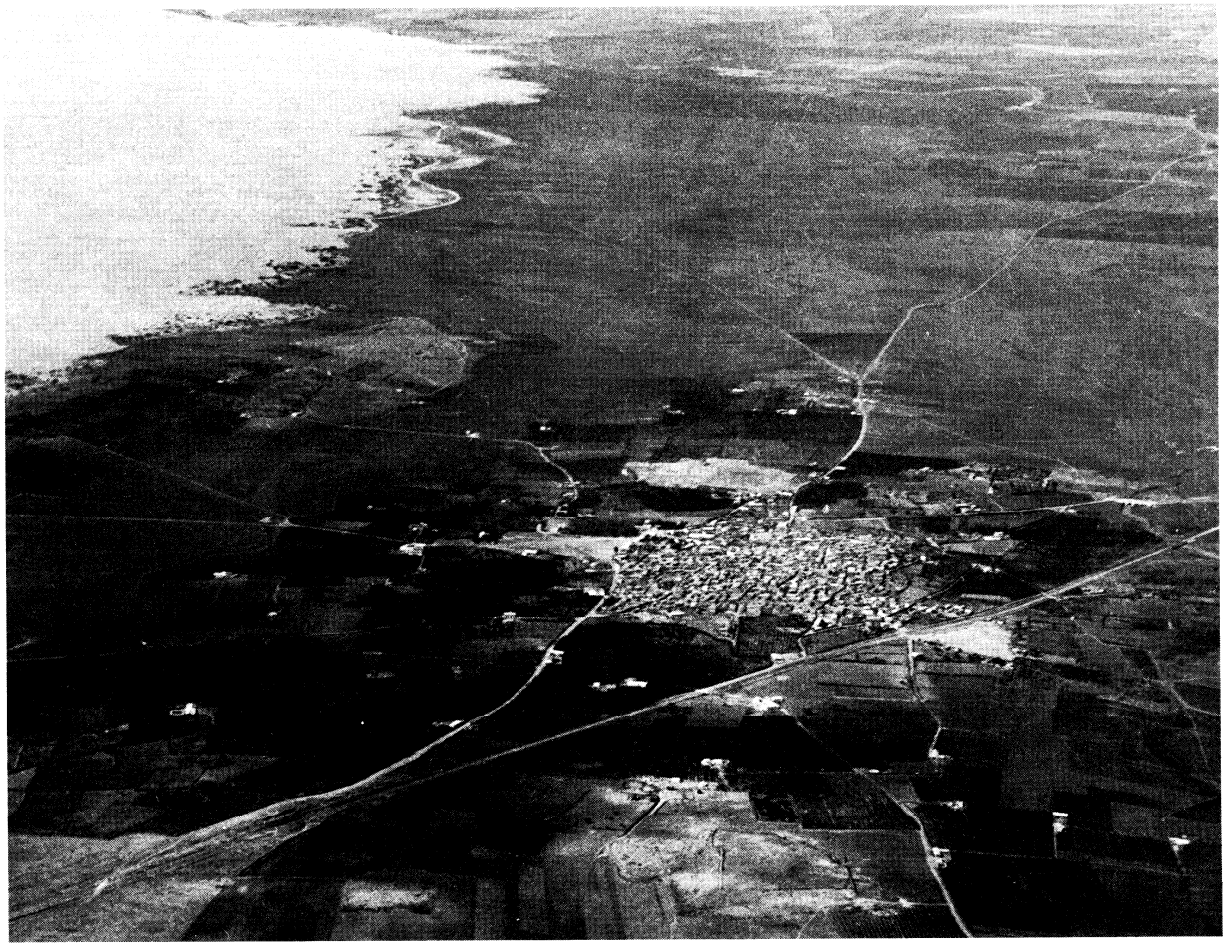
Being of equal rank, when Paul and Barnabas found themselves in disagreement as to how best to prosecute the work in their area, they separated (Acts 15:36-41). Barnabas then continued his work to the Gentiles in the area of Cyprus and Egypt. Of his later work we hear next to nothing. Probably not a 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 that question lies in the nature of the special purpose Christ was working out through Paul. What was that *purpose?*

A modern air view of Ashdod and a corner of the Mediterranean Sea. Philip the evangelist (who was first a deacon — Acts 6:5) came down here in one of the earliest evangelistic efforts beyond Judea. Jerusalem — in the mountains of Judea — lies off to the right.

Matson Photo Service



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 goverment. 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-generation* work in the Greek world.

Jesus 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, many congregations established. Paul knew the Greek nation could not long remain faithful (Acts 20:29). With the great falling away (II 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' apostles (II Cor. 11:13-15). But the Greeks would still preserve the true inspired Greek New Testament.

Paul's later work in Spain was no more prosperous or permanent than Barnabas' in Africa or the other apostles'. That is why Paul did not stay long in Spain.

Because we possess much more knowledge of the travels of Paul, the world today seems to think Paul was much greater than the other apostles. This is not the point. It was only because of his special commission — to teach the Greeks and to have much of the gospel preserved in their language through his own epistles — that Paul supersedes and overshadows all the rest. The "false apostles" of those days forged writings in the names of Peter and the others as well as in Paul's.

5. Did "many thousands" — probably the majority — of the members of the Church continue to be Jewish? Acts 21:20. This was now about 30 years after the Church began. Were many of them former Pharisees? Acts 15:5; 26:5.

What Was Peter's Job?

We saw how all the early lay members of the Church were scattered from Jerusalem. But what of the apostles?

1. What was the main commission given to the Twelve? Were they called specifically to go to the "lost sheep of the *house of Israel?* Mat. 10:2-6. But to do this they would have to leave Palestine! Only the Jews — *house of Judah* — had returned to Palestine from captivity.

2. Whom did Paul find left in Jerusalem about 38 A.D.? Gal. 1:18, 19.

COMMENT: Of the original Twelve, only Peter was there! The James mentioned here is the "Lord's [half-]brother," also mentioned in Mat. 13:55. He was not one of the original Twelve, 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).

3. When King Herod, about A.D. 42, martyred James, the brother of John, whom else did he find in Jerusalem? Acts 12:1-3.

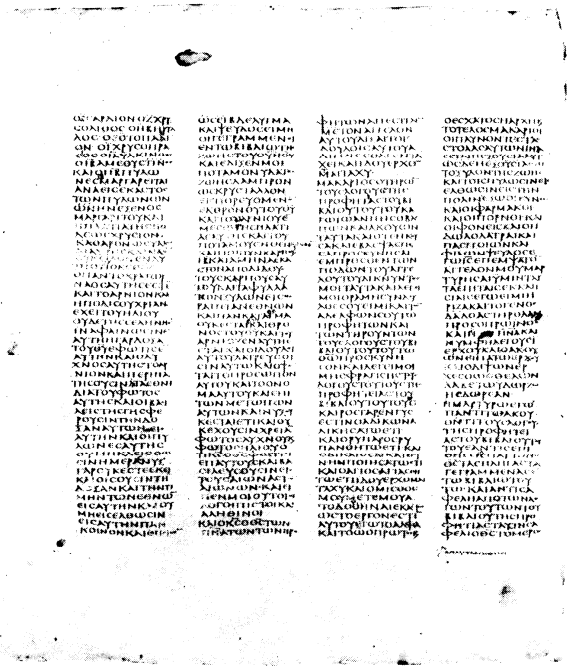
COMMENT: Peter was there. But the rest were long gone! Note that it was the season for the Days of Unleavened Bread. This probably accounts for the temporary presence of James.

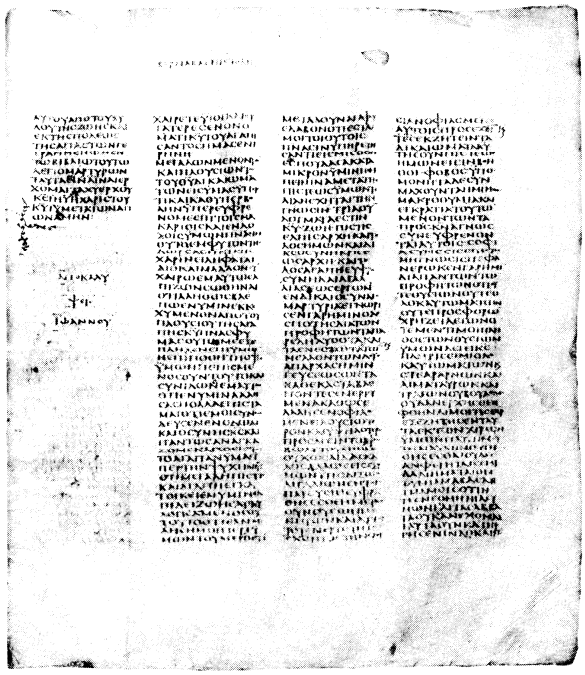
4. When Paul again went up to Jerusalem in A.D. 49, whom did he find? Gal. 2:9.

COMMENT: Again, *Peter* (Cephas), James (the Lord's brother) — and John. Now it was John who was temporarily at headquarters in Jerusalem.

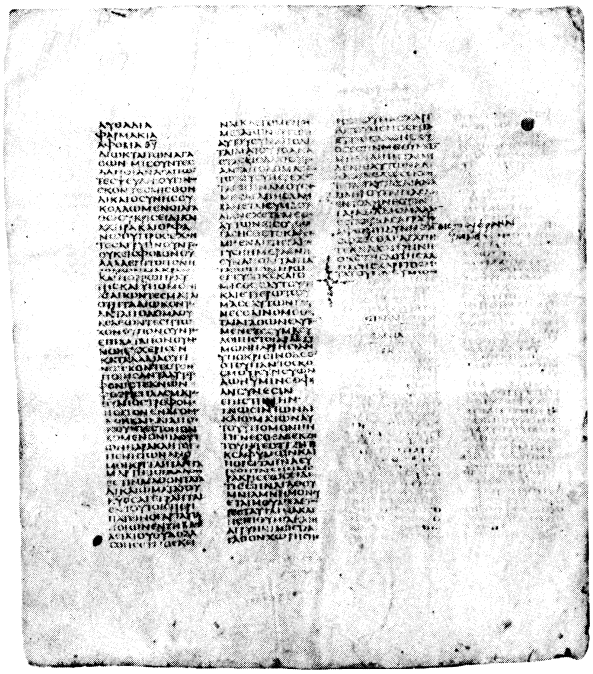
It is evident that most of the apostles had designated responsibilities elsewhere, which were occasionally interrupted either by trips to or temporary tours of duty at headquarters. Peter was most often at Jerusalem after the first 12 years in which the Syro-Palestinean area had been thoroughly covered. But this does not mean that Peter settled back on an ecclesiastical throne and never left the city. Notice!

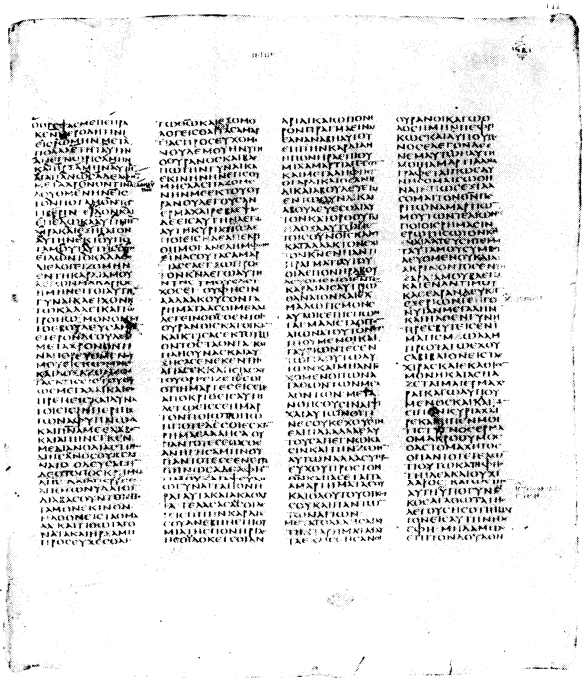
5. We have already noted Peter journeying to Samaria, Joppa, and other places around Palestine. Where else does the Bible show Peter traveled? Gal. 2:11. Then isn't it evident that part of Peter's job among the Twelve was to travel around and to coordinate the Work

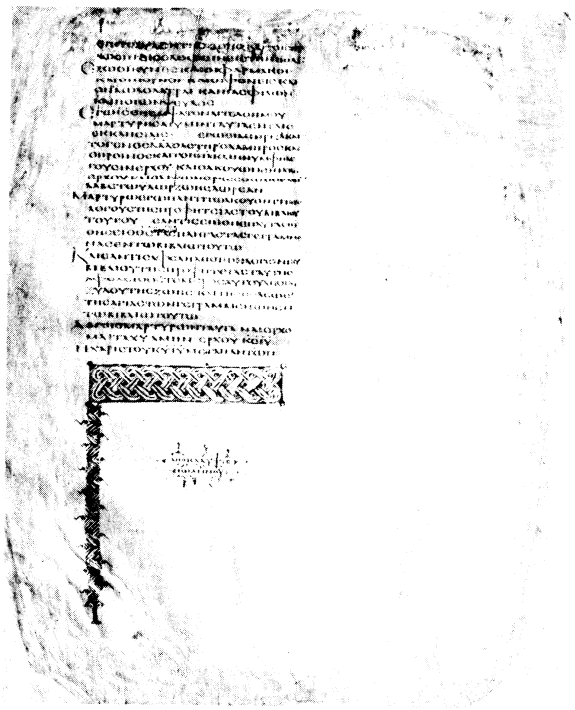


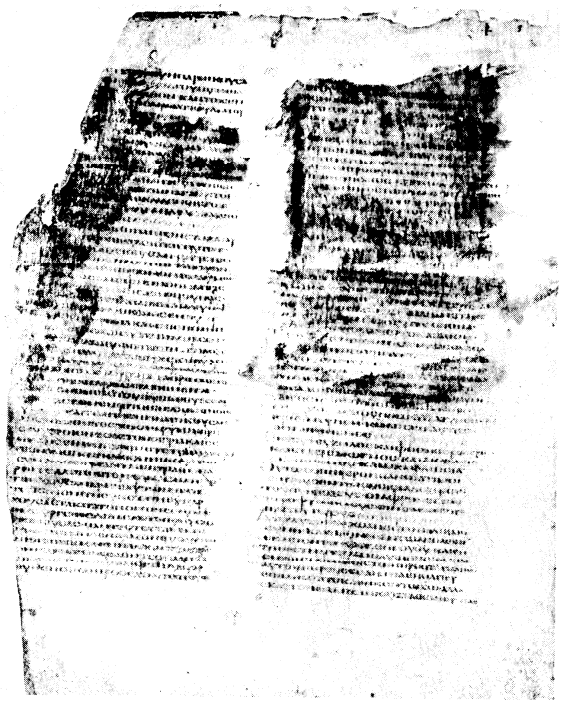


Photographic reproductions of Codex Sinaiticus (above and below) and of Codex Alexandrinus (opposite page). These Egyptian manuscripts, written in Greek — the international language of the time, have been corrupted by Egyptian scribes. To the end of the book of Revelation (above) has been added the spurious epistle of Barnabas. In the photograph below, we see this spurious epistle followed by another book — the Shepherd of Hermas — which originated in Rome and is filled with false doctrine. On opposite page the first letter of Clement, bishop of Rome, is deliberately added by a scribe to the Book of Revelation. And *that* despite the dire warning which he had just copied of Rev. 22:18 (visible on opposite page beginning on line 17 of first column).









© Ambassador College

of the Church to the House of Israel and the Jews in the Near East?

6. On Peter's first trip, did John accompany him? Acts 8:14. Did the Church usually send out men by twos? Luke 10:1; Acts 15:39. 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).

COMMENT: 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.

Nor was Peter at *Rome!* It was another Simon, also called a Peter, who went to Rome. (See Mr. Armstrong's account of this Simon in *God Speaks Out on the New Morality.*) Rome, basically, was not a Christian headquarters at all! When Paul wrote to the Romans — in about 56 A.D. — was there even an organized congregation there to which to write? Rom. 1:7. There was none! As late as 56 A.D.!

COMMENT: The Apostle *Peter* 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.

7. Somewhat later, when Paul in person arrived in Rome, did he call a *church* congregation to him, or were there only unconverted Jews to whom he could preach? Acts 28:17.

COMMENT: There were *scattered* Christians in south Italy (verse 14) as well as in Rome, but at the time no organized congregations in either area, outside of family worship in private homes.

8. As late as Paul's *second* imprisonment in Rome, were there only three other *true* ministers there? Col. 4:10-11. But were there false ministers *pretending* to be on Paul's team? Phil. 1:15; 2:20-21.

9. One more mention of Peter requires our notice. Where was Peter, much later, after persecution and Roman-Jewish strife had virtually ended the Work in the Palestine area? I Peter 5:13. *Not* at Rome. But at Babylon on the Euphrates! Where thousands of Jews still lived, descended from those anciently carried there captive by Nebuchadnezzar.

Where Did the TWELVE Apostles Go?

Most of the "lost sheep of the *house of Israel*" were not in Palestine. Not since the ancient Assyrians had deported them. Where *were* they? Let us notice *where the apostles went.*

1. As a headquarters apostle, Peter had also a certain responsibility toward the whole Church. In fulfilling this overall responsibility, did he write two epistles to congregations

abroad? I and II Peter. To whom did he address the first epistle? I Peter 1:1.

COMMENT: These provinces 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 here mentioned 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, then. Now compare I 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 2 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 that Christians were everywhere a multitude!

2. Did James, the Lord's brother — another headquarters apostle — also write an epistle to all the twelve 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.

COMMENT: 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 that he spent *much time* in Britain!

We do not know exactly when Peter died — probably before 69 A.D. But in 80 or 81 A.D. Anacletus, Roman Pope, 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 — I, II and III John — and the Book of Revelation.

Such scanty information as we possess suggests that John only returned to the region of

Historical Pictures Service

Trajan, Roman Emperor (98-117 A. D.). He allowed Christians peace instead of persecution — though the law demanded persecution — because truly repentant and converted Christians were obedient, peaceful, dependable — the kind of subjects any government appreciates.

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.

Did you notice how many reached Britain?

If you would like to know more about the later life and work of the apostles who so strangely disappear from the New Testament account, write for the free article "Where Did the Twelve Apostles Go?"

End of the Apostolic Era

When the gospel first reached each new region, there were those God had prepared to receive it. Church growth was spectacular. Soon, however, the first rush was over. Real conversions now came much more slowly, as the number of Christians in relation to the population of each region tended to reach its "saturation point."

And now, side by side with success and growth, came increasing persecution.

Nero, mad Roman Emperor, initiated the first *government* persecution in A.D. 64. A disastrous fire had destroyed a large part of the capital city. It was whispered that Nero himself had set it, to clear away the slums that cheapened the view from his palace, and that he had celebrated by fiddling while Rome burned. To clear himself — and safeguard his position — Nero accused Christians.

Some were martyred by lingering torture, other by exposure to wild beasts in the arena. *The infant* CHRISTIAN *congregation at Rome was virtually destroyed.*

Nero's government had, in A.D. 61, released the apostle Paul after two years at Rome. (Two years was the maximum imprisonment prescribed by a Roman "statute of limitations" since in the meantime no accusers had appeared against him — Acts 28:30, 31.) Now Paul was seized again (II Tim. 4:13), spoke personally before Nero himself, and in A.D. 68 was beheaded.

Meanwhile, in Judea the unconverted Jewish nation had risen in rebellion to drive out the Romans from Palestine. A Roman army under General Cestius came in sight of the walls of Jerusalem in A. D. 66. Had he only known it, the rebels were beaten. But *something* held him back! The rebels took heart. His chance was past.

But God's headquarters Church was still in danger — in the doomed and besieged city! Nero had tended to favor the Jews because of his Jewish mistress. He died in 68 — shortly after Paul. General Vespasian now commanded the Roman army and moved energetically to crush the rebellion.

Was the living, active Jesus Christ on the job? Yes! A stronger hand than all the might of Rome would make the next move!

The new Emperor died suddenly. Leaving the army in Palestine to his son, Vespasian raced for Rome to be emperor. Again, the Roman armies temporarily withdrew!

And in Jerusalem, as God's people were gathered at the Feast of Pentecost, there was an earthquake, accompanied with a great noise, and a supernatural voice was heard to say in the Temple: "*Let us remove hence!*"

Orient Press Photo Co.

Likeness of mad emperor Nero preserved on Roman coin. Note the facial expression of this man who persecuted the Christian Church and martyred the Apostle Paul.

God's people did "remove hence!" The Church fled to the mountains, and on to Pella, a small town just beyond the River Jordan. 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 A.D. 69 out of fear of revolt after the death of two Caesars already that year.

Thus ended, after just two 19-year cycles, the work of the Apostolic Church in Jerusalem!

Candlestick Removed From Ephesus!

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

In the first 38 years, 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 and 3).

1. Did Jesus Christ highly commend the first era of the Church for its labor and patience and goodness? Rev. 2:2, 3. Did He state it had *early* to face false apostles — men seeking to build up a following for themselves, whom Jesus Christ had not ordained? Same verse. Who were these people whom the True Church "canst not bear"? Verse 6.

2. But did He also have something against this church era? What is it? Verse 4. What did Christ threaten to do if this church did not awaken from its lethargy? Verse 5 compared with chapter 1, verse 20.

COMMENT: He would *remove it out of its place!* 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 A. D. 135 after a second Jewish War with Rome.

At the time John penned these words, Jesus Christ 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 A.D. 69 to all nations (Mat. 28:19).

3. Did the apostle Paul before A.D. 68 find it necessary to warn even some ministers to be more diligent? Col. 4:17. Was even the Evangelist Timothy, his most faithful helper, in need of being stirred up? II Tim. 1:6, compared with Philippians 2:19-20.

COMMENT: 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 you making the same mistake?

4. Was there an early *secondary* headquarters of the Ephesian era? Acts 11:26. See following COMMENT.

COMMENT: The earliest large, predominantly Gentile congregation of the Church was at Antioch. 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 A.D. 42. Another account tells *why* — he went there to withstand Simon Magus!

Antioch became a secondary headquarters because it was equally accessible from Pontus and Syria, as well as from the Greek-speaking area in western Asia Minor. Here was the major Gentile center for the Feast of Tabernacles (Gal. 2:12-14). Paul, Barnabas and other leaders continued to work in Gentile lands from a headquarters in Antioch.

Even long after apostolic days, Antioch remained a chief center. It was one of the 5 seats of Patriarchs (great fathers, or *papas*) in the false church that Constantine organized as a state church.

5. But where was Paul's *later* headquarters? Acts 19:1, 10. Did he return there once more after his trip to Spain and Britain? I Tim. 1:3.

COMMENT: Ephesus was the later headquarters of the Ephesian era, to which it gave its name. It was more than coincidence that Christ chose Ephesus to represent the first organization of the Church!

John, last survivor of the original twelve apostles, and the Philip who had originally been a deacon, both died in Ephesus. (The original Apostle Philip, one of the Twelve, was buried at Hierapolis of Phrygia, according to Polycrates.)

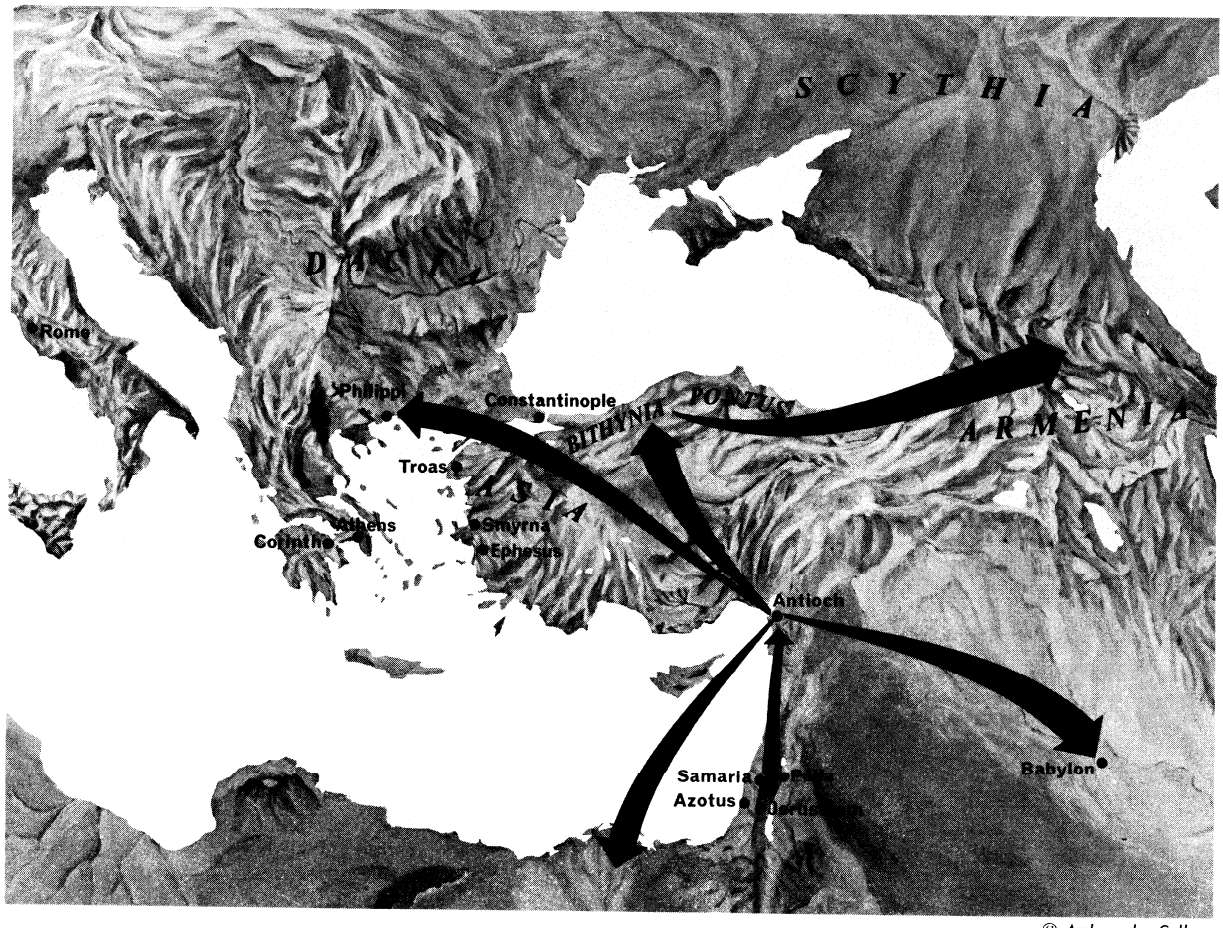
About A. D. 90, Emperor Domitian began the second imperial persecution. John was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea where he received the Revelation and the command to write it down. Probably the reason Christ allowed John to be imprisoned was to give him the leisure to write the remaining 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.

At Patmos the apostle John was finally released. Again at Ephesus he trained Polycarp who later carried forward the work of John and Philip. Polycarp and Polycrates are the last leaders of the Church in this part of the world of which we have any record.

6. What had previously happened in Ephesus, when once the strong hand of Paul was removed? Acts 20:30; I Tim. 1:3; II Tim. 1:15.

COMMENT: Ephesus and all the local congregations in the surrounding Roman province of Asia, were soon turned against Paul personally, by false teachers and disloyal elders who sought



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Map illustrated eastern half of Roman world in which the New Testament Church spread. Arrows indicate routes along which the gospel was disseminated first from Jerusalem to Antioch, Syria, and then to Asia Minor, Cyprus and Egypt. It spread east to the area of ancient Babylon and, later, west into Europe.

power and prestige for themselves. Many of these detached groups were permanently drawn away from the True Church. Ultimately, the "mystery of iniquity" already in operation long before (II 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 these who had become lukewarm. It happened in Pella as well, as we will shortly see.

7. This is why John, years later, wrote the way he did! Compare I John 2:19, 20, 26; 4:1; III John 9, 10.

COMMENT: 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 call 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 succes. The bishop of Rome, Anicetus, observed Easter. Nor would he be converted, nor observe *God's* Passover.

The following year (155 A. D.) Polycarp was burnt to death by a mob in Smyrna.

The name Smyrna means *bitter*. And *bitter*, indeed, was the era of the Church that it symbo-

P. Termes

The desolate site of ancient Ephesus from which a whole city has literally been removed. To the "Ephesian" era of the church which the city named, Christ said: "I will remove your candlestick."

lizes! 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 [tolerate] such things!' "

Such things as Anicetus — who claimed he was human head of the Catholic 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 apostacy 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 days instead of God's — yet dragged on though Polycarp was dead. Now, it was Polycrates of Ephesus resisting pagan pretences of Victor at Rome (190-198). But to no avail. Victor not only pretended his vast Easter-keeping organization was Christ's Church but arrogated to himself authority to "excommunicate" those who in Asia 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.

1. Few understand the real origin of the Synagogue of Satan. Is salvation *of* (beginning with and proceeding *from)* the Jews? John 4:22. Was there a people (and religion) which from Old Testament times had claimed to be Jews and were not? Verse 12.

COMMENT: 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 II 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 8:9-11, 21-23). For fuller information, write for our free reprint, "What is the Synagogue of Satan?"

2. Does the sure finger of God's Word point out the identity of the adversary of God's Church during the Smyrna era? Rev. 2:9.

COMMENT: Space will not permit complete revelation of the origin and development of the false church in this Lesson. That will follow later.

The Church of "Poor People"

We have 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 in this region. But we are ahead of our story. We must return to the predominantly Jewish Church in Palestine and Syria.

1. In the time of the first Apostles, did the world regard the True Church as only a "sect"?

Acts 24:5. Did it also nickname them "Nazarenes"? Same verse.

2. How does Jesus Christ characterize the second era of His Church? Were they "poor" in the eyes of the world — but actually *rich?* Rev. 2:9. *Why* were they rich? Verses 8, 10. Wasn't it because the *Living* Jesus Christ continued to guide and empower them — to prevent His Church from turning aside to false doctrine? Mat. 28:19.

COMMENT: 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! See Acts 24:14.

Instead of being any longer a part of the apostolic "Ephesus" era, the time had come when Jew as well as Greek composed the "Smyrna" era — or "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 a hundred and twenty years, Simeon was crucified.

Thirteen more "bishops" — all circumcised Jews—ruled the Jerusalem-Pella church in rapid succession. Then, about A. D. 135, came Jesus Christ's time to separate a living "Smyrna" remnant from among the lukewarm and unspiritual who clung to it.

The stubborn Palestinian Jews had revolted in 132 for the third 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 (II 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 disfellowshipped those few who remained faithful to the true doctrine and to Jesus Christ! The Smyrna Era now began.

3. Had the Apostle Paul prophesied this? II Tim. 4:3-4.

4. Was this same thing happening — even earlier — among the Greek congregations? III John 9, 10.

5. Does Jude mention that some — even before the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem — had begun to "separate themselves"? Jude 19. This was about A. D. 66. Within a few decades, only a remnant was left.

COMMENT: Hegesippus and Eusebius — Greek writers — tell us of faithful Zokker and James, grandsons of this Jude. As He often does, Jesus was still ruling His Church and working through members of the same family.

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 naïvete *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, founded by Simon Magus, now branded them "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.

Among the people east of Jordan, Ebionite *views* lingered until the Islamic conquest in the 7th century.

But that's again getting ahead of the story.

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." He it was 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.

Eusebius, whose chief theme was to justify and eulogize Emperor Constantine and the church of Constantine's choice, copied much of his information about the early True Church

from Hegesippus, not really telling the true story of either.

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 pre-existence of Christ, and the writings of Paul. But this was not true of all. The next age of God's True Church — revived in the place where migrating Ebionites disappear — accepted these truths! Their very distinguishing name became *Paul*ician!

It was the elaborate theology of Catholicism and Gnosticism which most "Ebionites" rejected! The interminable *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 — II Thes. 2:2.)

A rigid splinter group, also called Ebionite, *was* indeed antagonistic to Paul. It was composed of carnal-minded Jews who could plainly perceive Jesus was no ordinary man. But they could never forgive Paul for having put *Gentiles* on the level of *Jews* by offering them salvation. Irenaeus (about A. D. 180, in the area of modern France) wrote they used only the Gospel of Matthew.

A third group labeled "Ebionites" had accepted some Gnostic doctrines. As the second century ended a considerable number had exchanged the simple creed of Jesus Christ for a strange blend of Christianity and Essenism. Some of these became Elchasaites, so called after their leader, a false prophet led astray by demon visions. About A. D. 220. Alciabides propagated their false doctrine at Rome. Quite possibly this was the real origin of the "pseudo-Clementine" *Homilies* (composed about 170 A.D.) and *Recognitions* — (written later, but based on the former) — whose perverted ramblings betray knowledge that Simon Magus, *not* Simon Peter, founded a church at Rome! 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.

About 200 A. D. an Ebionite from Ephesus, named Theodotion, revised earlier translations of the Old Testament into *Greek*. His translation of Daniel gained universal acceptance in place of the poorly done original Septuagint version.

A little later another Ebionite, Symmachus, also made a Greek translation of the Old Testament. His was probably the most readable — yet faithful — such translation ever made. Symmachus is also noted for his Commentaries on various Old Testament books.

(To be continued)

CHRONOLOGICAL CHART

A.D.	
31	New Testament Church begins on Day of Pentecost.
32	Stephen martyred — Lay members scattered from Jerusalem.
33	Simon Magus "dunked."
35	Saul converted on road to Damascus early that year.
38	Paul returns to Jerusalem.
	Peter sent to Gentiles.
42	Church at Antioch founded.
42	James martyred.
45	Simon Magus goes to Rome.
45	Paul and Barnabas journey through Cyprus and southern Asia Minor.
49	Council at the headquarters church.
50	Paul goes to Europe — second 19-year cycle begins on Day of Pentecost.
56	Paul writes Epistle to the Romans.
59	Paul arrives bound in Rome — released in 61.
61	Epistles of James and I Peter.
62	Paul, released, goes on to Spain, etc. James, the Lord's brother, martyred by being thrown from a high window of the Temple.
64	"Nero's" fire at Rome.
66	Jews revolt.
66	II Peter and Jude written.
67	Paul's last imprisonment.
68	Paul beheaded, Peter killed.
69	Jerusalem congregation arrives at Pella.
70	Temple burnt.
80	Monument to a "Peter" dedicated at Rome.
90's	John's Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation.
98	John dies.
107	Simeon, son of Cleophas, dies.
112	Pliny's letter about persecuting Christians.
132	Jews revolt again.
135	Most of Pella congregation apostatizes — end of Ephesian Era — beginning of Smyrna Era.
155	Polycarp burnt to death.
195	Victor of Rome "excommunicates" true Christians.
303	Christianity persecuted (303-313) for 10 years in Eastern Roman Empire.
	Recurring famines, pestilences and wars reach a climax.
325	Catholics hold Council of Nicaea. Smyrna Era ended by persecution of Constantine.
337	Death of Constantine "the Great."