AMBASSADOR COLLEGE

BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

". . . in the Isle that is called Patmos"

LESSON 50

What our STUDENTS SAY

Lesson 48

"Thank you, for the 48th lesson on fasting. It contained all the answers I needed, and just at the right time. They get better all the time. I feel so unworthy of all the wonderful truths that come to us so freely."

— Mrs. K. E., Anaheim, California

By Mistake

"I am only on the 31st and 32nd lessons in the Correspondence Course, but when I expected my 31st lesson, on opening it I found the 46th lesson. Someone had made a mistake. At first I was greatly disappointed. However, since I was determined to have some guidance, I started to study this lesson so much in advance of me and do you know it fitted one of my problems to a "T." This lesson, so much out of context, has helped so very much that now that I look at it I'm sure the person who made the error was directed."

— Student, Nipawin, Saskatchewan, Canada

• *Yes, it can happen. We on the Correspondence Course staff are still human. And we can make mistakes.*

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And please forgive us when we goof!

AMBASSADOR COLLEGE
BIBLE
CORRESPONDENCE COURSE
LESSON 50

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About Our Cover . . .

The isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. Here the apostle John was imprisoned (Rev. 1:9) in the mid-90's A.D. and saw the visions he was commanded to "write" (Rev. 1:19). From Patmos emanated the prophecies and promises of Revelation concerning God's Church through seven definite eras until Christ will return.

After the first two 19-year cycles, the Church went to sleep. Another whole cycle had passed, and now in a fourth 19-year cycle, Jesus Christ was using John, last of the original apostles, to finish the New Testament and to give the "Ephesian" Era a last chance to awaken and do the "first works." It did not. Instead, the last survivor of the zealous first generation of the Church, Simeon son of Cleophas, died in 107.

Photo: P. Termes

WHAT BECAME OF THE CHURCH JESUS BUILT?

THE Christian Church in Judaea fled to Pella in 69 A.D. From that date the organized proclaiming of Christ's true gospel ceased!

For the next hundred years, church history is virtually a blank. "Scanty and suspicious" are the records, says the historian Gibbon, which remain from this period (*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 second age of God's Church. Enemies called them "Ebionites" (meaning "poor" or "poverty stricken") — though not all "Ebionites" were really Christians.

Why Persecution?

The second age of the New Testament Church is portrayed in Revelation 2. It is typified by the local congregation of the Church in Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11).

1. Was this Smyrna era of the Church to be persecuted? Rev. 2:10. Were some in that era to be martyred? Same verse.

COMMENT: Already we have seen two periods of persecution on Christians even during the first century. But both these persecutions were local. They even fell heavily on the developing

Shown below is Aleppo in northern Syria, located not far from Antioch, the earliest major center of the Church outside Palestine. In the latter days of the Smyrna Era, an "Ebionite" congregation was located here in Aleppo (Boerea). Driven by persecution in the third and fourth centuries, the last remnants of the Smyrna era of the Church took one further step north into Armenia. *Wide World*

Catholic Church in Rome. And there was a *reason!* What was it? Notice!

The ONE REASON the Roman *government* ever persecuted any religion was *fear*. Why?

Because the Roman Empire was a dictatorship. Its very foundation principle was exploitation of the masses. There was NO DEMOCRACY. Any new *non-government* grouping — lodge, union, club, anything — was strictly forbidden — illegal — lest opposition become organized. Only because they were a race as well as a religion were the Jews specifically exempted from those Caesar suppressed.

The leaders in power feared for their power — and for their lives.

If an Emperor persecuted a church, it was *not* because he cared if false doctrine enslaved his subjects. All shades of opinion were welcome. But only so long as they served and supported the Emperor!

When Nero feared for his throne he persecuted Christians. For this unauthorized organization was taking root in his very capital. Nero cleared *himself*, and rid himself of a potential rival at the same time. He was "killing two birds with one stone!"

2. Have events proven the Roman civil government had *reason* to feel a church seated in Rome had designs on supreme secular power? See Rev. 17:3. Remember, *this* church is *not* the poor and humble True Church of Rev. 2.

COMMENT: You should review Lesson 31 which shows how the "woman" mounted and rode the "beast" — the false church usurped AUTHORITY OVER the territory and peoples of the Roman Empire.

In the days of Diocletian (284-305 A.D.), so-called "Christians" were deeply involved in political haggling. Diocletian believed he had uncovered a plot to take over the empire when he found "Christians" taking sides between himself and co-emperor Galerius. "Church father" Lactantius tells us Galerius had spent the winter urging Diocletian to extirpate Christianity.

Diocletian's persecution edict of February, 303, was directed solely against Christians *in government* or in homes as servants of *government* personnel! When it was issued there were rebellions in Syria and Melitene. Suspicion became certainty. A second and much stiffer edict ordered all church leaders imprisoned.

A special civil tax on all Jews — which the Romans had substituted for the former temple tax (Mat. 17:24-27) when the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. — was now rigorously exacted of "Christians" of the Synagogue of Satan. Did they not, after all, *call themselves Jews?!* (Rev. 2:14.)

But the True Church of God never planned to usurp power in this world. Contrary to modern interpretations, the Apostle Paul never envisioned making the Roman Empire the Kingdom of God!

Remember the grandsons of Jude? When suspicion fell on them — because they were Christians, and *descended from David*, and because Domitian feared any person who might claim a a right to be a king — *they* were found *innocent* and were released — exonerated.

"On the Just and the Unjust"

1. But, just as God often sends good things on the just and the unjust alike (Mat. 5:45), must *true* Christians sometimes suffer along with the false — through no fault of their own? II Tim. 3:12.

2. Did the apostles instruct Christians to do their best to avoid giving the government any ground for persecution — to prove their innocence by their actions? Rom. 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-16, noting particularly verses 15 and 16.

3. But if unjust persecution came anyway, what then? I Peter 2:20-21; 3:12-17.

COMMENT: Few have realized Peter wrote these words in the shadow of his own martyrdom, instructing and strengthening the Church for the religious persecution that lay ahead.

4. How did he say a Christian could rejoice in such persecution? I Peter 1:5-6; 4:13. Notice the words "in the *last time*," "when his [Christ's] glory shall be revealed."

COMMENT: Keeping your eye on the goal beyond is the only way. Certainly one will not *enjoy* persecution itself even though he may realize tribulation is for his ultimate good! Read also Hebrews 12:11.

5. Is the Church of God also called the Church of Christ? Rom. 16:16. Then, isn't the name of "Christian" fitting and proper for a follower of Christ? Compare Acts 11:26. Did Peter write that some might suffer because evil men had brought "the name of Christ" and "Christian" into reproach? I Peter 4:14-16.

6. Did Peter mention these same evil men elsewhere? II Peter 2:10. Note that they "despise government." They refused to be *ruled!*

COMMENT: They falsely claimed to be members of God's Church (verses 1 and 13 — notice also Jude 4, 8). The Romans couldn't tell the difference between true and false brethren, of course. The real motive of those who secretly had crept into God's Church was to GET for SELF. They *wanted to rule* others but would not first themselves obey.

This carnal motivation — while professing the name of Christian — brought retribution on

them (II Peter 2:1, last part, and verse 3) and persecution on the innocent.

Once "false brethren" had drawn persecution, special persecution edicts were placed on the Roman law books. Nevertheless, they were not enforced during most of the time. Throughout the first three centuries of the Christian era, persecution was only occasional.

The letter of Pliny — before cited — is a case in point. Pliny found most Christians in Bithynia-Pontus law-abiding, hard-working, model citizens. They had *heeded* what Peter wrote them. Yet Pliny knew, also, that for a Christian congregation *to meet together* — even on the Sabbath — was against state law. That's why he wrote the Emperor for clarification. Just how far must he go? How rigidly enforce the law?

Pliny seems to have been generally a humane and upright man. He was willing to be lenient — to let *peaceful* (Mat. 5:9) Christians alone. And Emperor Trajan allowed it! Christians were to be punished for *the name* of Christ *only if* someone formally accused them before a judge. Then, of course, law *must be* upheld!

7. Had Jesus forewarned that persecution follows right after famine, pestilence, and earthquakes? Mat. 24:6-9.

COMMENT: This will not only happen at the end time, but it has happened before. Events run repeatedly in similar cycles. That is why it is said, "History repeats itself."

Human beings want a scapegoat. Just as Nero blamed Christians for burning Rome, so others blamed them for other things. If Christians had mentioned prophecies foretelling troubles, and if those troubles happened, then they must have *caused* them! It was all *their* fault! So people reasoned.

"Under Marcus Aurelius (161-180)," says Fisher, (*History of the Christian Church*), "Christians suffered both from popular fury and from government. In this reign risings of the populace against the Christians were frequent. These were occasioned by the terrible calamities which the empire suffered. There was not only warfare without cessation; there was a plague, from the destructive effects of which, Niebuhr tells us, the empire never recovered."

As the Work of the Smyrna age drew to a close, economic conditions became worse. The famous Edict of Diocletian (A. D. 301) fixing standard prices empire-wide was issued as a direct result of several bad harvests and resulting scarcity. Unfortunately, as always, such legislation only made matters worse.

Eusebius (*Ecc. Hist.*, IX, 8) gives a vivid description of the culmination of famine, pestilence and war about A. D. 310.

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!

1. Did Christ foresee that the real persecution would come from religion, not government? Mat. 10:17; 23:29, 34.

COMMENT: Even more than governors, pseudo-religious men fear for their positions of influence over others. Especially do they persecute the real TRUTH — because it *convicts them* of iniquity.

2. Does Christ reveal that the major part of the persecution on the "Smyrna" Church was to come in a specified period of ten years duration? Rev. 2:10, and the "day for a year" principle in Num. 14:34.

COMMENT: This prediction has been completely misunderstood by most people. Most everyone has sought to apply it to the wrong church! Eusebius (*Ecc. Hist.* VIII, 15, 16) mentions that the ten years were fulfilled in the last great pre-Constantine persecution (that of Diocletian and Galerius) in 303-313. It lasted on Rome only three years. In the Eastern Roman Empire it lasted 10 years. 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, A.D. 325, and then issued edicts favoring it and anathematizing all others.

Granted, 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.

Constantine himself was not a Christian. He was a worshipper 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 *Sun*day Christianity become dominant.

Only it was NOT really *marriage* — but a fornicating relationship! 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!

1. What were true Christians instructed to do *whenever* they found themselves in persecution? Mat. 10:23; 24:16; Luke 21:21.

COMMENT: The headquarters church at Jerusalem had been given a *special* sign — armies encompassing Jerusalem — to signify the time to flee from *Judaea*.

But that flight from Jerusalem was only a forerunner of two other great flights of the Church.

2. Did the Church know to flee farther this time than from one city to another? Mat. 24:4-9 and Rev. 6:1-9 compared with Rev. 12:6, 14.

COMMENT: Both of the great flights of God's Church, recorded in Rev. 12, are preceded by the same five universal conditions.

Eusebius relates there had been *many false prophets* in the period just before Constantine. Widespread *wars* had nearly torn the Empire apart. And just preceding the religious "peace of Constantine" (produced by persecution!) were great *famines* and *pestilences*. Eusebius closed his mind to the *real significance* of these events.

He ought to have known that the True Church must flee! And by this to have deduced *which was* the True Church!

3. Did Jesus Christ prophesy the True Church — symbolized as a pure "woman" — would flee to the "wilderness" for 1260 years after the Council of Nicaea? Rev. 12:6. (This Council was called together in 325 A.D. by Constantine to enforce one religion on all Romans.) Use again the year-for-a-day prophetic principle. Would God continue to protect His Church there? Same verse. What was Christ's promise before the Church was founded? Mat. 28:20, especially the last part.

COMMENT: This fleeing to the wilderness could never have applied to the Catholic Church. But this is just one more proof that God's Church was another church entirely!

But the True Church Lives On!

"I will build my church," said Jesus, "and the gates of hell, shall not prevail against it."

There would be other Christians, in other ages following the Smyrna Era.

1. What did Jesus promise individuals in the "Smyrna" Church for being faithful until death? Rev. 2:10. Is He *alive* to give it — "FOR EVERMORE"? Does He especially emphasize to them the return to life after death? Rev. 1:18; 2:8.

COMMENT: Ancient Smyrna was a "Crown City" in its heyday. The "crown of Smyrna" was an acropolis — a circle of beautiful buildings standing on a peak close to the bay. The view from the sea must have been famous in all that world.

Now it lies desolate, deserted. The "crown" is a ruin. When Jesus comes, He will give His followers from Smyrna a "crown of LIFE." That crown shall never tarnish — that Smyrna shall never die!

Jesus mentions the "crown" to signify that not he who exercised rulership in carnal-minded greed, not those whose religion was a cloak for their lust, not those who by scheming sought dominance of governments — *but those who by patient endurance, surrender and obedience,* overcome THEMSELVES—will reign over the earth.

Oddly enough, even the literal city owed its decline to Constantine. When he built his new capital at Byzantium on the Bosporus, commerce and prestige were shifted from Smyrna. It sank into ruin, but was later rebuilt and is today the modern city of Izmir. Thus the history of the city parallels the prophecy of the church era named after the church located in that ancient city.

A living prophecy demands a living Overseer. Jesus Christ is alive! And He *is* overseeing His Church and His Work today.

But what of the members and the children of members of the Smyrna age 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. But more about them later.

The "Pergamos" Era Begins

Now let's advance to the third of the messages to the "seven churches."

1. Did Jesus indicate the local church of Pergamos would be persecuted? Rev. 2:13.

COMMENT: Pergamos was the original seat of Roman civil government in the province of Asia (western Asia Minor). But long before, the city had already become a seat of Satan when one of the chief colleges of the ancient Chaldean mysteries migrated there after Babylon fell in 539 B.C. Doubly, when John wrote, this *was* "Satan's seat"!

2. Did Pergamos have her martyrs — represented in the prophecy as "Antipas"? Same verse. What does the name ANTIPAS mean? See Comment.

COMMENT: 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!)

Popes, remember, did not really become important until long after the local congregation of God's Church in the literal city of Pergamos had ceased to be. So this message, like the others, was prophetically written for a later age.

3. How does "Satan's seat" continue to identify the adversary of the Pergamos ERA of God's Church? See Comment.

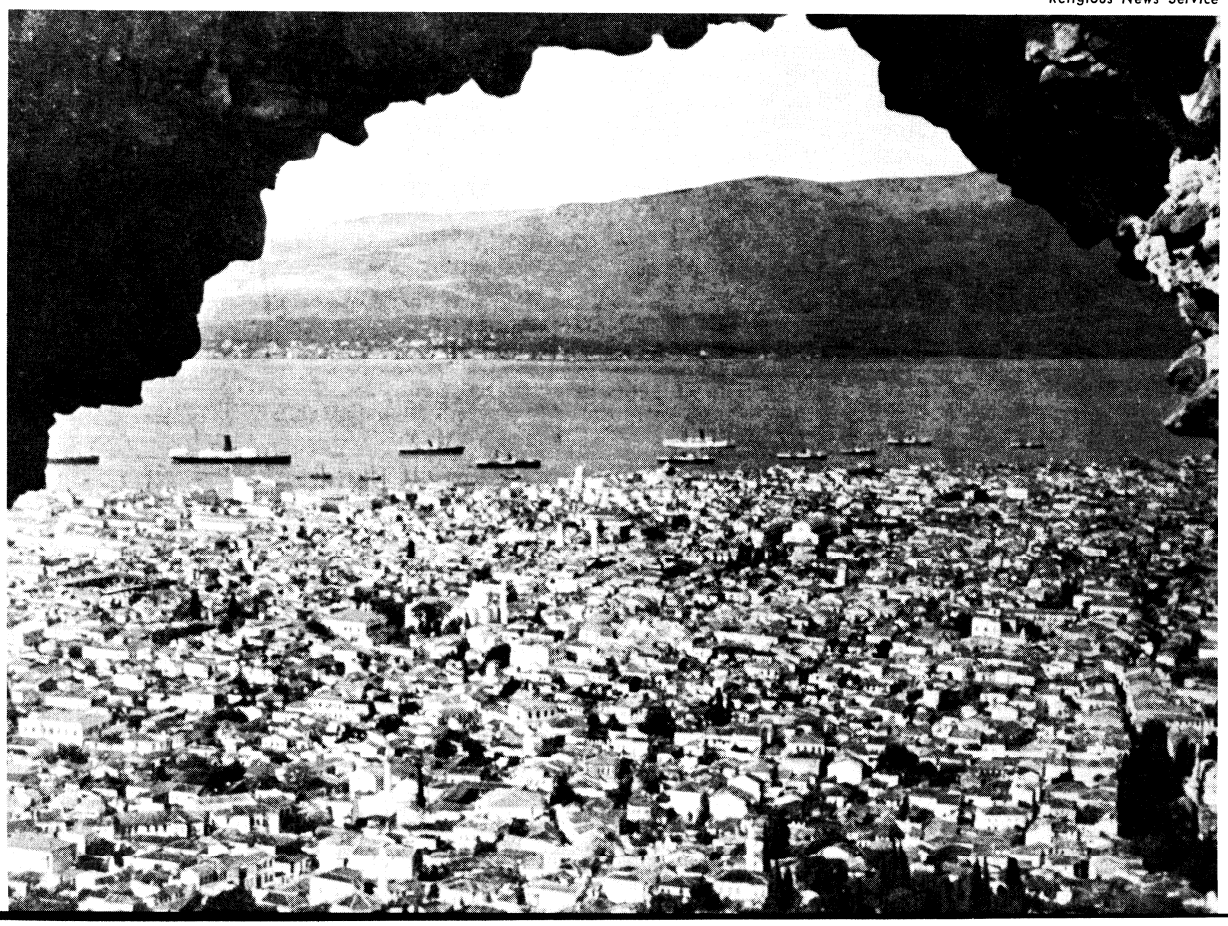
COMMENT: Satan's seat in the city of Pergamos was only a type. In 133 B.C., Attalus, last god-king of Pergamos, had willed all his powers to Rome. This became the legal basis of the pagan Emperors' title of Pontifex Maximus — *high priest* of the world. Then, in 378 A.D., Emperor Gratian conferred the title on Damasus, bishop (pope) of Rome.

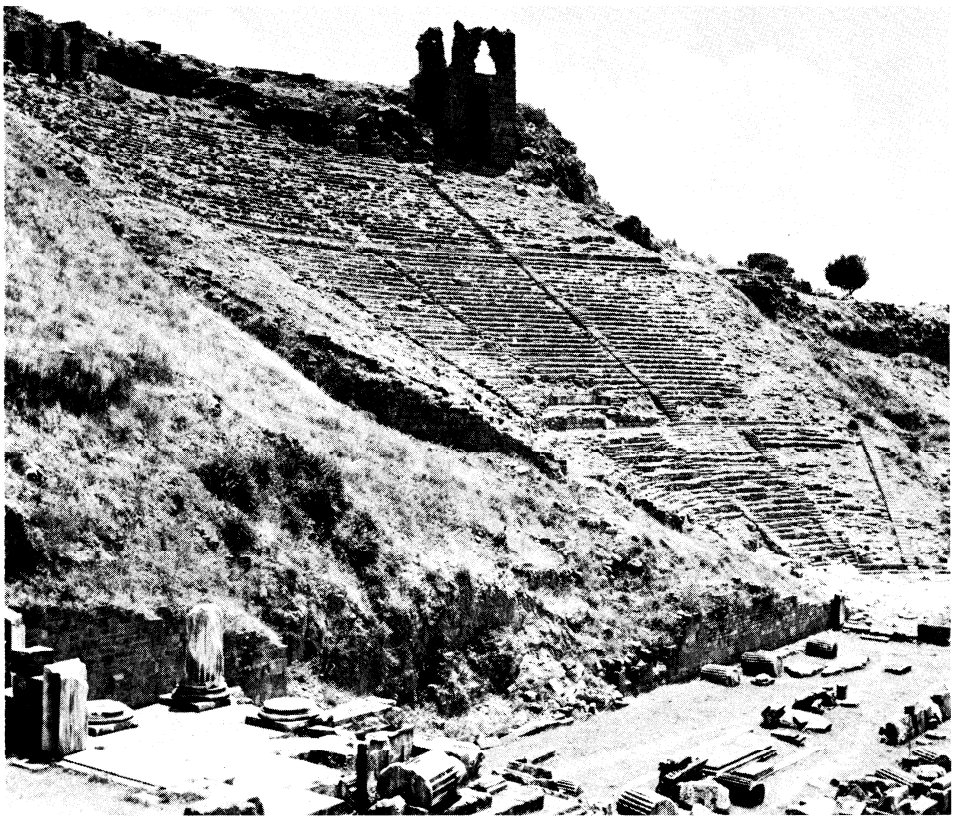
Meanwhile, Constantine had built and transferred the capital of the Eastern part of the Empire from Rome to the city of Constantinople on the Bosporus. Constantinople was now the place from which the Eastern Roman Empire was hereafter ruled. So — in the Pergamos ERA — "Satan's seat" was established in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

The religion of Rome was simultaneously directed by her "Pontifex Maximus" through the

Smyrna, once in ruins but rebuilt and a living city today, pictures a Church Era characterized by bitter persecution, sorrow and death, but whose future reward is sure — resurrection from the tomb, like Christ Himself, to eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Religious News Service





(Left) Immense outdoor theatre of ancient Pergamos. This city was the seat of Roman government for the province of Asia and a major center for the practice of the Chaldean and related pagan religions. Many came here hoping to be healed at the shrine of Aesculapius, god of medicine. The local congregation at Pergamos dwelt where "Satan's seat" was. *(Below)* Constantinople on the Bosporus, modern Istanbul, founded by Constantine the Great to control the commerce, the politics, and incidentally the *religion* of southeastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean region. The authority exercised from here in the early centuries of the Middle Ages constituted *this* city as "Satan's seat" during the Pergamos *Era!*

Ben-Haim, Ambassador College

secular power of a vast so-called "Christian" church-state. It ordered that any religion which would not *conform* should be extirpated.

These two facets of Satan's earthly government — the political and the religious combined — spelled persecution for the "Pergamos" Church. Well might Jesus say: "I know . . . where Satan's seat is . . . where Satan dwelleth." His "Pergamos" Church knew, too!

This 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, 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 seventh and eighth 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 A.D.

1. For what reason did God's minister and apostle, Constantine of Mananali, have to die? Did Jesus Christ hold certain things against this Church? Rev. 2:14-16, and see Comment.

COMMENT: 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 Church were not really converted. These were ones who cleaved to the Church with flatteries — that is, in insincerity (Dan. 11:34). They held the false "doctrine of Balaam."

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 doctrine 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 most, 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 Jesus 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.

What Was the Doctrine of Balaam?

1. But who was Balaam? Num. 22:7, and Comment.

COMMENT: 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. And — let the wise understand — *who*, today, in the same office, is headquartered in (St.) *Peter's?!*

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.

2. When the emissaries of Balak, king of Moab, asked Balaam to curse Israel, did Balaam ask God if he might be allowed to do it? Num. 22:10-11. Would a *pagan* high priest do a thing like this? Notice! Would even Satan himself ask God's permission to bring a curse on those under God's protection? Job 1:9-12; 2:4-5.

3. What did God answer to Balaam's evil suggestion? Num. 22:12. God said "*NO!*" But was Balaam willing to take God's answer? Verse 18-19. Read through the rest of this chapter and the next two chapters. Notice how God forced

Balaam to actually bless instead of curse Israel, in spite of Balaam's determination to go as far in the way of evil as God would permit.

COMMENT: 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!

4. Does God resist this practice? Numbers 22:32. Does He judge those who practice such as worthy of death? Num. 31:8, 15-17.

5. What else was Balaam's doctrine? Numbers 31:16 — note the words "through the counsel of Balaam." Also read all of chapter 25.

COMMENT: It was Balaam who taught Balak how to tempt Israelites into sin, 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's doctrine is to commit sin whenever sin would seem to be profitable or pleasant — 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!

His counsel to Balak 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.)

We will fully explain that in this Lesson.

6. Does the New Testament flatly state that Balaam was a false prophet whose god was his *greed?* Jude 11; II Peter 2:15.

Balaamites and Nicolaitanes

1. Did the Pergamos era have those also who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes? Rev. 2:15. What was this? See Comment.

COMMENT: Note that the Nicolaitanes also existed in the days of the "Ephesian" Church, which hated their *deeds*. What was it they *did?*

From the *Catholic Encyclopedia:* these Nicolaitanes "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 is identified in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* with a Bishop Nicholas of SAMARIA, a heretic of Simon Magus' company (Acts 8)!

But why then was he called Nicholas "of Antioch"? Eusebius gives us a clue. Before Simon Magus went to Rome — probably 42 A.D. — *he* was in Antioch for a while. Eusebius tells us that Jesus' Apostle Peter was sent to Antioch (Gal 2:11 — A.D. 42) to counteract the poison of Simon Magus.

From there he 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 Nicolaitanes, at any rate, are *identified* with the counterfeit "Christianity" founded by Simon Magus.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, too, was one of NO LAW — "unrestrained indulgence," "promiscuity." Their doctrine and the doctrine of Balaam sprang from the same source. In fact, as we have already noted, the name "Nicolaitanes" might well be translated "Balaamites," and *vice versa,* for both Balaam in the days of Moses and Simon Magus in the first century A.D. occupied the "office" of Nimrod.

But how, then, did they *differ?* Why did Jesus Christ charge the Church in Pergamos with harboring both?

The answer is plain.

The doctrine of Balaam was the original, universally received religion of the region. Asia Minor (where the city of Pergamos was), with the Tigris-Euphrates valley and Armenia, 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

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Christian symbols? No! These pre-Christian crosses, found on stones of ancient Ephesus, were symbols of the religion of Balaam. No wonder the Paulicians abhorred the worship of the cross and other such pagan "Christian" symbols!

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

Significantly, the Armenian church to modern times practiced, or allowed, animal sacrifices for sin — and the eating of sacrificial flesh! Could Revelation 2:14 be more specific?

On the other hand, the Nicolaitanes 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!

Now let's notice the doctrines and identifying signs of the *truly converted* members.

The Paulicians Were Maligned!

The world calls these "Pergamos" Christians *Paulicians* — just as it called the "Smyrna" Christians *Ebionites* — and the "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! How true is Matthew 10:22!

Some pretend this "wretched Paul" was the Catholic Patriarch of Antioch called Paul of Samosata who was deposed about 270 A.D. But such a connection is totally false. The Paulician leaders were never in any way Catholic.

Their very names show which Paul they followed! Constantine of Mananali took the name of Silvanus, helper of Paul the Apostle (see I Thes. 1:1; II Cor. 1:19). Simeon, his successor, took the name of Titus. Another of the Apostle Paul's close associates! Simeon's successor was a man named Paul who did not change his name. Later, Gegnesius, his son and successor, took the name of *Timothy*. His successor Joseph became Epaphroditus (compare Philippians 2:25), and lastly, Sergius was called Tychicus (Eph. 6:21). (See the chart on page 15.)

Yes, these men were the followers of Paul (I Cor. 11:1).

Their congregations, in part, were descendants of the Apostle Paul's own converts. Just as the congregation at Pella had continued to be called the "Jerusalem" church, those who fled Greece and western Asia Minor as a result of Constantine's persecution retained their old names.

Those gathered in Mananali continued to call themselves *Achaia* (where ancient Athens and Corinth had been); those in Castrum Colonias and Cibossa, *Macedonia*. The congregation at Cynoschora was called *Laodicea;* the one at Argaous, *Colossae;* the one at Mopsuestia, *Ephesus*, and so on. (See map on page 14.)

But does this mean, as some claim — echoing Photius of the 9th century, that they rejected Peter and followed only Paul? No! They merely taught — rightly — that Peter was not the only one to whom were given the keys of the kingdom of God, as the false church claims.

Notice the proof. The evangelist Silvanus, whose name Constantine of Mananali chose for his own, was the scribe who wrote the epistle of I Peter! See I Peter 5:12. Look this up and write it down! It is important that you know that the whole theory of a rift between Peter and Paul was an invention of false "Christians." Do the same with I Cor. 1:12; and with Gal. 2:9 and II Peter 3:15 (Cephas is Peter).

Furthermore, Paulicians *used* the writings of Peter. (They also used the Old Testament which some falsely say they rejected.)

The reports circulated about these people were slanderous and false. Unfortunately history has preserved little except hostile evidence surviving today. Only by careful sifting and comparing can we prove the truth.

All books and writings of the Paulicians were devoted to the flames in accordance with the laws of the "pious Emperors." Often those who owned them were murdered. Only the *Key of Truth*, hidden for centuries, preserved in out-of-the-way Armenia, remains. And that was put into writing centuries late, in a corrupted age!

Suspiciously, ALL the Catholic writers who enumerated Paulician tenets, instead of writing firsthand reports, slavishly copied from a single scurrilous older document. Obviously, their ignorance of the Paulicians must have been near total, and their object in writing about God's people was anything but truth!

NOT Manichaeans!

One of their chief accusations was that Paulicians were Manichaeans, believers in the ancient Persian Magian doctrine of dualism.

But this was a false charge. Several early writers admit the Paulicians totally rejected Mani, founder of Manichaeanism. The authoritative *Dictionary of Christian Biography* states flatly: "There is *no* indication of anything like the Manichaean esoteric and exoteric organization of their communities into 'elect' and 'auditors.'" The Gnostic and Manichaean writings they completely repudiated.

What the Paulicians really believed was that the devil is the ruler of this world (II Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9), and that human nature is dominant here. But either in ignorance or their duplicity, nearly all the orthodox "fathers" — including

Origen, Eusebius, Athanasius, Jerome, etc. — pretended the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4) meant the God of heaven!

When confuting "heretics," the "fathers" were not too scrupulous of the truth. It was their common practice to brand all opponents indiscriminately Manichaeans.

No wonder that as late as the 12th century, Catholics in Europe were still actually clipping out and destroying incriminating passages from books in their own libraries!

Real pagan Manichaeans, gradually driven from Iraq and Syria by the Moslems, were indeed persecuted by Catholicism. In the common persecution, the same "Paulician" Church which had earlier tolerated the followers of Balaam and Simon in their midst — and had become corrupted by them — might well have consorted with Manichaeans. This would account for the Manichaean influence which is so plainly apparent later in the Bogomils of the Balkans and especially in the Cathars of western Europe.

But they were centuries later. We must not get ahead of our story.

Paulicians rejected the false practice of praying to saints — or to Mary. They rejected purgatory. Images, pictures, crosses, incense, candles! They said that monks are the agents of Satan! That Mary, according to Scripture, was not a perpetual virgin.

They are accused of ignoring all the fasts and feasts, especially Sunday, of the (Armenian and Catholic) church. Obviously! These pagan institutions were incorporated into "Christianity" long after Christ. Instead of the pagan Sunday, the Paulicians would have kept the Sabbath.

They rejected the "bath water" of the persecuting church — *infant* baptism. But they practiced real baptism by immersion *after genuine repentance*, and cited Jesus' age of 30 at baptism as a significant example. To those who advocated baptizing infants, they said: "You do not know the mystery of baptism; we are in no hurry to be baptized, for baptism is death." They knew baptism signified the *death* of the *self*.

How They "Held Fast" Christ's NAME

Catholicism insists on regarding Jesus as *God*, and without human nature as all men have. They call His mother the "mother of *God*." They say Jesus had only the nature Adam is assumed to have had before he "fell." That is why the doctrine of the "immaculate conception" was invented — that Mary too was miraculously and sinlessly conceived.

Human beings would *like* to ignore the fact that Christ came with human nature to set us an *example*, showing us how we should live.

God's Church emphasizes that Jesus Christ had human nature, that He was GOD *changed into* mortal human flesh!

Because the Paulicians emphasized the *humanity* and also the baptism of Jesus, Conybeare, who found and translated the *Key of Truth* from Armenian, thought they denied Jesus' eternal pre-existence and/or His divinity before baptism. This idea remains unproven. It is possible that some *later* people among the Paulicians may have accepted either the Arian or the Adoptianist concept of Christ from "false Christians."

1. Did Jesus say the (converted) Paulicians had not denied the true *faith* — body of beliefs? Rev. 2:13. Did they also hold fast His *name?* Same verse. What does the world "name" mean? See Comment.

COMMENT: God puts great stress on names. He calls things by the name which expresses *what they are*. To hold fast to Christ's *name*, the Paulicians had to have *known who and what Christ really was!*

2. Does the Bible declare that those who do not believe Jesus Christ was *human*, was tempted and *suffered* (Heb. 4:15; 5:8), are not Christians? I John 4:3; II John 7; I Tim. 3:16.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ was God made *flesh* — a human being (John 1:14; Heb. 2:14, 16).

As shocking as it may sound, many people have no Savior, because they fail to discern that it had to be human life that paid for their sins, yet a human life worth more than all other human lives combined.

The view that Christ did not really suffer, that He was really immune to pain, and only *appeared* to be human, to suffer and to die, was one of the doctrines of the early followers of Simon Magus.

It is totally false!

The Bible teaching — and the Paulician belief — is that Jesus became a human being and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, successfully resisted Satan and overcame the evil pulls of human nature. Jesus lived a perfect life. We too must live the same kind of life by the same Holy Spirit in us. This is how Christ can dwell in us (Gal. 2:20).

In this way Christ still today *continues* TO COME *in the flesh*.

3. Is this receiving of the Holy Spirit called an "anointing"? II Cor. 1:21, 22. Why is Jesus called "Christ"?

COMMENT: Both the Greek *christos* and the Hebrew *messiah* simply mean an "anointed one" — one having received the Holy Spirit.

The Paulician teachers — we have direct statements regarding Sergius and Sambat — taught that the same Holy Spirit was in them

that had been in Jesus Christ. Their persecutors, to whom this was incomprehensible, charged that the Paulician leaders called themselves "Christs," as if it were blasphemy.

Paulician Church Government

The Paulicians claimed to be *the* "holy universal and apostolic church" founded by Jesus Christ and his apostles. Of the false churches, they would say: "We do not belong to these, for they have long ago broken connection with the church."

They taught that the Church is not a building, not just an organization, but an organism — the body of truly converted baptized persons, which has continued unbroken with the apostolic traditions from its beginning. Jesus Christ was and is the *head* of that Church.

Paulicians also 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, and accused the priests of hiding the Scriptures in order to deprive the people of the truth and of making monetary profit in addition by dispensing a *supposed* word of God in its place.

The great false church has never allowed the ordinary person to read the Word of God when she could help it. Only in certain "western" countries in modern times, where an educated public opinion exists, has such freedom ever existed.

1. Should every Christian study the Scriptures for himself? Acts 17:11.

2. Did Jesus Christ provide a variety of church offices for the purpose of *guiding* the lay members, to keep them from going off individually into heretical doctrines *read into* the Scriptures? Eph. 4:11-13. Also I Cor. 12:28. Are not these the ones to whom He gave the power of "binding and loosing"? Mat. 18:17-18.

COMMENT: Four of their greatest leaders, the Paulicians called *apostles* and *prophets*. These directed the other ministers — *synecdemi* (itinerant evangelists), *poimenes* (pastors) and *notarii* (teachers who also had the responsibility, in the absence of printing, to laboriously hand-copy the Holy Scriptures). These ministers exercised the power of "binding and loosing."

Also mentioned in the Pergamos Era are "elders," "rulers," and "readers." Compare the supplementary offices of ". . . miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" — see I Cor. 12:28!

Certainly these ranks were never in the clergy of the false church! Priests, monks, and nuns could never be made to fit these scriptural categories!

And unlike the supposed-to-be celibate priests of the false church — or the "electi" of the Manichaeans — the elders of the Paulicians not only might, but were expected to be married and the head of a family (Titus 1:6)!

After Sergius, it appears the surviving faithful evangelists were called *astati*, and soon the higher ranks ceased to be filled. By the time of the later Paulicians, *notarii* were the only surviving ministers.

3. Did Jesus Christ Himself put men directly into the highest office of this chain of authority? And did He *ordain* them by the laying on of His hands? Mark 3:14; John 15:16.

COMMENT: The Paulicians, consistently emphasized Jesus' authority over *apostolic succession*. No one can take upon himself the office of minister (Heb. 5:4). Only by the choice of Jesus Christ, by the Scriptural ordinance of the laying on of hands, were different ranks of ministers ordained to authority, and that by those who were ministers before them. The succession of ministers thus begun by the hands of Jesus Christ remained unbroken in the True Church through all ages.

Some of the men so ordained may prove unworthy. (Judas is an example.) They may be more interested in physical things than in service or the gospel.

Among the Paulicians were men, from time to time, whose works made it obvious Jesus Christ Himself had ranked them as apostles.

An apostle need not be an impressive looking man, or of *human* nobility. Fishermen, publicans, and tax-collectors have been among Christ's apostles (Mat. 4:18, 21; 9:9; Luke 5:27). Any greatness is not of the man, but of the *office*. No man is qualified for it but through the Holy Spirit.

Though you might not respect the MAN, you had *better* respect that *office!*

That office is of God. The office of Pope is only permitted by God.

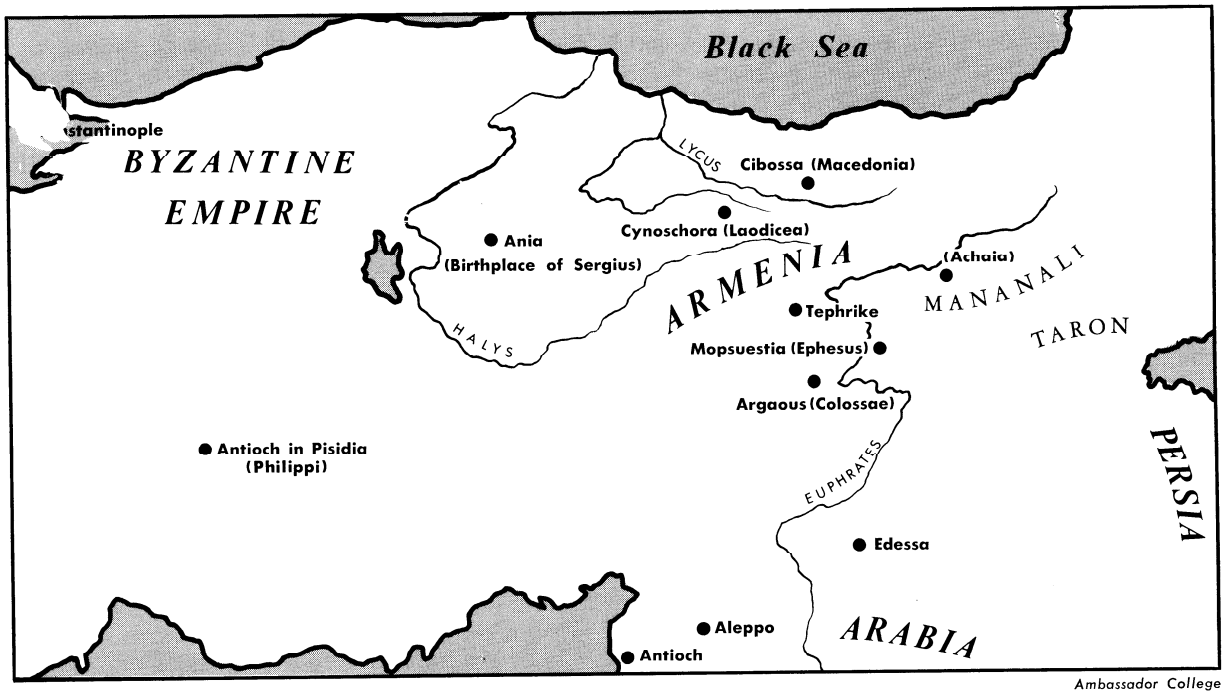
End of the Paulician Era

Paulicianism became an accepted faith in a vast region along the Taurus Mountains. It made great inroads in Armenia, Albania on the Caspian Sea, and nearby regions.

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. His people were allowing many false teachings to grow in their midst.

Now understand what this situation led to.

During all this time, persecution had not ceased. Even in Armenia an organized persecu-



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Scene of Work of Pergamos Era of God's Church — now modern Turkey. Just as the congregation at Pella after A.D. 69 continued to be known as the "Jerusalem church," so congregations in Armenia were made up of those whose ancestors had fled Macedonia, Laodicea, Achaia, Ephesus, Colossae etc. as a result of Constantine's persecution.

tion was waged as early as the middle of the 6th century. Persecution was nearly continuous in Roman (Byzantine) territory.

The civil government had been soon replaced by the dominant church as the active agent of persecution. For it knew best how to hunt down and identify its victims. It knew *just enough* of true Christian doctrine to detect its intended victims from among the general population.

At first, persecuting "Christianity" found difficulty in condemning Paulician doctrine. When the persecutors asked: "Do you believe" in this or that fundamental "Christian doctrine," the Paulician could usually answer "Yes."

Knowing that Catholics neither understood Biblical *meaning* nor even the religious sounding phraseology they so blithely repeated, many spiritually weak Paulicians 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. At length, persecutors discovered certain pertinent questions which inescapably reduced their Paulician victims either to APOSTACY or martyrdom.

Many "professing" Paulicians then permitted themselves full *external* conformity with the dominant church. They secretly *knew* they were sinning. But they held that Christ would forgive it. Thus *many* accepted the DOCTRINE OF BALAAM — going as far in the way of evil as they thought they could.

Punishment was not long on its way!

What the Doctrine of Balaam Brought its Believers

1. Did Peter prophesy that whenever false teachers would get within the True Church they would bring swift destruction upon themselves? II Peter 2:1-3.

2. Did Jesus Christ, in his opening words, spotlight the *sword* as of major significance to this Pergamos Era of the Church? Rev. 2:12.

COMMENT: The sword is a symbol of fighting and war. Even the city of Pergamos had received its name from being *a fortified place*, and passed through many wars. These facts made it ideally suited to picture this age of the Church.

3. Did Jesus warn that unless they would repent of harboring Nicolaitanes and Balaamites in their midst, He would "fight against them with the sword of my mouth?" Rev. 2:16. What does this sword represent? Rev. 19:15. Compare also Rom. 13:3-4.

COMMENT: This sword shows that Christ Himself is a warrior — One who will not hesitate to *use* His power to enforce His rule on earth! All He has to do is to speak, and it is done. That is why it is the sword *of His mouth.*

Either His people of the Pergamos Era would

submit wholly and gladly to His rule which He exercised *for* them and in their best interest — the rule of the "sword of the spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12), and its pure Biblical doctrines — or else He would call for a sword *against* them.

It was one sword or the other!

In the end, multiple thousands did perish by the literal sword, because the Church did not repent of its error — which grew and grew.

Ever since the Arabs began to contest the Byzantine power over Armenia, about 650 A.D., persecution had driven some Paulicians to hide in Moslem territory. About 750, the Emperor Constantine Copronymus reconquered the upper Euphrates region from Armenia and removed many Paulicians to fill the deserted cities of Thrace. The day of the sword had begun!

From this time on Paulicians were split into parties. *Violence* flared among them at Mananali between the followers of Zachariah, son of Gegnesius, and Joseph who took the name of Epaphroditus. Joseph led his people across the border, where he was received by other Paulicians. Under attack there by a local ruler, he led them on into Pisidia. From there, in 30 years of ministry, he evangelized all Phrygia. Christians, labeled Paulicians, were numerous in Phrygia and Lycaonia by 800 A.D.

Elsewhere, divisions multiplied. Half-Jewish Baanes gained great local influence with a militant doctrine of retaliation! They had forgotten — or never knew — that Christ was the one to wield *the sword!*

At this juncture, as if Christ was giving them one last chance, he raised up Sergius to do his work.

Sergius is the most renowned of all the Paulician leaders. He was originally a woodcutter and carpenter and earned his living with his own hands. For 34 years in the ministry he labored earnestly to bring the people to repentance and a return to the truth. "I have run from east to west, and from north to south, until my knees are weary, preaching the gospel of Christ" he wrote.

But to no avail.

Leo V (813-820), opened a new persecution against Paulicians in Cappadocia. So carnal were the vast majority of these Armenian people, so used to their "fornication" — mixing with the politics of this world — that it provoked a military rebellion! When it failed, many fled into Saracen (Arab) territory.

For the next 50 years, they continued to raid Byzantine territory, although Sergius absolutely condemned fighting and retaliation! But of course they would not listen to him. The people would not listen to any true minister of Christ now! *Remember, most of these Paulicians now merely cleaved to the Church with flatteries* (Dan. 11:34). *They were not converted.*

"PAULICIAN" CHURCH LEADERS

Earliest surviving mention of Paulicians by that name 555 A.D.	
Constantine of Mananali (Silvanus) 654-681	stoned to death
Simeon (Titus) 684-687	martyred by Byzantine Emperor Justinian II
Paul "the Armenian" 702-	
Gegnesius, his son (Timothy) 717-746	convinced Emperor Leo III that the Paulician doctrine was not heresy; at his death his son Zachariah claimed the office but was rejected by most Paulicians
Joseph (Epaphroditus) 746-782	evangelized Phrygia
Sergius (Tychicus) 801-835	resisted militant teaching

After the death of Sergius, even those who had heeded him began to fight.

The Empress Theodora (829-867) continued the persecution with unabated zeal. Furious and desperate, they reconciled the use of Bible and sword. Revolting from the dominion of Theodora, they submitted to the Caliph of Bagdad.

Armies of Moslems and carnal-minded Paulicians combined ranged through the heart of Asia Minor. But trusting in their worldly alliances with the Arabs instead of relying on Jesus' protection, the Paulicians were betrayed and slaughtered. One hundred thousand perished!

The sword had prevailed!

The Great Move to Europe

From this time the Paulician name became famous as a *warrior* people. No longer was a Paulician a follower of Paul! Yet still they *claimed* the distinction of being a remnant of the true apostolic church. Perhaps a *few* real Christians, invisible to the world, did live among them, growing in grace and knowledge.

In Armenia, Sambat reorganized a remnant of the Church at Thonrak. The Middle Ages record of their doctrine, the partially preserved *Key of Truth* translated by Fred C. Conybeare, was found with Paulician remnants which survived in Russian Armenia as late as the 19th century. There was continual persecution, though a recognized line of leaders continued there for at least 200 years. Even here they embraced more and more error as time went on.

Meanwhile the Byzantine Empire used the

Paulicians to defend its European border.

Emperor John Zimisces in 970 transported to Thrace 100,000 more Paulicians. For a time they defended the Empire against the Bulgarians and thereby enjoyed full religious freedom.

In this region, as early as 870, missions from the Paulicians of the Taurus had begun to teach their religion to the Bulgarians who had moved from the Volga. Converts became known as Bogomils, which meant, in the Slavic language of the Balkans, "friends of God."

At the beginning of the 13th century a "Bogomil" leader — Catholics called him "their Pope" — lived in the territory of modern Yugoslavia. Congregations in Italy and France also recognized his authority. More about them later.

But wherever they were, the sword never ceased from their land. The emperors continued the policy of Copronymus of transporting and arming Paulicians. In the end it not only destroyed the Paulicians, but the Empire's only bulwark against the Saracens.

The Saracen wars, on top of centuries of Irano-Roman rivalry, left Anatolia a desolation. Considered already spiritually "the wilderness" when the True Church went into it, it was now truly a *desert*. The "thousand churches" for which Cappadocia is famous were in ruins.

This is the fate to befall any land having had full warning, having been the very center of God's Work on earth, and having rejected it.

Let modern nations beware!

By physical destruction and mass transfers of population, Christ removed the last Israelites (remember I Peter 1:1), some Armenians and a remnant of Assyrians from Asia Minor. Thus He prepared the land for the children of Esau — the Turks.

During the next two centuries, the Crusades found Paulicians scattered everywhere in Syria and Cilicia, corrupting their name to Publicans (Paulician is *Pavlikani* in Medieval Greek), a name strangely descriptive of their apostacy — getting involved in *public* affairs! Yes, even the world knew *why* they were rejected by Christ!

With the returning Crusaders, "Publicans and Sadducees" ('self-*righteous* ones') became scattered over all Europe.

Later Turkish wars in the Balkans forced Paulicians and Bogomils into central and northwestern Europe. Writings of the early Anabaptists in Germany, from whom came all modern Baptists and Mennonites, display a clear recognition of them as their spiritual ancestors.

Into the same region, after the Mongol invasion of Armenia, came the Athingani. They had been linked with the Paulicians of Sergius' day and after, and portrayed as a "legalistic" "Judeo-Christian" sect. In Germany they were (deliberately?) confused with the Gypsies (Zigeuner or Tsigani).

(To be continued)

This desolation was once the site of a great city, Antioch in Pisidia. In the days of Joseph, the Paulician (746-783), a congregation of Christians met near here. Now it stands a mute witness to the fate that befell most of Asia Minor when the Work of God's Church in that area was finished!

Photo: P. Termes