

WHERE IS THE
TRUE
CHURCH?
AND ITS INCREDIBLE HISTORY!

by David C. Pack

Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly The Radio Church of God until 1968) until his death in 1986. Hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. God called him in the fall of 1926 and he was converted in the spring of 1927. Over the course of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, God revealed through him a great many true biblical doctrines, which had been lost to the Church through the centuries. After his death, his successors ceased to believe and teach these doctrines. Although copyright law prohibits The Restored Church of God from reproducing and distributing literature produced while he led the Worldwide Church of God, we are committed to the preservation and teaching of all of these truths!

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Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ built His Church—and promised that it could never be destroyed (Matt. 16:18)!

Although foretold to remain small and persecuted, and to appear in seven phases, this Church—with faithful leaders and members in every age—has ENDURED and CONTINUED. And it has been recognizable to those knowing what earmarks and signs to look for.

Where has this Church been for nearly two millennia? Can it be found in history and traced to the present day? How is it identified?

As compelling and gripping as anything you will read, here is the astonishing, inspiring and fascinating true story of the Church of God!

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Introduction

Jesus Christ declared, “I will build My Church; and the gates of hell [the grave] shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). This Church—Christ’s Church—the *true* Church—was foretold to *never* be extinguished—to *never* die out. Although it might have seemed to disappear, as it ebbed and rose over the centuries, Christ, who has been actively guiding it, has ensured that there would always be at least a few faithful servants, called and empowered by His Spirit, to keep it alive.

Unrecognized and discounted as a cult or a fringe sect on the edge of supposed Christianity, the Church of God has endured every trial and storm it has faced. This book identifies it, and is the account, straight from history, of the *true* Church of God.

For nearly 2,000 years, almost everyone has been looking in the wrong place for God’s Church. The true Church was called out of this world—out of its religions, creeds, customs, beliefs and traditions. The word translated throughout the New Testament as “church” comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning to be “called out”—and Christ’s Church has come out of the world. This has made it more difficult for traditional historians to locate it. Unlike historians within the Church, they simply did not know what to look for.

Since the Bible states that the entire world is deceived (Rev. 12:9), blinded (II Cor. 4:4) and cut off from God (Isa. 59:1-2), it is evident that civilization as a whole could never be greatly influ-

enced by the truth or by the true Church that always strove to uphold it. This helps explain why so few would become converted in this or any previous age. In fact, it is evident from just this next passage that the true Church of God would never be large. Notice how Christ addresses His Church in Luke 12:32: “Fear not, *little flock*; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

The respected and accepted churches of this world are so because they teach the popular doctrines and traditions, familiar to the masses. By no means could any of these well-known denominations of professing Christianity be considered a “*little flock*.” Instead, many of them are comprised of millions, or even hundreds of millions of members. One has over a billion.

Exploring Hidden History

This book will also take the reader on a truly extraordinary journey through generally untraveled corridors of history, from the beginning of the Church of God in AD 31 to the present. Before embarking on this journey, there are three terms or concepts that need to be briefly explained. This will help as we begin.

(1) The Church that Jesus built has always called itself the Church of God. This name is found twelve times in the New Testament.

(2) In the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, are messages to seven respective “Churches.” When understood, these are actually *eras* spanning the entirety of New Testament Church history, from AD 31 until the Return of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that Christ has worked with His Church through seven separate and successive eras. In these two Bible chapters, Christ briefly describes each era or phase of His Church. The first five eras (with the exception of the second) are described as having their own unique set of doctrinal and spiritual problems that eventually led to their downfall. Each time this happened, God raised up a new leader to establish the next era. These seven eras are *Ephesus*, *Smyrna*, *Pergamos*, *Thyatira*, *Sardis*, *Philadelphia* and *Laodicea*.

Originally, these were seven cities that lay close together (in the above order) on a mail route in Asia Minor (now western Turkey). Each city reflected corresponding attitudes that would exist in the seven eras that they represented. Christ was able to use these cities to show a spiritual pattern that would span the history of His Church over the next 2,000 years, from AD 31 until His Return.

The dates assigned to these successive eras are “best estimates” and we cannot be absolutely dogmatic about *every* tiny detail, event

and date included. But the prophecies about these eras are *most certain*—past, present and future—and history has borne this out. We will carefully examine the description in Revelation 2 and 3 that pertains to each of these seven eras.

Christ gave various specific identifying descriptions of each of these eras, creating a series of earmarks allowing the discerning, observant historian and Bible student enough information to successfully locate God's Church at any point in history.

(3) The lost tribes of ancient Israel, or "lost sheep" of the House of Israel, referenced in this book, pertained to the northern kingdom of Israel, which went into captivity in about 718 BC. Separated from the kingdom of Judah, these tribes later lost their own identity. The apostles were sent to these scattered Israelites, because many of them were to be called by God into His Church.

First notice this incredible quote of many to follow. It is from members of the true Church who lived in AD 1404: "We do not find anywhere in the writings of the Old Testament that the light of truth and of holiness was at any time completely extinguished. There have always been men who walked faithfully in the paths of righteousness. Their number has been at times *reduced to a few*; but has never been altogether lost. We believe that the same has been the case from the time of...Christ until now; and that it will be so unto the end. For if the Church of God was founded, it was in order that it might remain until the end of time...We do not believe that the Church of God absolutely departed from the way of truth; but one portion yielded, and, as is commonly seen, *the majority was led away to evil*" (*Hist. of Waldenses*, Comba, pp. 10-11).

Like No Other Story

This book is completely unlike any other that you have ever read, or possibly ever will. Its pages present a truly dramatic—and largely untold—story! The identifying marks of the true Church, and the facts of history recorded here about it, are more compelling than any novel, and this volume only barely begins to cover what can be known about the true people of God.

The person who encounters and comes to understand the record of the true Church of God is left stunned—permanently changed by the experiences, learning, suffering, conviction and sheer determination of its figures—great and small. Once you start reading this book, you may find it difficult to put down. And when you have completed it, you will never again be able to view the history of

ordinary, mundane events—or even current events—the same! This journey leads to a single Church still in existence today, inseparable from the story of its history.

Where Is God's Church Today?

In one of the most powerful, dramatic and profoundly important statements in the Bible, Jesus Christ declared, “I will build *My Church*” (Matt. 16:18). He did not say “churches,” “fellowships,” “sects,” “denominations” or “communities of believers.” No matter how men try to place an interpretation on it, this passage speaks of a single Church—of one, undivided organization! Jesus continued, “and the gates of hell [the grave] shall not prevail against it.” He promised that *His Church* could never be destroyed.

Over 2,000 different professing Christian organizations have been “built” by men just in the United States. Another is started every three days. Estimates place the number of professing Christians at above two billion. While *attendance* seems to be growing, it is not growing as fast as the confusion surrounding the question of which is the *right* church.

While it has been said, “They can’t all be *wrong*,” it is more correct to say, “They cannot all be *right*.” If Christ built His Church as He said, then it can be found somewhere on Earth today—and it is the only *right* Church. But we must ask: How do we find it—what do we look for—how do we identify it—and how do we know it if we see it?

Early “Religion”

My mother required her three children to read many books when growing up. I spent many summers reading her assigned “book a

week.” I enjoyed most of them and am very thankful she did this. On occasion, perhaps two or three times, I picked up the Bible and attempted to read it. But I never got far, because it made no sense to me. I simply could not understand the Bible.

Despite this lack of understanding, upon turning sixteen, I was “confirmed” into the church that I had been born into. I recall having to appear briefly before a panel of “deacons” to answer some questions, which I no longer remember. I do recall making some kind of general affirmation about this denomination, but I also remember that I was not concerned in the least with whether or not I was in the right church, or if I was fulfilling the Bible definition of a Christian.

Neither of these questions remotely interested me. I did vaguely believe God existed, but He was not *real* to me. I had certainly never attempted to build a personal relationship with Him or to find His one Church. I did not pray or study His Word for guidance or doctrinal instruction. These concerns did not enter my mind until some years later, in 1966, when I heard a powerful voice on the radio introduce me to Christ’s statement in Matthew 16:18. I began to question where I could find this true Church. I immediately realized that it *had* to exist because, through just basic study, I came to understand Christ’s promise that it would remain and could not be destroyed.

Traditions of Men

Jesus declared something almost none seem to believe or even know about: “But *in vain* they do *worship Me*, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments *of men*” (Matt. 15:9). In Mark’s parallel account of this statement, He continued, “Full well you *reject the commandment of God*, that you may keep your own TRADITION” (7:9).

The world’s Christianity is filled with traditions. One of the largest is the traditional view of the New Testament Church. Most ministers, theologians and religionists typically define the church this way: “All those who sincerely believe in Jesus Christ, and accept Him as their Savior, comprise the true Church.” This is often followed with the familiar statement, “There are many routes to heaven” or “There are many spokes on the wheel of salvation.” Though the Bible does not teach that heaven is the reward of the saved, the clear implication of these clichés is that people can believe what they want, or be a part of any group or organization they choose, and still be Christians—still receive whatever is salvation. While people may sincerely believe these traditional ideas, *they are sincerely wrong!*

My research led me to absolute PROOF of *where* the Church was that Christ promised to build. I learned that this Church, foretold to span seven eras or phases, could be carefully traced through almost 2,000 years of New Testament history. I was shocked. I could not believe the Bible was so clear on a subject that confuses so many.

Your Bible declares, “God is not the author of *confusion*, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints [the context shows this refers to all *congregations* of the true Church, not all of the many *organizations* of men]” (I Cor. 14:33).

God's Church (composed of *many* congregations of saints) was to reflect *peace*—not confusion. You need not be confused about its identity—about the location—of the true Church. God commands, “*Prove* all things; hold fast that which is good” (I Thes. 5:21). While this certainly refers to *scriptural* matters (not the car you drive or house you buy), it does say that “ALL things,” not “*some* things,” should be PROVEN! Surely God would not exclude something of such magnitude—such supremely vital importance—as the matter of where His true Church is found. And He would never emphatically tell people to prove things that *cannot be proven!*

The more I studied the other doctrines of the Bible, the more I learned that the churches of this world were *wrong*—on virtually EVERYTHING! One plain scripture after another contradicted each *traditional* “Christian” idea I had been taught. I was amazed—actually stunned—at how easy it was to find direct, clear, undeniable proof that even the most popular—the most widely believed—traditions of the big denominations were not based on the Bible—at all!

Each time I studied a Bible doctrine—salvation, baptism, who and what God is, the gospel, death and hell, law and sin, grace, being born again, the Christian Sabbath, the true origin of supposed “Christian” holidays, where the modern-day tribes of ancient Israel are found today, the sequence of prophetic events preceding Christ's Return and so much more—I gained *undeniable proof* of what the Bible *really* taught! I was excited and fascinated. I found that the churches of this world were confused on every one of these and many other plain points of Bible teaching. I came to realize that there had to be a church that correctly believed and practiced *all* of the doctrines of the Bible, including perhaps the most central—what is the true Church.

I learned that this Church existed, and that the proof *identifying* it and setting it apart from all the churches of recognized, mainstream Christianity were no different from the proof of any other biblical doctrine. I also learned that the scope of the proof—the sheer volume of facts about God's Church—was vast, almost overwhelming in amount.

A Persecuted “Little Flock”

When speaking to His disciples about the importance of seeking the Kingdom of God, Jesus said, “Fear not, *little flock*; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). By no stretch can any church comprised of millions, let alone over two billion collectively, be considered a “little flock.”

Jesus understood that *His Church*—His *little flock*—would be persecuted and despised by the world. Just before His crucifixion, He warned, “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have *persecuted Me*, they will also *persecute you*” (John 15:20). In the preceding verse, Jesus had reminded His disciples that “I have chosen you *out of the world*, therefore the world *hates* you.” Of course, Christ *was* persecuted, to the point of horrible torture and crucifixion. Therefore, the true Church could also expect to be persecuted—and hated! Those in it are not “of the world.” The world senses this and hates them for it (John 17:14; Rom. 8:7). Christ used the apostle Paul to record, “Yes, and *all* that will live godly *in Christ Jesus* shall suffer *persecution*” (II Tim. 3:12). The word “all” means what it says!

Consider what we have just discussed. How many churches can you name that are small, persecuted, not of this world—and even hated because of it? Think about those you are familiar with. Do any fit this description? Surely not many!

The Importance of the Name of the Church

The world’s churches have many different names, which are derived in various ways. These include the particular *doctrines* they teach, the names of the *men* who founded them, the humanly-devised type of *church government* that they espouse, their *location*, or their intended scope and size, such as *universal* or *catholic*—in order to be thought of as all-encompassing and therefore being a BIG flock.

On the night of His betrayal, Christ prayed for His Church. Here is what He said:

“Holy Father, keep through *YOUR OWN NAME* those whom You have given Me, that they may be *one*, as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them *IN YOUR NAME*...I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from

the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Your truth: *Your word is truth*" (John 17:11-12, 14-17).

There are 12 separate places where the New Testament records that the true Church *has* been kept in the name of the Father—meaning *God*. The first five refer to the entire Church, or Body of Christ, as a whole. The next four speak of a specific local congregation, while using the same term "Church of God." This may refer to the Church of God at Judea or Corinth, etc. The final three references speak collectively of all the individual local congregations combined. All these references use the term "Churches of God":

(1) Acts 20:28: This verse is instruction to the elders to "feed THE CHURCH OF GOD."

(2) I Corinthians 10:32: "Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to THE CHURCH OF GOD."

(3) I Corinthians 11:22: "...or despise you THE CHURCH OF GOD, and shame them that have not?"

(4) I Corinthians 15:9: Paul wrote the same thing to two congregations: "For...I persecuted THE CHURCH OF GOD."

(5) Galatians 1:13: "I persecuted THE CHURCH OF GOD."

(6) I Corinthians 1:2: "THE CHURCH OF GOD which is at Corinth."

(7) II Corinthians 1:1: "THE CHURCH OF GOD which is at Corinth."

(8) I Timothy 3:5: Paul references any elder in a local congregation: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of THE CHURCH OF GOD?"

(9) I Timothy 3:15: "...behave yourself in the house of God, which is THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD." This verse adds a descriptive word to God by using the term "living."

(10) I Corinthians 11:16: "...We have no such custom, neither THE CHURCHES OF GOD."

(11) I Thessalonians 2:14: "For you...became followers of THE CHURCHES OF GOD which in Judea are in Christ Jesus."

(12) II Thessalonians 1:4: "So that we ourselves glory in you in THE CHURCHES OF GOD."

In the modern age, for corporate reasons, God's Church may use an additional descriptive name to distinguish itself from other "Churches of God"—those merely *appropriating* God's name, but not obeying His commandments, believing all His true doctrines or doing His Work. Herbert W. Armstrong, the twentieth-century leader of the Church, chose the name Worldwide Church of God and before that,

Radio Church of God. Because of circumstances in our time, we have chosen the name *The Restored Church of God*.

Just as various mainstream denominations may have a few correct doctrines mixed with much error, some appropriate to themselves the name of God's Church. This chapter will later explain why some *few* churches may even have a significant amount of truth, but choose to accept a variety of false doctrines. Only one church on the face of the Earth has the correct name and teaches all the additional many true doctrines that the Bible teaches! Recall that Christ prayed, "Sanctify them [meaning set them apart] through Your TRUTH: Your word is TRUTH." The Church that Jesus Christ works through, directs and guides is sanctified—set apart—by its belief of the *plain truth* of God's Word!

In addition to carrying the name "Church of God," we have seen that the true Church has come out of the world, is small and persecuted, even to the point of being hated by it. This Church is then also set apart by its BELIEFS and PRACTICES—which are in complete agreement with the TRUTH of the Bible!

Unified Through God's Word

Men have their own differing definitions of what the Church actually *is*—and these could be listed almost without end—but only the Bible definition—*God's* definition—matters. Read it for yourself. Paul wrote to Timothy, "...that you may know how you ought to behave yourself in the *house of God*, which is the *Church of the living God*, the pillar and ground of the TRUTH" (I Tim. 3:15). In the end, no other definition, devised by men, is acceptable. This description of the Church *Christ* built will guide us throughout the remainder of this chapter. God's Church has and teaches "the truth."

We have discussed how this world's churches are in confusion, divided by endless disagreement over doctrine and practice. Amos 3:3 asks, "Can two *walk together*, except they be *agreed*?" The answer is NO!

This world's churches do not practice the principle of "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word of God*" (Luke 4:4), exactly as written. Instead, since they follow the many differing traditions and ideas of men, endless disagreements separate, divide and create more and more churches of *men*. These organizations generally do not "walk together," because they do not "agree"—either with each other or with God! (And we have seen this starts with the very definition of what is the New Testament Church.)

God's Church is different. Many New Testament verses show that the Church Christ built is *unified*—with all its members and congregations walking *together* in complete agreement with each other, and with God and Christ.

An important point, revealing the kind of unity to be seen in the true Church, emerges from Christ's same prayer of John 17, on the night of His betrayal. Notice:

“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be *sanctified* [again, set apart] *through the truth*...That they *all* may be ONE; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be ONE *in Us*: that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them; that they may be ONE, *even as We are* ONE: I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made *perfect in* ONE; and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them, as You have loved Me” (vs. 19, 21-23).

These are powerful statements! Christ intended that His Church be unified—“one”—bound together—*no less than were He and His Father!* There is no room for disagreement in a Church that is *this* unified. These verses describe a perfect oneness through the truth—the *same* kind that the Father and Christ enjoy. It is *this* kind of unity that allows true Christians to be “in” them—be *in* Christ and *in* the Father (vs. 21).

Even in the Old Testament, David recorded, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for *brethren to dwell together in UNITY*” (Psa. 133:1).

We will in the next chapter examine several New Testament passages to see if, in fact, this kind of wonderful unity was apparent *after* the New Testament Church came into existence. We will see if God's servants teach and administer *this* kind of agreement, and learn how that unity is achieved.

Now notice this earliest picture of Christ's Church. On Pentecost, with the disciples gathered in “one accord” (Acts 2:1) on the day the New Testament Church was formed, 3,000 converts were baptized. They formed the very beginning of Christ's building of His Church. The initial description given was “...and they *continued steadfastly* in the APOSTLES' DOCTRINE and FELLOWSHIP” (vs. 42), “...*all* that believed were *together*” (vs. 44) and “...they, continuing daily with *one accord*...did eat their meat [food] with gladness and *singleness of heart*” (vs. 46).

From these verses, we clearly see that the Church Jesus Christ built was unified. It was in agreement over doctrine, and was together. Notice verse 47: “And *the Lord added* to the Church daily such as

should be saved.” In the Church Christ guides and directs, He is the One who adds to it, and builds it!

So then, are there verses—plain statements!—making absolutely clear that Christ constructed but one Church, built only one, unified “House”—one organization? There are many...

Only One Organization

The New Testament speaks of the Church of God as the same thing as “the Body of Christ.” This introduces remarkable understanding.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul recorded that the Church had many separate members (individual brethren), and this was likened to various parts of the human body, in that these members were connected. A careful study of chapter 12 brings understanding. Verses 12 to 14 state, “For as the BODY is ONE, and has *many members*, and all the members of that ONE BODY, being many, are ONE BODY: so also is Christ. For by ONE *Spirit* are we all baptized into ONE BODY...For the BODY is not one member, but many.”

When one is converted—has repented, been baptized and received God’s Holy Spirit—this verse reveals that he has actually been placed into the Body of Christ as well as into the Church of God.

Many have been confused by what this means. In other words, exactly what is the Church or Body of Christ into which one has been baptized? When Jesus Christ walked the Earth, His preaching of the gospel and other teachings, and all the miracles and works that He did, were done through and from His physical body. Of course, after crucifixion and burial, Christ’s body was later resurrected as Spirit, before ascending to heaven, requiring that His work and preaching be transferred to another entity, His one true Church—which Scripture makes plain that Jesus Christ still considers to be His “Body” continuing on Earth what He started.

The context of I Corinthians 12 then uses the analogy of hands, feet, eyes, ears and the mouth to show how different parts of a *human* body (Christ's body was once human) are connected within the same person. Paul continues, "But now has God set the members every one of them in the BODY, as it has pleased Him. And if they were all one member, where were the BODY? But now are they *many members*, yet but ONE BODY" (vs. 18-20).

The Popular Belief

Let's further understand what this means. The "Christian" world teaches that the Body of Christ—Jesus' Church—consists of many denominations, fellowships or communities of believers, said to all be connected by the Holy Spirit working in believers wherever they are affiliated. (Many, many sources attest to this popular thinking.) But this is totally contrary to what the Bible teaches about the Body of Christ. This substitute idea—a very clever counterfeit!—asserts, in effect, that Christ and His Body are divided among many groups or organizations. We will see that this is not true.

I Corinthians 12 cannot be "spiritualized away" by human reasoning. It does not describe an amorphous, disconnected, "spiritual" body of disagreeing people and organizations throughout professing Christianity. Any foot, eye or ear that is taken from a human body *dies*! No severed body part can live for very long without blood supply and the connective tissue necessary to secure it to the body. God created the human body, so He obviously understands the analogy that He inspired.

Further Meaning of "Body"

For further proof of the meaning of *body*, consider two additional scriptures, written to two separate congregations under Paul's leadership.

Notice his statement to the Colossian congregation: "And He [Christ] is the head of THE BODY, *the Church*" (1:18). Now see the first of Paul's instruction to the Ephesian congregation. Speaking of what God placed under Christ's control, Paul wrote, "...and gave Him [Christ] to be the Head over all things to *the Church*, which is HIS BODY" (1:22-23). The Bible definition of the *Body of Christ* is *the Church*! They are the same.

Further, in chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul went on to admonish the brethren there to be "Endeavoring to keep the *unity* of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is ONE BODY [Church], and ONE *Spirit*, even as

you are called in ONE *hope* of your calling; ONE *Lord*, ONE *faith*, ONE *baptism*, ONE *God and Father*” (3-6). Again, there must be no confusing the all-encompassing unity and agreement that this verse requires of God’s people. Recall how Christ prayed for *this* kind of oneness and unity.

A few verses later, Paul described the importance of a faithful ministry, actively working with and teaching Christ’s Church. Carefully read and comprehend the following lengthy, important passage:

“And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the *perfecting of the saints*, for the work of the ministry, for the *edifying of the BODY OF CHRIST*: till we all come in the *unity* of the *faith*, and of the *knowledge* of the Son of God, unto a *perfect man*, unto the measure of the stature of the *fullness of Christ*: that we henceforth be *no more children*, *tossed to and fro*, and carried about with *every wind of doctrine*, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the TRUTH *in love*, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the WHOLE BODY fitly *joined together* and *compact*ed by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of *every part*, makes increase of THE BODY unto the edifying of itself in love” (vs. 11-16).

Type of Christ’s Human Body

The Church is a type of Christ’s own physical Body when He was on Earth and, as its Head, He governs, directs and builds it, adding to it daily (Acts 2:47). The above verses describe that Body as being UNIFIED in both *doctrinal truth* and *love*. (A later chapter explains how these two overarching points work together.) In phrase after phrase, this passage demonstrates that the entire Church (“*whole body*” and “*every part*”) must be walking together in *complete* doctrinal agreement under Christ’s authority. And He works through His *true* ministers to keep the Church from drifting into “*every wind of doctrine*.” But further understanding of this must wait until another great truth about the Church is understood.

The New Testament Temple of God

We cannot leave the subject of the Body of Christ until another vitally important connection to all that the Church is becomes clear. The New Testament Church of God, which we have seen to be the same

as the biblical Body of Christ, is also described as the “temple of the Lord.” There are a number of New Testament passages that make this plain, and they are crucial to understand. Recognize that in the Old Testament the magnificent physical temple (first built by Solomon, and later rebuilt by Zerubbabel, with a still later renovation by Herod) was the place where God dwelled. Everyone understood this. The Old Testament Temple, as we will see with the New, was also often referred to as the “House of the Lord.”

The term “temple” is used in a host of contexts throughout the New Testament. This word appears literally scores of times through the gospels and epistles of Paul, as well as in various places in the book of Revelation, usually there referring to the Temple of God around God’s throne in the third heaven.

The English word “temple” generally derives from three separate Greek words that can correctly be translated as “temple.” These are *oikos* (oy’ kos): “a dwelling, by implication a family home, household or temple”—*hieron* (hee-er-on): “a sacred place, that is, the entire precincts of the temple (at Jerusalem or elsewhere)”—and *naos* (nah-os’): “a feign shrined temple—the central sanctuary itself.”

Let’s examine passages that remove all doubt about what—more correctly, *who*—is the Temple of God today.

John 2:19-21 is the place to start. It offers important proof that the Body of Christ is the same as the Temple of God. As you read, realize that Christ’s words are the Bible interpreting the Bible, and they provide the best introduction to the subject of the New Testament Temple. Note especially the final part of the passage: “Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building [the renovated second temple built after Solomon’s had been destroyed], and will you rear it up in three days? But He spoke of the *temple of His body.*”

If you understand that Christ’s “body” is also His “temple”—and that the “temple” is “His body”—obviously the same as the term “Body of Christ”—you cannot get confused. All you must do is take Christ’s words at face value. The Bible will continue to be seen to interpret itself. As you read, recognize that you are receiving astonishing understanding known to but the tiniest few alive on Earth today!

What Paul Recorded

Paul recorded much more than any other biblical writer about the New Testament Temple. Let’s start with his foundational statement

in Ephesians 2:19-21: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the BUILDING *fitly framed together* grows unto an HOLY TEMPLE in the Lord.”

He also wrote this to the Corinthians: “For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s BUILDING” (I Cor. 3:9).

Note this. Unlike the custom of today’s English, the King James translators carefully used “ye” whenever the intent was plural and “you” when it was singular. The *ye* here means all of the Ephesians and all of the Corinthians, or thus the whole Church, collectively. It will become clearer as we proceed that individual members are not the Temple of God, but rather the entire Church as a whole comprises the Temple.

We will later come to understand *how* the Bible describes—the specific term that it uses for—individuals *within* that Temple. I cannot overstress that this is supremely important understanding for all who seek to serve God in the manner and in the place that He requires.

A few verses later in I Corinthians 3 Paul added this: “Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in ye? If any man defile the Temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy, which Temple ye are” (vs. 16-17).

Placed together, these verses reveal that God sees His people—the true Church—as both His Building and His Temple. Understand that God is *building* a Temple—or a House. Almost identical, I Corinthians 6:19 does add a little more, making clear how serious it is if those called of God treat lightly the incredible privilege it is to have God dwelling in them—if God’s people do not conduct themselves in a manner that reflects this.

But the second epistle to the Corinthians adds significantly more understanding. Let’s notice: “And what agreement has the Temple of God with idols? for ye [notice the plural pronoun is used throughout] are the Temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (6:16).

The last part of this passage is a quote from Leviticus 26:12. Its use here demonstrates God has *always* planned—“has said” from the beginning—that His Church, those in whom He would in the future *personally dwell*, would be the greatest—truly the most glorious—

temple of all. Realize that Leviticus was recorded long before either Solomon's or Zerubbabel's temple was built.

There is a powerful message for everyone in the preceding verses leading up to verse 16 quoted above. For those who desire to be in God's Temple, there exists no room—NONE!—for doctrinal compromise with any of the false, pagan teachings of counterfeit Christianity—summarized as “unrighteousness” and “darkness” (vs. 14). Christians are to “touch not the unclean thing” (vs. 17)—anything that is sin.

Pause to read verses 14 and 15. Then take the time to read each phrase in Ephesians 5:6-11, followed by verses 23 and 30. The first group of verses condemn all compromise with every form of unrighteousness. The latter two verses tie Christ as Head of “the Church” to those in it being what He considers the individual “members of His Body, of His flesh, and of His bones.”

Let this understanding of exactly what it means to be in the Body of Christ sober you!

Church, Body and Temple—Three Critical Verses

One final proof (there are several others) that the *Church of God*, the biblical *Body of Christ*, the *Temple* or *House of God* are the exact same thing is understood by carefully comparing three additional passages in Paul's epistles. Follow very closely the incredible connection between these important verses.

Do not miss what they reveal!

Let's begin by looking at I Timothy 3:15. This crucial but we saw largely ignored bedrock passage provides the New Testament definition of the true Church of God. Notice the Church is there called “the *house* of God...the *Church* of the living God, the pillar and ground of THE TRUTH.” (Take more than a passing interest in the fact that this verse directly ties the Church to where “*the truth*” is—not “*some of the truth*” or “*much of the truth*” or even “*most of the truth*”—and certainly not “*truth mixed with error*”—but rather simply “THE TRUTH”!)

Then, get clear in your mind that the Church is called “the HOUSE of God.” (It is also more than interesting that this is virtually the same term used from the beginning regarding Solomon's Temple—which was generally referred to as the “House of the Lord,” or “God's House,” as in I Kings 6:37-38.)

Jesus taught in Matthew that “a house divided...cannot stand” (12:25). Why do those who teach the New Testament Church is scattered among many organizations never reference this verse? Christ

went on to explain that even the devil realizes *his* “kingdom” cannot survive divided.

Surely Christ is at least as wise as the devil. Like Paul, I “speak as a fool” (II Cor. 11:23).

Also recall that in Ephesians 2:19-21 Paul called the Temple of the Lord a “BUILDING *fitly framed together*.” Here is the point not to be missed. Later, in chapter 4 of Ephesians, he said almost the identical thing about the Body of Christ. Notice: “From whom the whole BODY *fitly joined together* and compacted [I Corinthians 12:24 adds “tempered together”] by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part...” (vs. 16).

The phrases translated “*fitly framed together*” and “*fitly joined together*” derive from the exact same Greek word *sunarmologeō*. It means “to render close-jointed together, i.e. organized compactly, be fitly framed (joined) together (in the sense of laying).” Paul obviously had the same thing in mind whether he was discussing the Church, the Temple (or House of God) or the Body of Christ.

Sunarmologeō offers truly fascinating meaning. The beginning and last portions of the definition—“render close-jointed” and “together (in the sense of laying)” —carry the obvious meaning of laying individual bricks or stones that are mortared or put “close-jointed” beside each other (“together”) as one would lay them in rows within a building. (Take a moment to read in Acts 2:42-47 how the first 3,000 baptized into the New Testament Church were bound together in all that they did.)

Since we saw that the Temple is also called God’s “building,” there is no possible way to read these passages and conclude that the true Church of God could be anything other than *one undivided organization*—A SINGLE BUILDING! Do not let anyone tell you that God’s Temple (and Christ’s Body) is anything less than this! His Building cannot be “spiritualized away”—as do professing Christian ministers with every doctrine in God’s Word—into a “temple” that is ill-defined, disconnected, amorphous—and meaningless.

Now let’s look more closely at what are the “bricks” or “stones” used in building—exactly what or who it is that lies together “close-jointed.” At this point the knowledge presented in this chapter becomes personal.

An Astonishing Passage in I Peter!

The apostle Peter put an exclamation point—a capstone if you will—on all that Paul wrote about the New Testament Temple.

This first of his general epistles declares this to what would include all true Christians through the ages: “If so be ye [plural again] have

tasted that the Lord is gracious. To Whom coming, as unto a LIVING STONE [referring to Christ], disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as *lively* [living] *stones*, are built up a SPIRITUAL HOUSE, *an holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices [on God's altar], acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a CHIEF CORNER STONE, elect, precious: and he that believes on Him shall not be confounded" (I Pet. 2:3-6).

It is obvious the *living stones* (Christ being the Chief Corner Stone) are the individual Christians in the Temple lying "close-jointed" or "fitly framed" *together*. And note that it was only the priests who could enter and serve in Solomon's Temple (II Chron. 23:6). Also, it is important to recognize that verse 5 should carry the stronger rendering of the positive command "*be ye* [BE YE!] also living stones," as is found in the margin of many Bibles.

This is absolutely incredible understanding, for those able to receive it. Get it firmly in mind before continuing. Everyone who wishes to receive God's Spirit should give much more than mere pause in determining whether they will fulfill this meaning—will *obey* what is a COMMAND!

Peter wrote more, and our understanding cannot be complete without it: "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the Stone which the builders disallowed [or "rejected"], the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, *a royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (vs. 7-9).

The world has never been willing to accept the *true* Jesus Christ! Neither will they accept the Church He built—and is still building. They "stumble" at His doctrines, and reject—"disallow"—Him as the Head of the Church—*any* Church. In His place they have brought a cold, *dead Jesus* (called "another Jesus") on a cross, who brings *dead understanding* (empty pagan doctrines), and who builds *dead churches* out of DEAD STONES!

The Tragedy

Most will not hold precious the true Jesus Christ of the Bible. Neither will they hold to His teachings (of course, most will not even study

them). They will not yield to His government. Neither will they come to His Church, nor support the Work of that Church. And they will not permit Him to head their lives—and build them into His House. Blind to their actions, they keep themselves outside the Temple He is constructing. They have unwittingly chosen not to be placed next to the “living stones” with which He is building.

Get this. If God is calling you, you will be judged on this knowledge! The apostle Peter also said two chapters later: “Judgment is *now* on the HOUSE OF GOD” (4:17).

The Church has long understood that the “House of God” is His Church. By now you know this is the same as saying “His Temple”—of which you were called to be a “living stone,” one “closely joined” with all the others in God’s unified “Building.”

Why will not most people accept that God’s Church—the Body of Christ—His House or Temple—is obviously one, undivided organization ruled by Jesus Christ as Head under the government of God—and doing His Work?

What could be more important for you to understand than these points? What could be more important to you than allowing yourself to be placed by Christ into the Temple—into the “House of God”—recognizing that it is being judged?

What could be more important to you than capturing the basic, but all-important, knowledge, never understood by Christendom, that “Except *the LORD* build the HOUSE, they labor in vain that build it” (Psa. 127:1)? There is but one House God could have had in mind here, the one He planned long before the Psalms were recorded. Regarding the churches of men, how could their founders think they could build their own “houses” and that Christ would submit to their lead, and follow them, instead of the other way around?

And how could so many millions blindly help them build?

Why *Many* Churches and Groups Today?—Some History!

The next two subheads form important related insets, the first being to help the reader understand why the supposed Christian world has so many different disagreeing and competing churches.

The universal church, centered at Rome, and teaching the false doctrine of the trinity, has always taught that the Body of Christ was solely composed of those within that church. Even though the Roman church taught doctrines that were almost entirely the tradition of men, their understanding that Christ led one undivided, organized spiritual Body, identified in a single church, was largely correct. Their error

was connecting this key doctrine to themselves instead of to the true Church of God, led by the *true* Jesus Christ (II Cor. 11:4).

Let's understand this by tying together several critical elements that clarify the thinking of the Protestant Reformers. When they rebelled against Rome, they were obviously no longer part of that church, and thus had departed from what they previously believed to have been the sole Body of Christ. They knew that Paul taught, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" and "For the body is not one member, but many" (I Cor. 12:13-14).

The entire world of Christendom is able to read this passage, and others, about the Body of Christ. All of these plain passages had to be "reconciled" with the fact that different groups—starting with individual reformers—had now left the Roman church and its authority. Here was their problem: They had to come up with—invent—a teaching compatible with converts and believers supposedly being truly baptized, but now into a divided, competing and multiplying picture of denominations that is the Protestant world. They had to reconcile the idea of "one Body of Christ" with the reality of hundreds of Protestant denominations—and other groups—with more appearing all the time. They were forced to conclude that Christ's Body is composed of *many* organizations, denominations, fellowships and "communities of believers"—or stated more correctly, of worthy individuals within and throughout this host of differing churches.

But this is utterly false!

Built Upon Which Rock?—Peter the First Pope?

When the Protestant Reformers rejected Rome's authority, they were simultaneously rejecting the rule of popes over the church. Let's briefly return to Matthew 16:18—where Christ said, "I will build My Church"—this time examining His statement to Peter.

Let's first read: "And I say also unto you, That you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

This verse is the single bedrock scripture to Catholic theology regarding the *supposed* authority of popes, who are said to derive their authority directly from Christ's *supposed* empowerment of Peter, and thus his successors in an unbroken line ever since. Over a billion Catholics today, and generations before them, have been taught that this passage designates Peter as the first pope. The verse simply does not say this, and the reader needs to understand what it does say—what Christ meant by His statement.

Breaking down the important Greek words within this verse makes it easier to understand:

Peter comes from the Greek word *petros*, meaning *a piece of rock, but either bigger or smaller than a stone*. (Note that the Greek word for “stone” is *lithos*, and it essentially means a medium-sized rock.) The Greek word for *Rock* is *petra*, which means *a mass of rock*, usually very large.

Let’s carefully examine and understand. Verse 13 mentions that Christ was speaking at Caesarea Philippi. It is significant that He chose this site to speak of His Church! Here is why.

This city is in the far north of today’s Israel, about 25 miles north of Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee. Located at the foot of Mt. Hermon, it is where one of the three main branches of the Jordan River originates. The area is very beautiful.

A Key—Where Christ Was Speaking

I have stood on the spot from which Christ delivered these words. This is what I saw—and what anyone would see: Immediately above where the river springs from the base of a cliff is a massive rock outcropping that dominates the topography. Its presence towers over the landscape. None who were present when Christ spoke these words could possibly have believed He was talking about building His Church on Peter, whom He compared to a *little* rock. The enormous physical size of the rock looming directly over Christ’s head reinforced His message that He was building the Church on a *giant* Rock—HIMSELF! This is, no doubt, why He picked this setting to utter His words in Matthew 16:18 to His disciples, and to Peter.

In effect, Christ was saying that Peter was a *small* rock. On the other hand, Jesus Christ is the *large* rock, or foundation stone of the Church that He built. Christ is actually distinguishing between the two. Proof that the mass of rock is Christ can be found in I Corinthians 10:4, Ephesians 2:20, Matthew 7:24 and 16:13-16.

Understand that Christ is the great Rock that the Church is built upon. This verse is absolutely not saying that *Peter* is either that massive rock or that the Church is built on *him*. I Corinthians 3:11 shows there can be only one foundation (Christ), not two. Obviously, this applies to Peter’s role. Ephesians 4:11-12 explains that apostles (Peter, Paul, John, etc.) were in offices that Christ established to serve His Church. Collectively, with the prophets, they form *part* of the Church’s foundation—alongside Christ (Eph. 2:20).

Think of Christ as having complimented Peter. Then there is this: If He had established Peter as the first (and infallible) pope, how could Peter almost immediately have fallen into what Christ labeled a satanic attitude in the very next verses, 21 to 23? Take a moment to read them. Would such an attitude be possible for one who was spiritually infallible? Also, there is this question: How could Peter have later denied Christ three times?

Later in the book will appear ten PROOFS that Peter was probably *never* even in Rome—and therefore could not have been the first pope. Although not the subject of this book, Peter was, in fact, the leading apostle in the early New Testament Church, but he simply was not the first pope and certainly did not even live in Rome.

Now we can return to the all-important unity so necessary to maintain in the Church Christ leads...

Unity at All Costs

A great deal can be learned by examining Paul's instructions to various other congregations he was overseeing. He continually stressed unity and oneness within the true Church of God. Let's now return to this central New Testament teaching.

The CORINTHIAN congregation had many problems—including terrible division and disunity, some of it doctrinal and some of it because people were selecting “favorite ministers” and “favorite speakers.” Early in his letter to this congregation, Paul strongly admonished them to stop entertaining other doctrines and to quit playing favorites with ministers. Notice:

“Now I beseech you, brethren...that you all speak the *same thing*, and that there be *no divisions* among you; but that you be *perfectly joined together* in the *same mind* and in the *same judgment*...Now this I say, that every one of you says, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas [Peter]; and I of Christ. *Is Christ divided?*” (I Cor. 1:10, 12-13).

Do not miss the intent of this passage. Paul was inspired to describe, in *five* different ways, how completely all of God's people—real Christians—in every age should be unified and in agreement. These verses also cannot be “spiritualized away” by deceptive human reasoning.

Where in this passage does Christ give license for multiple organizations—“churches”—to appear in His name? Where in this description is there room for hundreds, even thousands, of divided, competing groups, in disagreement over teachings—and diminished in the all-important impact of taking the gospel announcement of the Kingdom of God to the world (Matt. 24:14; 28:19-20)?

The answer: nowhere!

Let's examine further. I Corinthians 1:13 begins with the rhetorical question: "Is Christ divided?" The only reason the question is not followed with the word "no" or something similar is because the answer is so obvious. Considering what he had just written, Paul knew that the thrust of his question was equivalent to asking, "Is grass green?" or "Is the sky blue?" When people ask rhetorical questions, no one actually responds, because the answer is so obvious. In Amos 3:3, even the question "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" is left unanswered for the same reason.

It was in this same letter to the Corinthians that Paul also had to write, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (14:33), followed by "Let all things be done decently and in order" (vs. 40). Real *decency* and *order* are impossible if God's Church is divided into several organizations, let alone hundreds or thousands.

Now consider Paul's admonition to the PHILIPPIAN congregation: "...stand fast in ONE *spirit*, with ONE *mind* striving *together* for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries" (1:27-28). And, "Fulfill you my joy, that you be *likeminded*, having the *same love*, being of ONE *accord*, of ONE *mind*" (2:2). These passages teach that complete unity in the Church is the only condition that is acceptable to God!

Paul admonished the COLOSSIANS to be "knit *together* in love, and...the *full assurance of understanding*," and "rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, *as you have been taught*" (2:2, 7). There is no misunderstanding the total unity Paul is describing. Brethren walk "together," assured of the right "understanding" that they "have been taught" by Christ's trained and duly-appointed ministers. (We already saw how strongly Paul admonished the EPHESIAN congregation, in numerous ways, to strive for unity.)

The local ROMAN congregation was experiencing a problem with false doctrines entering the Church. Notice how Paul instructed them to address this: "Now I beseech you, brethren, *mark* [take note of] them which cause DIVISIONS and offenses *contrary to the doctrine* which *you have learned*; and AVOID THEM. For they...by good words and fair speeches *deceive* the hearts of the simple" (16:17-18).

Protecting Unity

The last passage contained very strong language. It introduces the truth of the biblical doctrine of disfellowshipping (sometimes described as *shunning* or *excommunicating*) those who depart from

the truth into false doctrines and seek to take others with them, and to divide the Church. This principle demonstrates how important it is to God that His people not stray from the truth into manmade doctrines.

A number of additional scriptures address and amplify this same Bible principle. See Titus 3:10-11, I Corinthians 5:1-8 and I Timothy 6:1-5. Together, these passages represent a vital Bible doctrine that the true Church must practice in order to maintain unity. In addition to ignoring God's instruction, churches that will not practice this doctrine are full of division, discord and disagreement—which inevitably leads to splits within the church or congregation.

Fulfilling the instruction to disfellowship is neither abusive nor an act of hate! It is actually a form of God's *love* being administered to people who have drifted into error—and it is designed to wake them up. At the same time, it protects the remaining brethren in the Church. It certainly requires a greater level of FAITH—that most find too difficult—to obey God's instruction to protect the Church in this way. Persecution can result. However, obeying God yields the fruits of peace, joy and unity in the Church (I Cor. 14:33, 40; Prov. 22:10).

The apostle Peter also taught the all-important need for Church unity and oneness. He wrote, “But you are *a* chosen generation, *a* royal priesthood, *an* holy nation, *a* peculiar people” (I Pet. 2:9). The four phrases in this verse are in the singular—meaning *one*, not several, of each term referenced. If a nation is split into several nations, no one would consider it to be a *single* nation—it would be multiple nations, not “a” nation. The same is true of God's Church.

There is but one!

Christ Left No Doubt

Also, Christ Himself taught the following on the vital importance of unity in the Church:

“Every *kingdom* divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every *city* or *house* divided against itself *shall not stand* [survive]” (Matt. 12:25). Recall that Paul asked in I Corinthians 1:13, “Is Christ divided?” This is *CHRIST'S* own answer. His instruction is even more fascinating when the reader considers that He is describing *Satan's* kingdom in this account! Jesus taught that even *the devil* is smart enough to know that his kingdom cannot be divided and survive! Surely, the great God of heaven and Jesus Christ are at least as wise as Satan the devil. Of course, they are infinitely *wiser*! They both understand that their Church also cannot be divided and expect to survive (“stand”).

Consider. Can a divided marriage continue indefinitely? Could even the most powerful company survive if its board of directors were divided? Could a winning professional football or soccer team remain in existence if the coach continually challenged and opposed the decisions, policies and judgment of the corporate leadership and management of the team? Could a school survive if every decision made by the principal was attacked and repudiated by senior teachers on the faculty, and groups of teachers regularly broke away from the school to form another one?

Certainly not!

Again, Jesus Christ plainly stated that Satan's kingdom is unified (Matt. 12:25-26). Why, then, do professing Christians accept the idea that the most important organization on Earth—the Church of God—can be divided into hundreds and thousands of competing, disagreeing denominations? Why do they presume that God cannot “figure out” what even the devil understands?

We are left to ask: How long could God's people survive in a state that members of a family, a company, a sports team or a school could not begin to endure—and would not even be foolish enough to *think* they could?

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus gave vital instruction to His disciples. In John 15, He explained the well-known analogy picturing Himself as the “Vine” and individual Christians as “branches” (vs. 1). Here is what He instructed, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches...for without Me you can do nothing” (vs. 4-5).

The obvious purpose of this passage is to explain that individual Christians *must* be connected to Christ, meaning to His one, organized, unified Church, to grow—to produce fruit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Read and reread all that you have read so far until it becomes crystal clear in your mind—and until it is impossible to misunderstand what is at stake in which church you enter. Remember, the true Christ is not divided—meaning there is only ONE true Church of God, and ONE true Work of God! Until you find *that* Church—the one, unified Body of Christ and Temple of the Lord—you cannot have contact with the living Christ who heads it, and only it!

But there are so many other unique and fascinating truths only taught by the Church of God...

Many Vital Truths

How did mankind get into the state of confusion, division, war, competition and disagreement existing all over the Earth today? Of course, this includes religion. God's original command to Adam was, "But of the tree of the *knowledge of good and evil*, you shall *not* eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely *die*" (Gen. 2:17).

In the next chapter (3:6), Eve, with Adam following, rebelled and ate of this wrong tree. Notice that this tree represented *knowledge* that was both "good *and* evil." In other words, the tree was not entirely evil—it contained a *mixture* of true and false knowledge! It is the same with the churches of this world. Some do have small amounts of true ("good") doctrinal "knowledge," mixed with much false ("evil") doctrinal "knowledge." For 6,000 years, God has told His servants to avoid mixing truth with error. He warned Adam that eating of the wrong tree would result in death. It did.

The warning is the same for us today!

When I was first learning the truth, I heard an analogy that I had never considered before—but have never forgotten since: Think of a delicious cake laced with either arsenic, cyanide, ricin or strychnine, while otherwise containing nothing but good and healthy ingredients. Eating such a cake would always result in death.

The good ingredients would not be sufficient to overcome the poison hidden in the cake. Likewise, God's Church does not and cannot mix truth with error. As with the cake, the result for those who do is deadly!

I have already explained some of the true doctrines taught by the Church Christ built. This book could scarcely contain a simple *listing* of all of them, let alone a detailed scriptural explanation proving them and explaining *why* God teaches them. However, the following sections list and briefly examine *some* of the major doctrines of God.

Who and What Is God?

David wrote, “The fool has said in his heart, There is no God” (Psa. 53:1). The single most important biblical truth is the identity of the true God! God *does* exist. His existence can be *proven*! (You may wish to read our booklet *Does God Exist?*) The first of the Ten Commandments requires people to worship the true God only. (You may also read our book *The Ten Commandments – “Nailed to the Cross” or Required for Salvation?*)

The ancient Greeks served 30,000 different gods. Some believe that the Hindus serve 5 *million* gods. Judaism teaches that God is one single Person. Many people believe God is a kind of “inner goodness” within everyone. Others believe He is a “metaphysical idea.” Most of the churches of traditional Christianity teach that God is a trinity—that He is *one God*, but *three Persons*.

The God of the Bible said, “Let *Us* make man in *OUR* image, after *OUR* likeness” (Gen. 1:26). When God said this, He was not talking to Himself. Nor was He confused. God is plainly more than one Person. The Hebrew word used here is *elohim*. It is a *uni-plural* word—in this case, one God, but meaning more than one Person. God and Christ represent *two* separate Beings, composing the Godhead. Together, they represent the “Us” and “Our” of this verse.

John 1 contains an absolutely amazing statement about the true nature and identity of God. It states, “In the beginning *was* the Word, and the Word *was with* God, and the Word *was* God. The same *was* in the beginning *with* God...and the Word *was made* flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (vs. 1-2, 14).

The only way the Word could both *be* God and be “with” God is if there were *two* separate Beings. One Person or Being, the Word who became Jesus Christ, came to Earth and “dwelt among men,” until His crucifixion as the Savior of mankind. The other Person or Being, the Father, remained in heaven and was the One to whom Jesus Christ prayed. He (the Father) was the One who resurrected Him from the dead so that He could return to His throne in heaven.

The Godhead now has TWO SEPARATE BEINGS—Father and Son! If God were a trinity—three Persons or Entities in *one* Being (with the Holy Spirit as the supposed third Person)—Christ’s death would have actually been *impossible*.

God is not conjoined triplets where one-third of *one* Being can die—without affecting the other two-thirds of the single Being. This entire idea (often called a “mystery that cannot be understood”) denies God’s MASTER PURPOSE for mankind. If the trinity doctrine were true, it would deny God’s plan, because mankind would have no Savior. It pictures Him as a mysterious, *closed*, triune God with no room for expansion in His Father/Son family relationship! (Take time to read my thorough and powerful book *The Trinity – Is God Three-In-One?*)

Christ’s Church understands and teaches the identity of the true God.

Mankind’s Great Purpose

We just read, “Let Us make man in Our *image*, after Our *likeness*.” *Why* did God do this? It is not within the scope of this book to disprove the pure science fiction of evolution and to prove the truth of a literal creation. (You may wish to read our extensive and thoroughly illustrated brochure *Evolution – Facts, Fallacies and Implications*.) The fact is that God *did* create man. But we must ask, *why*? For what *purpose* did He do this?

The popular belief of nearly all professing Christians is that they will “die and go to heaven.” Yet, Christ stated, “...*no man has ascended up to heaven*, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven” (John 3:13). It was not until I came into contact with the true Church that I learned the belief that “*heaven is the reward of the saved*” is a *fable*!

Here is what Christ taught: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit *the earth*”—spoken in His very first recorded sermon (Matt. 5:5). He understood that Christians do not inherit heaven—they inherit THE EARTH! Actually, Christ was quoting the Old Testament—Psalm 37:11 states exactly the same thing. It has always been God’s Plan to give RULERSHIP of Earth to Christ and the resurrected saints, who will REIGN with Him. It has *never* been His Plan to have people “roll around heaven all day,” “ride clouds,” “play harps” or merely “walk the streets of gold, in front of the pearly gates.”

God’s purpose for humanity is infinitely greater than the inventions of deceived men!

The book of Revelation, which is Christ's revealing of events long after His Return to Earth, says of the saints, "And has made us unto our God *kings* and *priests*: and we shall *reign on the earth*" (Rev. 5:10).

Many refer to Christ as King of kings, but never question who are the *other* "kings." These are the resurrected saints! Also see Daniel 7:18, 22, 27, which all reveal that Christ and the saints inherit all the kingdoms of this world at His Coming.

God the Father says that Christ is "His Son, that He might be the FIRSTBORN *among many brethren*" (Rom. 8:29). Do you recognize the implications of this statement? Many *more* sons and daughters will soon be added to God's Family. They will enjoy the same things that God Himself enjoys. God is a Family—a Household! (See Ephesians 3:15 and I Timothy 3:15.)

True Christians have the Spirit of God. This—the Holy Spirit—makes them sons of God: "For as many as are *led by the Spirit* of God, they are the *sons of God*" (Rom. 8:14). Now consider the following verse: "Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be *like Him*; for we shall see Him *as He is*" (I John 3:2).

Christ is called the firstborn among *many brethren* (the true Christians who follow later). God is a Father who now has one (born) Son. But He will later have *many more* sons. God is reproducing Himself by developing His character in yielded, conquered, Spirit-begotten and led human beings (God begets His children just like any *human father*).

Remember, Paul said that the ministry teaches and edifies the Church so that it can grow into the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13). A Christian copies and builds the character of Jesus Christ, so that he can later enjoy membership in the God Family with Christ and the Father. What a sobering yet exciting opportunity and future responsibility!

The truly incredible human potential that is offered to everyone who repents and believes, and goes on to practice God's many marvelous truths is that they will be born into the very Family of God. May God help you understand what He has offered to all who seek *Him* first—above all else!—in their lives (Matt. 6:33). How glorious is the future of Christians!

The true Church teaches that this INCREDIBLE HUMAN POTENTIAL lies ahead for every one of God's people—that it is the vital key to the knowledge of God's supreme *purpose* for all mankind—to be BORN

into the God Family! (Take the time to read my most vital book *The Awesome Potential of Man.*)

The True Gospel

Notice that Revelation 12:9 states, “Satan...deceives *the whole world.*” This is a staggering statement! Surely the truth about a subject as vital as the gospel brought by Christ would not be excluded from this deception.

The first recorded words spoken by Christ are, “Repent you, and *believe the gospel*” (Mark 1:15).

But what *is* the REAL gospel? Is there more than one? Those who would be true Christians are told that they *must* believe the gospel. The previous verse (14) states, “Jesus came...preaching the *gospel of the kingdom of God.*” There is no other gospel but the KINGDOM OF GOD. Of course, the world focuses on the *Person* of Jesus Christ, rather than on the *message* He brought. It is almost entirely ignorant of the KINGDOM OF GOD—the governing Family of God that is coming to Earth at the Return of Christ, with His saints. Professing Christendom has assumed the belief of numerous manmade gospels.

In fact, this becomes one of the greatest distinctions between the many denominations and sects of the world and the true Church. Rather than focusing *on* Himself, or teaching a gospel *about* Himself, Jesus came to reveal the Father to His followers. Yet, the Father and His role as Supreme Head of the divine Family of God, is overlooked and almost entirely excluded. As Savior and High Priest, Jesus brought access—reconciliation—to the Father, saving us by His resurrection (Rom. 5:10). The true Church understands Christ’s vital role as mediator to the Father, but also has Him in proper perspective. It does not overly focus on Him by constantly talking about “adoring Jesus,” “the Lord,” “our Master,” “His precious blood.” Neither does it see Him as merely dead on the stake or a baby in the manger, among other popular views that almost always reduce Christ, as do those who do not understand that the true Jesus Christ brought a message about coming WORLD GOVERNMENT—the Kingdom of God!

Paul warned those who would believe or teach another gospel, “I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto *another gospel*: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would *pervert the gospel* of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any *other gospel* unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any *other gospel* unto you than that you have received, *let him be accursed*" (Gal. 1:6-9).

Satan does not talk directly to human beings. He works through his servants—his ministers. The Bible teaches that Satan does have *his* ministers, and they invariably teach a false gospel. Paul warned the Corinthians that they had been “beguiled” into accepting “another gospel”—accompanied by “another Jesus” (II Cor. 11:3-4). He went on to describe the cunning ways through which Satan’s ministers successfully deceive.

Notice: “For such are false apostles, *deceitful workers*, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for *Satan* himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if *his ministers* also be *transformed as the ministers of righteousness*; whose end shall be according to their works” (vs. 13-15).

The true Church has always had to be careful—vigilant—about the dangers of false ministers entering it and perverting the doctrines of God. This will be addressed at the end of this chapter.

There is only one true gospel. All others are counterfeits designed by Satan to replace the enormous, awesome truth of God’s soon-coming Kingdom.

As the one who deceives the whole world, Satan is called the “god of this world.” Notice: “In whom the *god of this world* has *blinded the minds* of them which believe not, lest the *light of the glorious gospel* of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (II Cor. 4:4). The world does not know of *this* gospel. God, for His own supreme purpose, has opened the truth of the gospel and its meaning to only a very FEW—and has put them into His Church. The rest of the world remains blinded for now. The devil does not want human beings to enjoy what is forever denied to him—membership in the God Family.

Matthew 24:14 states, “And this *gospel of the kingdom* shall be preached [Mark 13:10 says, “published”] in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and *then shall the end come.*” The Church that Christ built has the knowledge of His true gospel—the Kingdom of God. That Church will always be found preaching it (Matt. 24:46), until the end of this age comes. You have been permitted to come into contact with the knowledge of the true gospel—and the understanding that you can be a part of God’s Church *now*—and His soon-coming Kingdom, in His governing Family—*later!*

But first comes a life of testing for true Christians. These tests come in various ways.

The Sabbath Test Command

The churches of the world will often admit to making an effort (however half-hearted) at keeping nine of the Ten Commandments. Typically, they will acknowledge that it is wrong to steal, kill, covet, bear false witness, and commit adultery. They will also acknowledge that honoring one's father and mother, avoiding idolatry and taking God's Name in vain—while at least *claiming* to follow the God described in the First Commandment—are basically good things to do. However, most do a poor job of actually keeping these nine Commandments, and officially teach that Christ did away with them and “kept them for us” and “nailed them to the cross.” But most at least tacitly agree that these nine Commandments are “nice principles.”

There is one commandment that people almost universally will not obey. Almighty God states that *this* command sets His people apart from everyone else. The Sabbath, the Fourth Commandment, becomes the *test Command* (Ex. 16). Notice this in chapter 20 of Exodus: “Remember the *Sabbath day*, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: but the *seventh day is the Sabbath* of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work” (vs. 8-10).

God gave the Sabbath from Mount Sinai, through Moses, to ancient Israel. While most people are familiar with this story, they are *not* aware that God commanded the Sabbath to be kept *FOREVER!* It was never meant to be “just for the Jews” or “just for ancient Israel.”

The nation of Israel continually refused to remain faithful to God's Sabbath. They had periods when they did observe it, before neglecting it and falling into the practices of the nations around them.

God told Israel, “Moreover also I gave them My *Sabbaths*, to be a *sign between Me and them*, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. But the house of *Israel rebelled* against Me in the wilderness: they walked not in My statutes, and they despised My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and *My Sabbaths they greatly polluted*: then I said, I would pour out My fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them” (Ezek. 20:12-13).

Mankind has been rebelling against the Sabbath ever since. Yet it still remains the *sign* between God and His true people (vs. 20).

The God of the Old Testament declares, “For I am the LORD, *I change not*,” (Mal. 3:6). Paul was inspired to record, “Jesus Christ *the same yesterday, and today, and forever*. Be not carried about with various and strange doctrines” (Heb. 13:8-9).

Almost none recognize that the God of the Old Testament was the same Person known as “the Word” in John 1:1-2, 14, who came to Earth as Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 10:4 identifies Christ as the “Rock” of the Old Testament. In other words, *Jesus Christ* is the One who inspired both Malachi in the *Old Testament* and Paul in the *New Testament* to record that He is a God who does not change! His people are to hold to the truth, avoiding all wrong (“strange”) doctrines, as we have seen.

This permanence applies to the Sabbath. This is why, in the *New Testament*, Christ said, “Therefore the Son of Man is *Lord also of the Sabbath*” (Mark 2:28).

Theologians and religionists have long taught that the true Sabbath of the Bible is the seventh day. Saturday, not Sunday, is the seventh day of the week. Any good dictionary explains this. The weekly cycle has never been changed. (You may read my book *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?* to see an entire chapter of PROOF of the unchanged weekly cycle since the time of creation.) However, the ministers of this world have had to carefully devise seductive “explanations” that dismiss or ignore the many clear scriptures about God’s plain command to keep His Sabbath. They justify Sunday-keeping—even though God’s Word has *never* justified this!

Instead of letting the clarity of God’s Word change cherished beliefs to conform with His truths, they change the meaning of the Bible to make it fit their beliefs!

Sunday is commonly thought of as the day that Christ was resurrected from the dead. It can be clearly proven that the Bible does *not* teach this. But there is an important reason theologians and many others *must* conclude that the resurrection occurred on Sunday.

Sunday is commonly referred to as “The Lord’s Day.” While any true Lord’s Day of the Bible is actually one of several Days of the Lord—in some cases, specific times associated with His Wrath (Joel 2:1-11 and other places)—the term, The Lord’s Day, has become synonymous with Sunday. But why? The reason is simple. If Sunday can be established as the day that Christ was resurrected, it can be a means of validating and “authorizing” the *unauthorized* keeping of Sunday by the churches of the world—in place of the true Sabbath!

You have already seen several scriptural references to the Sabbath. God hallowed it at creation—long before there were any Jews or Israelites to keep it (Gen. 2:1-3). The Sabbath was to be kept “forever”—“continually”—and “throughout your generations” by Israel, God’s intended model nation (Ex. 31:12-17). Jesus observed it (Luke 4:16) and said that He was Lord of it, and that it was “made for

man” (Mark 2:27-28). He did not say it was “only made for the Jews.” Paul also kept it (Acts 13:42, 44; 17:2; 18:4).

Much more than just the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition collapses if Christ was really in the grave for 72 hours (starting late Wednesday afternoon and ending late Saturday afternoon) instead of the traditionally taught 36 hours between late Friday afternoon and early Sunday morning. The biggest single reason for the unscriptural tradition (recall Mark 7:7) of Sunday-keeping collapses at the same time. God has always said, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8). He has never said, “Remember Sunday to keep it holy—and just call it the Lord’s day!”

It was once said, “More than the Jews having kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews”! This could just as easily have been said of the true Church of God, which has been under siege through the ages, in part because of its faithful Sabbath-keeping. One of the single most vital KEYS that identify the one true original Church of God, founded by Jesus Christ, is God’s Sabbath. Think about this. Prove it for yourself. Sabbath-keeping, as God’s command for true Christians, is a large subject requiring its own extensive book to prove. (Take time to carefully read the above referenced book proving God’s Sabbath.)

The Annual Holy Days

In Ezekiel 20:12-13, God said, “I gave them My *Sabbaths*.” The word *Sabbaths* is plural. The weekly Sabbath is not the only Sabbath that God ordained to be kept forever. Leviticus 23 describes seven annual Holy Days—*annual Sabbaths*—that God commanded Israel to keep “forever” (stated four times). Like the weekly Sabbath, this subject requires its own lengthy booklet in order to properly outline the proofs that these annual Sabbaths must still be kept today. (Read our booklet *God’s Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?*)

Leviticus 23:1-2 calls these Sabbaths “*feasts* of the LORD.” The terms Holy Day, High Day and Feast Day are all found in the Bible and are synonymous with one another. They are all terms for the annual Sabbaths. They picture the Plan of God, as they are kept each year in sequence.

The two Holy Days known as the First and Last Days of Unleavened Bread were kept by the early New Testament Church (Acts 12:3; 20:6) in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper—the New Testament Passover. (See our booklet *How Often Should the Lord’s Supper Be Taken?* to learn more about the Passover and the spring Holy Days.) In late spring is the Day of Pentecost.

Four more annual Sabbaths are kept in the fall. They are known as the Feast of Trumpets (*Rosh Hashanah* to the Jews), the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), the Feast of Tabernacles (*Succoth*) and the Last Great Day.

When understood, these days depict *important events* within God's Plan.

The PASSOVER shows God's mercy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is the one feast that is not an annual Sabbath. Immediately following, the seven DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD depict the Christian coming out of sin, just as Israel came out of Egypt after the first Passover of Exodus 12. The first and last days are Sabbaths. PENTECOST, or the Feast of Firstfruits, representing the early spring harvest in Israel, portrays the role of true saints (the firstfruits of God's Plan)—at Christ's soon-coming Return.

The FEAST OF TRUMPETS depicts Christ's establishment, in power and glory, of His Kingdom over all nations. The DAY OF ATONEMENT ("at-one-ment") pictures the whole world finally "at one" with God, because Satan will have been exiled to the "wilderness" (Lev. 16:10), where he can no longer deceive the nations.

The FEAST OF TABERNACLES depicts Christ's reign on Earth with the saints—and a time of peace, happiness, abundance and prosperity for a world that has not known this for 6,000 years. This seven-day feast is immediately followed by the LAST GREAT DAY, which represents the time at which God the Father will come to Earth, with a New Heavens and New Earth in place. (My book *The Awesome Potential of Man* presents a detailed overview of God's Master Plan!)

Those few being called in this age (John 6:44) have an opportunity to be part of the early spring harvest of Pentecost, while the *world* learns the truth later, during the time pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

The Church Christ built teaches the truth about God's weekly Sabbath and annual Holy Days, and the scriptures that support their observance.

Other Important Truths

I have mentioned that when God first called me I was amazed at how many plain doctrinal truths the Bible taught that I had never heard. As explained, this book could not contain them all. But here are some others.

I learned the Bible says, "The wages of sin is *death*" (Rom. 6:23). Yet, I had always been taught that there was an "ever-burning hell,"

where “bad people” went because they were still *alive* after death. I had been taught that people have immortal souls that survive death. Yet, Ezekiel 18:4, 20 states, “The *soul* that sins, it shall *die*,” and Matthew 10:28 states, “Fear Him [God] which is able to *destroy* both *soul* and body in *hell* [*gehenna*: “lake of fire,” which burns up the wicked (Mal. 4:3)].”

Countless millions have feared going to an ever-burning “hell” that *does not exist!* The Greek word for hell is *hades*, meaning “the grave.” Again, Christ’s Church teaches the truth about death and hell and the scriptures that explain them. (My booklet *The Truth About Hell* presents scriptures on the subject virtually none consider, and they are plain.)

I came to understand that Christmas and Easter (as well as Valentine’s Day, Halloween, April Fool’s, New Year’s and certain other popular observances) are not Bible customs. Rather, they are completely PAGAN in origin, and have nothing to do with God!—and are in fact condemned in scripture in the strongest possible terms. (You may wish to read our booklets *The True Origin of Christmas* and *The True Origin of Easter*, and articles about others of these days to learn more about these holidays that men have used to replace the true Holy Days.) The true Church teaches the truth about the pagan origin of all these days and the scriptures that condemn them.

I also came to see how Satan the devil “deceives the whole world,” including the deception about who and what he is—and that he is the “god of this world.” (You may read our booklets *Who Is the Devil?* and *A World in Captivity* to learn about his role in God’s Plan.) I also learned that one-third of the original angels (now demons) joined Lucifer (Satan) in rebellion against God’s government—and that the *faithful* angels are God’s ministering spirits. Once again, the true Church of God teaches the truth about the devil and the scriptures that support this understanding.

When Is One “Born Again”?

The vast majority of professing Christians believe that conversion makes them “born again.” In regard to when this occurs, I came to understand that what Jesus really taught was “that which is born of the flesh *is flesh*; and that which is born of the Spirit *is spirit*” (John 3:6). I had been taught that people could be born again in *this* life, while they are still made of *flesh*. No one told me that Jesus Christ, only *after* His Resurrection, was called “the firstborn *from the dead*” (Col. 1:18). No wonder He said that those who are born again *are spirit*—they are

no longer composed of flesh. God's Holy Spirit has "changed" them (I Cor. 15:50-52) from "flesh and blood" to spirit. Then I understood why Romans 8:29 described Christ as "the firstborn *among many brethren*."

My studies led me to understand that I could be one of those "many brethren"—if I QUALIFIED! Again, the Church built by Christ teaches the truth about these doctrines and the many scriptures that support them. (You are urged to read our thorough booklet *What Does "Born Again" Mean?* to learn more about this.)

The Definition of Sin

I learned that "sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4), and that the law of God was "holy, just, good" and "spiritual" (Rom. 7:12, 14). I had been told that Christ had "done away" with the law. Instead, I found that He said this:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets [I had also been told that the Old Testament, which contains the writings of the prophets, was basically "done away"]: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, *Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled,*" and that "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, *and shall teach men so*, he shall be called the least in the kingdom...but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom" (Matt. 5:17-19).

I came to recognize that, when people keep the law of God, it **KEEPS THEM!** This is because it *is* a law. And I also learned that, again because it is a law, when people break it, it **BREAKS THEM!** If the whole world were keeping this law, it would be a very different place. Again, the true Church teaches the truth about law and sin and the many scriptures that explain them. (Read our book *The Ten Commandments – "Nailed to the Cross" or Required for Salvation?*)

Baptism and Conversion

It became clear that the Bible method of baptism is immersion, and that God says that no other form of baptism is acceptable to Him. (Read our booklet *What Do You Mean "Water Baptism"?*) I learned that proper baptism must be preceded by repentance and recognition of what human nature really is—where it came from and why it needs to be repented of. (Read our booklet *Did God Create Human Nature?*) I came to understand that "the laying on of hands" immediately fol-

lows baptism and that it is the *only way* a person can receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit. The true Church teaches the truth about proper baptism and the scriptures supporting it.

Feeding the Flock

I learned that God's Church protects and feeds His Flock. Christ said (three times) to Peter that if he loved Christ, he would "Feed My [Christ's] sheep" (John 21:15-17). I also learned, as we have seen, that there is loving authority in the Church Christ built under God's form of Church government. Hebrews 13:7, 17, Acts 16:4, II Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6 and numerous other places explain that God gives His true ministers necessary authority over His Flock—partly so that they are better able to protect it. Of course, God's Church teaches the truth about this understanding and the scriptures supporting it.

Financial Laws

I learned God's principle of tithing (Hebrew means "*tenthing*") on one's income because "the tithe belongs to God" (Lev. 27:30). Also, in Malachi 3:8-10, God declares that He considers those who do not both *pay* Him His tithes and *give* Him His offerings to be "robbers"! I also learned that in these same verses God promised to "open the windows of heaven" and pour out tremendous blessings on those who were willing to "prove Him" regarding this promise—and that this is the way He finances His Work of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom to the world and the warning message to the modern descendants of ancient Israel. I found that Christ affirmed the tithing law in Matthew 23:23, and that other places in the New Testament confirmed Christ's words. (The booklet *End All Your Financial Worries* carefully explains these things.) And again, the true Church teaches the truth about tithing and the many scriptures supporting it.

False Church

I learned that there is a great false religious system that masquerades as Christianity. This system has carefully counterfeited all of the doctrines of God and has continually tried to penetrate, capture and destroy the true Church of God.

I learned that the Bible warns God's people about being swept into the deadly deception perpetrated by this large false church. And by studying true Church history, I learned that this false woman invari-

ably finds a way to enter the true Church (seen in this book's later chapters), causing those who are determined to hold fast to the full truth of God to have to flee her seductive intrusion and influence!

Finally, the true Church of God teaches the truth about all of these doctrines and the many scriptures supporting them! It never compromises even one doctrine—not ever.

Another Crucial Truth

At this point, an additional Bible doctrine must be re-introduced so that it can be seen in a different context. First, we saw that the Bible teaches, in Revelation 2 and 3, that God has worked with His Church through seven separate and successive eras. This understanding has been in fact established, well-known doctrine in God's Church.

While we saw that Laodicea means “the *people* rule, judge, decide,” they are still God's people, but in a weak and confused condition. However, they do *not* represent His true Church, and are outside His Body and Temple. They have formed their own organizations, and Jesus Christ cannot rule them! (It is important to note that the false leaders who succeeded Mr. Armstrong of course found it necessary to throw out the doctrine of Church eras. This paved the way for people to be conditioned to fall into a thinking and era they were once prepared to resist when it came. In the end, because they either forgot the doctrine of Church eras, or forgot its importance, they slid into its thinking.)

Those who wished to remain completely faithful (those wishing to continue the Philadelphian thinking and standard) without compromising *any* true doctrines or practices, slowly found themselves again having to flee their new organizations in order to do this.

This part of the book would be incomplete without at least briefly describing these events, because they ultimately led to the forming of The Restored Church of God. This Church does not compromise on even one of God's many, many doctrines. Just as Jesus foretold, it is a small, persecuted “little flock” that God has kept in His Name. It is powerfully continuing God's Work—taking the *true* gospel of the KINGDOM OF GOD to the world and the special warning to the modern descendants of ancient Israel, before this age ends. Its fruits are evidence of God's blessings. It is growing rapidly and has members and ministers scattered in countries around the globe. The very fact that you are reading this book means you have come in contact with it—just as I was privileged in 1966 to come into contact with the true Church and learn the truth of the Bible for the first time.

Christ's Unwavering Promise

Not only did Christ promise to build His Church, and that it could not be destroyed, He also promised—and it would be absolutely necessary that He did—that when false leaders, whom He refers to in John 10 as “thieves and robbers,” have been able to get into the Church, “the sheep hear His [Christ’s] VOICE: and He calls His own sheep by name, and *leads them out.*” Jesus’ voice is defined as “the truth” (John 18:37).

Christ goes on to say, “...He goes before them, and the *sheep follow Him*: for they *know His VOICE*. And *a stranger will they not follow*, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (10:4-5). He continues by describing the behavior of certain ministers. Notice: “The hireling flees, because he is an hireling, and *cares not for the sheep*” (vs. 13).

This remarkable promise shows that Jesus Christ will never abandon His sheep and will always protect those who hear His voice and willingly follow Him—when they are in spiritual danger!—to where He has restored the truth, to where He has re-established His Work and placed His name!

Before examining the history of the true Church, we must first address an important element of whether Christians should give “truth” or “love” higher importance...

“*Truth*” or “*Love*” —*Which Comes First?*

The apostle John repeatedly taught the importance of both Bible truth *and* godly love. To understand the identity of the true Church, it is vital to recognize which of these is the foundation for the other.

The large, respected, well-known church of this world in which I grew up was comprised of millions of “believers”—people who believed in and talked about Jesus. No doubt, most of them were sincere. They also talked much about “Christian love.” Many sermons had this topic as their theme. Sometimes it seemed that “Jesus” and “love” were the only two subjects preached. In fact, this describes the diet served every week from pulpits in tens of thousands of churches.

Of course, these *are* both critically important topics! The Bible has hundreds of verses that refer to Jesus Christ and to the importance of demonstrating real godly love. But I saw that many people had a hollow love, and that no one really believed what Christ *taught*. No *real* love was evident in their lives. It was not until later that I learned *why*—and that there was a connection.

Does this sound familiar—Christ’s name on people’s lips but the truths that He taught not evident in their lives? Lots of *talk* about love, but little, if any, being practiced in their lives?

John has been called the “Apostle of Love,” because he spoke about this subject much more than all the other New Testament writers *combined*. Check any concordance, and you will see this to be true. What is not realized is that he also wrote more about the importance

of “truth” than all the other New Testament writers combined. John could as easily have been known as the “Apostle of Truth”! Just a superficial look at his gospel and three epistles could leave you wondering if he wrote about anything other than these two subjects. Strangely, despite John’s dozens of references to the importance of truth, this emphasis is ignored by almost everyone!

In God’s infinite wisdom, He knew that He could not have one apostle stress *truth* and a different one stress *love*. This would have more easily left the impression that people could “choose their favorite apostle,” depending upon whether they felt truth or love deserved greater emphasis. (It was this very kind of division that plagued the Corinthian Church – I Cor. 1:10-14.) The result is that each group would feel superior to the other because it has the “more proper” emphasis. Many denominations today feel that they merely need to stress “love”—and without explaining the Bible definition—with little emphasis on correct doctrine. The churches that think this way have a well-honed set of passages they use in an attempt to establish their position.

The Role of Love

Two of the most frequently quoted verses in the Bible come from John. Both speak about love. John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” People who know little—or nothing—about the Bible usually know of this verse.

John 13:34-35 states, “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one to another.” It is easy to see, from just these two passages, why so many believe they are Christians if they just “have love”—all the while feeling no need to be concerned about right doctrines or *truth*. Notice the phrase, “By *this* [love] shall all *men* know that you are My disciples.” It is true that an outward demonstration of love does make an important impression on people. In a selfish, unhappy, confused world, people practicing genuine love—the way of *give*, of out-going concern, instead of *get—do* stand out from all those around them!

A basic question arises. How does *Christ* know if you are His disciple? We are not asking how *men* know, but how *Christ* knows. John also answers, “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed;

and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

Did you notice the phrase “IF *you continue in My word*, THEN are you My disciples...”? This is a key point! (We will see later how love is directly connected to this.) “Continuing in [Christ’s] word”—remaining free of error—signifies to Christ that we are His disciples.

This is what Christ looks for!

The Role of Truth

Holding to truth would never be a sign to men. People are usually turned off by what true Christians believe “because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). The truth is *not* attractive to anyone *not* called by God (I Cor. 2:14). However, seeing people show genuine concern for one another turns no one off and is attractive to all. Anyone reading this book who doubts this may attempt to “cast” a few “pearls” (of Bible truth) at someone (Matt. 7:6). Watch the reaction. Then try showing love to them when they do not expect it. The lesson will be learned.

Consider! True Christians are led by the Holy Spirit—called the “Comforter” and the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13). This same Spirit of truth “will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). That is the only Church where both God’s Spirit of truth and the Christian can be “comfortable.” The Holy Spirit will also lead all true Christians into the knowledge of real godly love. Galatians 5:22 reveals that love is a “fruit of the Spirit.” Romans 5:5 explains that such fruit is possible in a Christian’s mind only because God’s Spirit has put it there.

Romans 13:10 states, “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” I John 5:3 adds this, removing all doubt: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous.” It will be clear to others that you have love, because they will see you fulfilling God’s laws toward your fellow man. Understanding real Christian love—what it is—how it is expressed—its relationship to law—its part in being the light of the world—is in itself also a *great truth!*

Let’s now carefully examine an important verse: “He that says, *I know Him*, and keeps not His COMMANDMENTS, is a *liar*, and the *truth* is not in him” (I John 2:4). Pause and consider this before continuing. Verse 5 speaks about people who claim to be Christians—to “know Him”—but who neither keep the commandments *nor have “truth”*

in them. The world is filled with professing Christians who claim to “know Jesus in their heart” but who have no interest whatsoever in understanding the true doctrines of the Bible. Now, focus carefully on John’s words: “But whoso keeps HIS [Christ’s] word; in him [that person] verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him.”

Real love cannot be perfected in those who are *not* keeping Christ’s word—His recorded instruction—the *truth*. The true love of God is *only perfected* in people who ARE doing this! Remember John 8:31. God’s servants must always “continue in” or “keep” God’s word. No wonder Jesus taught, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4).

The Greek word for “keep,” *tereo*, means “to watch or to guard (from loss or injury) by keeping the eye upon...to detain in custody.” Will you determine to keep the truths of God’s Word in your “custody”? Will you then be prepared to “guard” it from “loss or injury”? Are you becoming convicted about keeping your “eyes” continually upon it? If so, then you will later (at baptism) be “sanctified” by that Word of truth (John 17:17). Only in this way can you first become and then remain Christ’s disciple!

Remember! Truth is the umbrella that stands over love. Love springs from truth—*not the other way around!* It is no coincidence that Matthew 22:37-39 says, “love your neighbor as yourself,” *after* the verse says, “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Certainly, none who reject God or His truth love Him. Therefore, genuine love for “neighbor” will also be absent.

Many Churches Claim to Have “Love”

I ask: What about all the churches that profess the importance of love and having a “relationship with Christ”—while in ignorance of God’s doctrines or while neglecting or abandoning the ones they may have? Can love be perfected in them? The Bible says this is impossible! (Recall I John 3:4.) The only thing such people and organizations “perfect” is the ability to *talk* about love. So says God! While many churches have honed “lovespeak” into a fine art, this is nothing more than empty, hollow, selfish *talk!*

This is why the church of my childhood was filled with talk of “love” and “Jesus,” while it demonstrated no real love of God and had no knowledge of the true teachings of Christ. Checking the Handbook of Beliefs of this denomination (as I did) would show that it matches

what almost every other denomination and branch of traditional Christianity says when there is doctrinal disagreement within their churches. They all say something like this: “We must agree in love to disagree. Love is primary. Doctrine and opinion about Bible truth is secondary. Let us all just have love. Let us submerge our differences under ever more love.”

The problem is that, in the end, this breeds *more* division and doctrinal confusion in these churches and a complete disregard and neglect of doctrinal truth. This wrong premise puts the “love” cart in front of the horse. The true Church continues in truth and *then* is able to walk in love. Remember, real love, the kind seen in God’s Church, springs from first having the truth! John stated that he “rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the *truth* that is in you [them], even as you walk in the *truth*.” Seeing *this* within fellow Christians was John’s greatest joy (III John 3-4).

How Love, Truth and Blessings Work Together

There is a final, important, related point. What role do *blessings* and *growth* play within the formula of truth and real Christian love? Do their presence—or absence—tell the true Christian anything?

They should!

I John 3:18 states, “Let us not *love* in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and *in truth*.” John explains that this gives Christians confidence toward God in their prayers, while eliminating the conscience problems that hinder them. Now verse 21: “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” Answers and blessings flow from obedience, pleasing God and application of His truth: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, *because we keep His commandments*, and DO those things that are *pleasing in His sight*” (vs. 22).

This principle is made plain through paraphrasing three verses. Let’s notice. Isaiah 58:13-14 explains that Israel was promised wonderful blessings *if they kept the Sabbath properly*. Malachi 3:8-10 shows that they were also promised great blessings—but only *if they tithed faithfully*. Exodus 15:26-27 directly connects the promises of good health and healing *to full obedience to God’s commands*. These and many other verses containing promises show that the Christian can know when he is in harmony with God. Conscience problems vanish when people follow all of God’s commands and instructions.

God’s people must recognize and never forget that a real Christian’s path is not easy or pain-free. However, if our ways please Him, God

will continually give blessings and growth. This becomes a sign to *us* of His happiness and pleasure with us. When blessings, fruit and growth are continually *lacking*, God is *not* pleased! We know—either way.

First, belief and continuance in the truth tells *Christ* who His disciples are (and real love will always be evident anyway). Next, love tells *people* who Christ's disciples are. Finally, *blessings, fruit* and *growth* tell the individual Christian whether he or she is pleasing God and continuing in His Word.

If I were the devil, I would speak endlessly of love and “Jesus,” while de-emphasizing right doctrine—Christ's teachings—truth!—and their connection to growth and blessings. If this is what you are hearing, beware!

There is a Church that understands the connection between these things. We are now ready to take a close look at the history of the Church that is unlike any other on the face of the Earth...

The Ephesian Era

The Church of God began with what is often called the “Apostolic Era,” and this period lasted until about AD 98. This was the first phase of the “Ephesian Era.” Christ inspired the apostle John to describe this era in Revelation 2:1-3: “Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; these things says he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you can not bear them which are evil: and you have tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars: and have borne, and have patience, and for My name’s sake have labored, and have not fainted.”

The Beginning of the Church—The Apostolic Era

Some background: The story of the Church of God began on the day of Pentecost, AD 31. When talking for the final time to His disciples, just prior to His ascension, Christ described the significance of that event in Acts 1:8: “But you shall receive *power*, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and *unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” Then, Acts 2:1 reads, “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with *one accord* in one place.” God then sent His Holy Spirit to 120 disciples, which was witnessed by many thousands gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. So moving were the events

and so convicting was Peter's sermon that 3,000 were baptized into the Church on that day. The number soon increased to 5,000 (Acts 4:4).

The apostles performed wonders and signs from the outset. Many devout Jews were converted in the beginning months. The Church enjoyed unity of doctrine and fellowship. Its only opposition at this early stage were threats from the religious establishment. Feeling themselves threatened by such powerful miracles and wonders by the apostles, certain officials called Peter and John before their council and asked by what power they had done a miracle of healing a lame man (Acts 4:7). With great boldness, Peter told them that the miracle was done in the name of Jesus Christ, whom they had crucified and God had raised up. The council then called for a private conference, in which they acknowledged among themselves, saying, "What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle has been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it" (vs. 16).

In this instance, the apostles were only threatened before being released.

Upon being reunited with the brethren, they gave account of the threats against them. The Bible records that the brethren then prayed in one accord and with great fervor. Verses 29-30 continue: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Your servants, that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching forth Your hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Your holy child Jesus." After their prayer, "the place was shaken," that is, the ground trembled with an *earthquake*. "...and they were *all filled with the Holy Spirit*, and they *spoke the word of God with boldness*" (vs. 31).

The record is that God was with the early Church in tremendous—and miraculous—power.

Later, the apostles were imprisoned. Through another extraordinary miracle, an angel opened the prison door and directed them to continue to speak and teach in the temple. This carried over into the next day and the religious leaders sent the authorities to detain them again. But these men had to be careful to treat the apostles with respect because "they [the authorities] feared the people, lest they should have been stoned" (Acts 5:26). The majority of Jews in Jerusalem, though not converted, stood in awe of the apostles, again because of the many miraculous healings that they performed.

Respite, Then Persecution

The advice of Gamaliel, a respected teacher of the law, gave the apostles some precious additional time to continue preaching the gospel in

Jerusalem: "...Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught: but if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it; lest haply you be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:38-39).

As the apostles were released, this time they were threatened *and beaten*. Yet, they departed "...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His [Christ's] name" (Acts 5:41). Such was the zeal of this first era.

After the arrest and martyrdom of Stephen, the first intense persecution arose against the Church at Jerusalem. Except for the apostles, the brethren fled to various regions of Judea and Samaria. But this scattering resulted in the spreading of the gospel beyond the regions that had been covered at that time. Things were beginning to develop. Saul, who later became the apostle Paul, was called and converted, and prepared for his special commission. He was miraculously transformed from a vicious persecutor of the Church into a special instrument that God would use mightily.

Within the first few years of the Church's development, God had revealed to the apostle Peter that the door was opened for Gentiles to be called, and he personally baptized the first Gentile converts. (This was the Italian Cornelius of Acts 10, with his family.) This occurred as Paul was being specially trained, during a three-year period, by the resurrected Christ in Arabia (Gal. 1:15-18).

In AD 42, the apostle James, John's brother, was killed by Herod, and Peter was miraculously delivered from prison by an angel. And the momentum of the Church was strong in spite of dangers of persecution. The posture of the Church at this point is best summarized by this brief description in Acts 12:24: "But the word of God grew and multiplied."

By AD 45, Paul and Barnabas had begun their first journey to preach in Cyprus and southern Asia Minor. This yielded great success with terrible hardships, such as Paul's stoning at Lystra. Quite possibly, he was raised from death in this incident. So bold and determined was Paul, that he returned to Lystra, as well as the other cities, to reassure the new converts and prospectives. Acts 14:22 explains that he was "...confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

The council at the Headquarters Church in Jerusalem, in AD 49, is related in Acts 15. Verse 6 shows the apostles and elders gathered to consider the matter of circumcision. Peter led the council in their discussion and the decision was pronounced by James, Christ's brother, and accepted by all present as the judgment bound on Earth and in

heaven. The Church was still in unity, despite serious clarifications that would yet have to be made. It is significant that this council was the last time all or most of the apostles came together. The rest of the book of Acts describes Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

Before addressing where the twelve apostles went, some observations must be made concerning the work among the Greeks. These were the people that Christ selected to preserve the New Testament Scriptures through the turbulent decades and centuries that lay ahead. Here are some of the reasons. Unlike the Jews, the Greeks were not under persecution. They were in a position to remain in their own homeland indefinitely, as they *have* done for millennia.

Though the Greeks, as a nation, were not converted, they had the intent and capability of preserving and protecting the New Testament. The Greek people treasured these manuscripts partly because this was akin to a heritage. Of course, even the briefest overview reveals that many scriptures addressed Greek converts—in Greek territory. The Greeks were to preserve, and meticulously copy, these manuscripts through the centuries. God's Church was to be under constant persecution and would be in no position to do this. The Greek nation was safe and secure and the best candidate for the task. But, preserving the New Testament was assigned to the Greek peoples rather than the Greek converts in the Church (*Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course [ACBCC]*, les. 49, p. 7).

The Commission to the Original Apostles

We now focus on the twelve apostles' ministries. Notice what Christ instructed them in Matthew 10:5-6: "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter you not: but *go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*"

And again in Matthew 15:24: "But He answered and said, I am not sent but *unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" Then Jesus made this promise to the twelve disciples in Matthew 19:28: "You which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, *you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*"

Now notice this greeting in James 1:1: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the *twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*"

The original apostles were sent to the lost tribes of Israel after initially working in the area around Jerusalem and in Judea during the forma-

tive years of the early Church. The remainder of the book of Acts only relates the accounts of Paul and his mission to the Greek and Roman areas. Shortly after James, John's brother, was martyred, the apostles went to the lost tribes of Israel—their primary mission. And these pioneering servants spent most of the remainder of their lives in these areas.

James, Christ's younger brother, also functioned as an apostle. We do know that a number of other men were later ordained apostles, with one likely filling the position that James (John's brother, who was martyred) had held. We will encounter various reliable secular sources that name a number of other loyal servants who later went on to hold the office of apostle. Later in this chapter, a summary chart will address this subject.

Before considering the areas to which the lost tribes of Israel were dispersed, it is helpful to view the twelve apostles' commission in a broader perspective. The book of Acts, along with the other manuscripts that were canonized into scripture, dealt primarily with the eastern Mediterranean area, extending from Judea, in the east, to Rome in the west, with the Greek world near the geographical center.

Most people have the misconception that this particular area comprised most, if not all, of the converted peoples of the first century Church. In view of the fact that, from the early AD 40s, the apostles departed to the lost tribes of Israel, an observation can be made. Over the next thirty years, about ten times the manpower of top leadership was devoted to these lost tribes, compared to the eastern Mediterranean. It is reasonable to project that no more than 20 percent or 30 percent of the first century Church were in these "traditional areas." That leaves 70 to 80 percent from the areas of the lost tribes. Any account of history omitting this commission of the apostles is therefore *terribly* incomplete.

An obvious question at this point would be: If this is true, then why has it not been made known? The answer is anchored to the issue of why Israel's identity was lost in the first place. It was God's intended purpose to keep the identity of the lost tribes hidden through the ages. To document in Scripture exactly where certain apostles went, would have compromised this purpose.

Notice this from page 2 of Herman Hoeh's 1964 article, "Where Did the Twelve Apostles Go?": "Luke was not permitted by Christ to include in Acts the final journeys of Paul's life. It would have revealed the whereabouts of the children of Israel! It was not then God's time to make that known. But the moment has now come, in this climactic 'time of the end,' to pull back the shroud of history and reveal where the twelve apostles went."

(To better understand the “time of the end,” carefully read our booklets *Are These the Last Days?* and *Revelation Explained at Last!*)

Where the Lost Tribes Were Located

When Israel was first taken into captivity, they were relocated into the areas in and around Assyria and Media. Their domain came to include Parthia, Scythia and Armenia. Within a few centuries, many had already begun to migrate toward the northwest. At the time of the apostles, there were still many Israelites living in the original areas where their captors had placed them.

In fact, as the greetings in James’ letter acknowledged the twelve tribes scattered abroad, another reference addresses some of these Israelites, specifying their locations. I Peter 1:1 says, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...” All of these areas were non-Greek, and were located in northern (upper) Asia Minor. The greater area of Galatia, mentioned above, was in the north of Asia Minor.

The Greeks of southern Galatia were those whom Paul had previously ministered to. Paul had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit from entering Mysia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). This would have been an area heavily inhabited by Israelites, because their numbers were significant around the coastal areas of the Black Sea in Upper Asia Minor. But they were in a mode of transition toward the northwest. Hence, Peter addressed these Israelites in Upper Asia Minor as sojourners—or “strangers”—among the Gentiles. Paul’s commission at that time was to go to the Gentiles. But Peter and the other eleven were commissioned to go to the lost tribes. As coordinator, Peter traveled to many more areas where the Israelites were located than did any of the other apostles.

Regarding the areas of ancient Parthia to Armenia, notice this observation by the Jewish historian, Josephus: “...but then the entire body of the people of Israel remained in that country [the ten tribes having never returned to their native Israel]; wherefore there are but two tribes in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans [Judah and Benjamin], while the ten tribes are beyond [the] *Euphrates till now, and are an immense multitude, and not to be estimated by numbers*” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book XI, chap. V, sec. 2).

Although Josephus was well aware of the very large number of Israelites living from Parthia to Armenia, he would not have necessarily been aware that some of them had already migrated to the northwest.

Other Destinations

The chart “Where the Twelve Apostles Went” lists most of the apostles, with the locations of their ministry. The sources (which are not exhaustive) are listed on the right, with the order of listing according to locations—east to west.

Besides these eight men, there were three other apostles’ ministries, whose locations were only preserved through tradition. (Remember, James, John’s brother, was martyred in AD 42 before the others were sent to the tribes of Israel, leaving only eleven *original* apostles.) When specific documentation is lacking, there always remains a reasonable doubt. However, the destinations of these men were to remain concealed to the world. Perhaps some did a better job of retaining their anonymity with the outside world than did others. One of these apostles, not specifically documented, was John. He reappears after having been absent from the eastern Mediterranean from about the AD 40s until the AD 90s, having spent this last period on the island of Patmos, recording the book of Revelation.

According to French tradition, Mary, Christ’s mother, lived the rest of her life in Gaul (France). John had been assigned the responsibility

WHERE THE TWELVE APOSTLES WENT		
APOSTLE	LOCATION OF MINISTRY	SOURCE OF DOCUMENTATION
Matthew	Parthia, Aethiopia (near India)	Metaphrastes quoted in William Cave’s <i>Antiquitates Apostolicae</i>
Thomas	Parthia, Media, Persia, and other parts (near India)	Sophornius quotes in Cave’s <i>Antiquitates Apostolicae</i> , p. 189
Bartholomew (Nathaniel)	Parthia, Armenia, and other parts	Nicephorus Callistus in <i>Ecclesiasticae Historiae</i>
Philip	Scythia, Upper Asia Minor	Cave’s <i>Antiquitates Apostolicae</i> , p. 168
Andrew	Scythia, Upper Asia Minor	Cave’s <i>Antiquitates Apostolicae</i> , pp. 137-138
Peter	Scythia, Upper Asia Minor, Europe, Britain, and other parts	Cave’s <i>Antiquitates Apostolicae</i> , pp. 138, 45
Simon the Zealot	Egypt, Cyrene, Mauritania, Libya, Britain	Nicephorus and Dorotheus quoted in Cave’s <i>Antiquitates Apostolicae</i> , p. 203
James, son of Alphaeus	Spain, Ireland, Britain	Cave’s <i>Antiquitates Apostolicae</i> , p. 148

to provide for her (John 19:26-27) after Jesus' death (*ACBCC*, les. 49, p. 10). It is likely John spent the intervening decades in France, since many Israelites lived there.

The other two apostles linked to a particular area only by tradition were Jude (also named Libbaeus Thaddaeus) and Matthias, added to replace Judas. Jude was claimed to be in Parthia, while Matthias was to have been in Dacia (modern Romania). The source for this information and the chart is "Where Did the Twelve Apostles Go?", Hoeh, pp. 3-7.

Apostles in Britain

Now examine some amazing statements that all have to do with the commission of the apostles. We begin with several from *The Incredible History of God's True Church*, by Ivor Fletcher, chapters 4 and 5, pertaining to the first century Church in Britain. The first statement mentions two of the original apostles, plus Paul, and two loyal servants who were also later ordained apostles. Sources below indicate that Aristobulus was already in that office by the time he arrived at his assignment in Britain. This most likely could have also been the case with Joseph of Arimathea. A number of sources give strong indication of his eminent position of authority and Paul's responsibility in this region and elsewhere.

Consider the following: "*The true Christian Religion was planted here [Britain] most anciently by Joseph of Arimathea, Simon Zelotes, Aristobulus, by St. Peter, and St. Paul, as may be proved by Dorotheus, Theodoretus and Sophronius [highly acclaimed historians of that period]*" (*Remains of Britain*, William Camden, 1674, p. 5). In this particular quote, the names of these servants were apparently arranged in the chronological order of their service in Britain.

There are many (often long) accounts documenting the works of Joseph of Arimathea in Britain. Only two shorter quotes are given here. Cressy, in his *Church History of Brittany*, writes: "'Joseph was buried near the little wattle church he built [at Glastonbury]. The lid of the sarcophagus said to have contained his remains bore the simple inscription: 'To the Britons I came after I buried the Christ. I taught, I have entered my rest.'"

The next quote, by Bishop Godwin, in his *Catalogue of Bishops*, is an ideal summary quote about the story of Joseph: "'The testimonies of Joseph of Arimathea's coming here are so many, so clear, and so pregnant, as an indifferent man cannot but discern there is something in it.'"

The following source helps to establish the time frame of the early Church in Britain in which Joseph of Arimathea played so vital a role:

“It is the opinion generally received among our later writers, as one of them tells the world, ‘That the conversion of the British nation to the Christian faith was performed towards the latter end of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,’ i.e. about thirty seven years after Christ’s nativity” (*Antiquities of the British Churches*, by Stillingfleet, p. 1).

The date referenced here would have been late AD 34—the beginning of the gospel to Britain! Fletcher observed that the above information had proved to be quite an embarrassment to the Roman Catholic Church, since Paul’s arrival in Rome was not until about twenty years later.

Here are two quotes on another first century servant of Christ in Britain. In his *Church History of Brittany*, Cressy writes, “St. Aristobulus [Romans 16:10], a disciple of...St. Paul in Rome, was sent as an Apostle to the Britons, and was the first Bishop in Britain, he died in Glastonbury, A.D. 99.”

Then, elaborating on the work of Aristobulus, the *Greek Martyrologies* inform us that “Aristobulus was one of the seventy disciples, and a follower of St. Paul the Apostle, along with whom he preached the Gospel to the whole world, and ministered to him. He was chosen by St. Paul to be the missionary bishop to the land of Britain, inhabited by a very warlike and fierce race. By them he was often scourged, and repeatedly dragged as a criminal through their towns, yet he converted many of them to Christianity. He was there martyred, after he had built churches and ordained deacons and priests [bishops or elders] for the island.”

Another dedicated servant of the early Church in Britain was Elvanus [also known as Elfan in Welch sources]. This brief quote summarizes his service: “Bale saith that Elvanus Avalonius was a disciple to those who were the disciples of the Apostles, and that he preached the Gospel in Britain with good success...” (*Antiquities of the British Churches*, Stillingfleet).

As mentioned, Peter, as chief coordinator, was required to travel to areas where the Israelites were located. The following quotes help to establish more documentation of Peter’s work, as well as that of other apostles. These next four quotes, with their original sources, are from “Where Did the Twelve Apostles Go?”, Hoeh, pp. 4-6: “...Peter was...a long time in Britain where he converted many nations to the faith” (*Antiquitates Apostolicae*, Cave, p. 45).

Those converted to the faith in the British Isles were undoubtedly of the diverse tribes of Israel in and around that location. Continuing with Dr. Hoeh’s next statement, this one taken from page 137 of Cave’s book: “Andrew ‘went next to Trapezus, a maritime city on the

The Church in the Far East

Most do not realize that the apostles even spread the truth to the Far East. Eusebius recorded that the apostle Thomas was sent to Parthia (*Ecclesiastical History*, bk.3, ch.1). As the apostles were dispatched to the lost tribes of Israel in about AD 42, they initially ministered to the tribes of Israel and afterward to the indigenous peoples of these regions who were also coming into the Church. It was recorded that Thomas was martyred in AD 72, after being in the Far East for about 30 years. During that time, he brought the true gospel not only to the region of Parthia, but to other locations as well.

Even before the arrival of Thomas, the Far East had already been represented by various Jews and other Israelites from Parthia and nearby Media on the Day of Pentecost AD 31, when the New Testament Church was first established (Acts 2:8-9). Although the gospel was first brought to these eastern peoples during the Ephesian era, the Church in those areas was not persecuted later during the Smyrna and Pergamos eras in the same way that had occurred in the Western regions, where the Roman Catholic system was strong. However, being in Satan's world, persecution was inevitable and emerged from other sources. By the late 1500s, late in the Thyatiran era, the tentacles of the Roman System did bring persecution to the Far East. The following was primarily obtained from *Truth Triumphant* by B.G. Wilkinson (ch.19-22).

An important factor that helped in the spreading of the truth to the Far East was the Aramaic language. Aramaic and Greek were well-established languages in Judea and Syria. Josephus, the famous Jewish author in the days of the apostles, wrote his works first in Aramaic and later in Greek. This was because of the large Aramaic reading constituency in the East, including the Parthian Empire.

At this point, it is helpful to understand that the true Church in the eastern regions was sometimes referred to as the Syrian Church in order to distinguish it from the Roman Church of the west. The true Church's doctrinal stance was correctly associated with Lucian's position [described in a later inset] of Antioch, Syria, and labeled accordingly. Sometimes the term "Nestorian" was also used to identify the eastern true Church. Nestorius was a scholar of Syria who opposed the trinity, and the true Church in opposition to the trinity was thus labeled

“Nestorian.” Another term often used was the “Church of the East,” although this included a larger set of believers beyond the true Church.

The book *Early Spread of Christianity* by Mingana reveals that the apostle Thomas’ travels and efforts in India were well established. Notice: “It is the constant tradition in the Eastern Church that the apostle Thomas evangelized India, and there is no historian, no poet, no breviary, no liturgy, no writer of any kind who, having the opportunity of speaking of Thomas, does not associate his name with India.”

In his work *Christianity in China, Tartary, and Tibet*, the author L’Abbe Huc presented some other interesting points: “The circumstances of St. Thomas having preached at all in India has been frequently called into question by writers deserving of attention; but we find it supported by so much evidence, that it seems difficult for an unprejudiced mind to refuse credit to a fact guaranteed by such excellent historical authorities. All the Greek, Latin, and Syriac monuments proclaim that St. Thomas was the apostle of the Indies [India] who carried the torch of faith into the remote regions where he suffered martyrdom. Some writers have affirmed that he prosecuted his apostolic labors as far even as China...”

In *A History of the Holy Eastern Church* by Neale, it states, “There is a constant tradition of the church that the gospel was first preached in India by the apostle St. Thomas...he arrived in Cranganor...where the most powerful among the princes who ruled in Malabar then resided. Having here wrought many miracles, and established a church, he journeyed southward to city of Coulan. Here his labors were attended with equal success and after traversing the peninsula he arrived at Meliapour, a town more close to the more celebrated city of Madras. Sailing from this port he preached Christianity in China...”

Briefly consider some additional interesting points, compiled from a variety of sources, providing links with the travels of the apostle Thomas and elements of the true Church having existed in China.

(1) The period of the imperial Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) was the most brilliant and prosperous of all the Chinese dynasties. In 1625, a remarkable stone was unearthed near the city of Changan that dated from the Tang Dynasty. This famous monumental stone provided evidence of the impact of true Christianity in China. Many who have written about this stone call it the Nestorian stone—relating this link to a larger set of believers, which included the true Church. The stone monument explicitly recognizes the head of the Church in the East, and

names the patriarchs of the church located in Baghdad and in Persia. The Chinese called Christianity the “luminous religion,” a term that appeared in the stone. This stone is said to rank in importance with the Rosetta stone of Egypt or the Behistun inscription in Persia in its confirmation of recorded Chinese history.

(2) It is believed that the teachings of the Old Testament came to China by way of India, which had been evangelized by Thomas. One statement by an Ante-Nicene theologian and scholar, Arnobius, in about AD 300, was that China was one of the Oriental peoples among whom the Church was established (*Against the Heathen, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, p. 438).

(3) Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* states, “The Christianity of China, between the seventh and the thirteenth century, is invincibly proved by the consent of Chinese, Arabian, Syriac, and Latin evidence” (ch. 47, note 118).

(4) About 1284, two young Chinese scholars, Marcos and Sauma, made a historic journey by caravan across Asia to Persia (headquarters of the Church of the East at that time) and from there on to view Jerusalem. Their journey occurred about the same time as the famous travels to the Orient by Marco Polo, headed in the opposite direction (*Truth Triumphant*, B.G. Wilkinson, ch. 22).

(5) Marco Polo, of Venice, Italy, made his famous travels to the Orient from 1271 to 1295. As a devout Catholic, here are some of his observations, colored by his Catholic interpretation of the world:

“Mosul is a large province inhabited by various descriptions of people, one class of whom pays reverence to Mohammad, and are called Arabians. The others profess the Christian faith, but not according to the canons of the church, which they depart from in many instances, and are denominated Nestorians, Jacobites, and Armenians. They have a patriarch whom they call Jacolite, and by him archbishops, bishops, and abbots are consecrated and sent to all parts of India, Baghdad, and Cathay [China], just as the pope of Rome does in Latin countries” (*The Travels of Marco Polo*, Komroff, p. 29).

The information we have about the Church in China is very sketchy. But we do know that the truth was taught there and a significant number of converts had to exist as a result. Certainly, the true converts, as always, were vastly outnumbered by many sympathizers who appreciated the results of applying these right principles.

The reader is left to ponder these astonishing facts of true Church history!

Euxine [Black] Sea, whence after many other places he came to Nice, where he stayed two years, *preaching and working miracles with great success*...He next came to Sinope, a city situated upon the same sea... here he met with his brother Peter, with whom he stayed a considerable time...Departing hence, he went again to Amynsus and then...he proposed to return to Jerusalem.”

Hoeh’s next source is Eusebius, who mentioned that the apostles “passed over to those which are called the British Isles.” He continued, “Some of the Apostles preached the Gospel in the British Isles” (*Evangelical Demonstrations*, book 3, ch. 7).

Here is the commission given to Paul before he was converted. It was actually given as Christ spoke to Ananias in a vision in Acts 9:15: “But the Lord said unto him, Go your way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.” Paul taught the Gentiles in Cyprus, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. He appeared before kings and rulers before and during his two-year confinement at Rome. Paul’s window of opportunity to teach the Israelites was between his release in Rome in AD 61 and his arrest in AD 68. When he traveled to Spain, there were other destinations on his agenda.

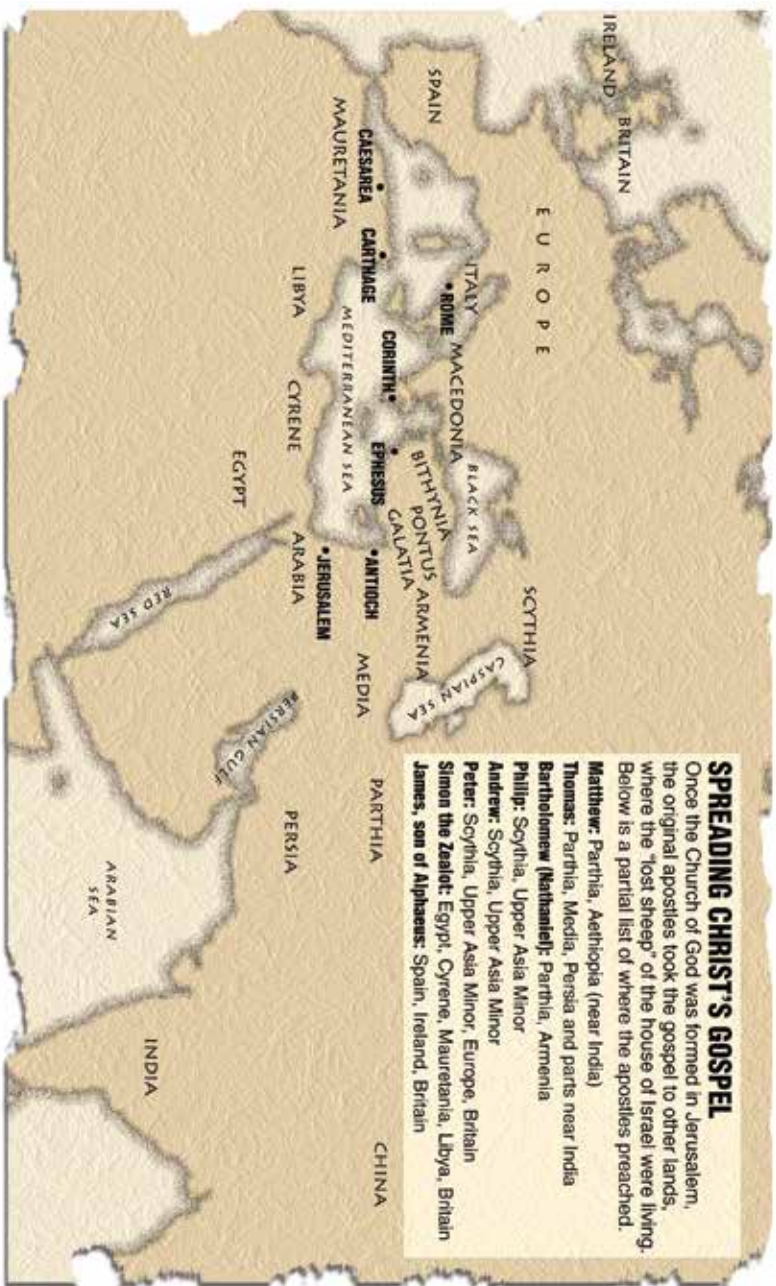
Besides William Camden’s famous quote above, which placed Paul with other apostles in Britain, there are more accounts to consider. Theodoret, another of the Greek Church historians, writes the following: “That St. Paul brought salvation to the isles that lie in the ocean” (book I, on Psalm CXVI, p. 870). This was another common term for the British Isles.

The following four quotes from *A True History of the True Religion*, by Dugger and Dodd, chapter 20, help to illustrate the preponderance of sources attesting to the true gospel reaching the British Isles. The last three mention Paul.

“Chrysostom, A. D. 398, mentions ‘The Britannic Isles’ as having felt the power of the Word, and says, ‘To whatever quarter you turn—to the Indians or Moors or Britons, *even to the remotest bounds of the West, you will find this doctrine.*’

“Clement of Rome, A. D. 96, says, ‘St. Paul preached in the East and West, leaving behind him an illustrious record of his faith, *having taught the world righteousness, and having traveled even to the utmost bounds of the West.*’

“Jerome, A. D. 392, says, ‘St. Paul, having been in Spain, went from one ocean to another.’ *‘His diligence in preaching extended as far as the earth itself.’* ‘After his imprisonment he preached in the western parts.’



SPREADING CHRIST'S GOSPEL

Once the Church of God was formed in Jerusalem, the original apostles took the gospel to other lands, where the "lost sheep" of the house of Israel were living. Below is a partial list of where the apostles preached.

Matthew: Parthia, Aethiopia (near India)

Thomas: Parthia, Media, Persia and parts near India

Bartholomew (Nathanael): Parthia, Armenia

Phillip: Scythia, Upper Asia Minor

Andrew: Scythia, Upper Asia Minor

Peter: Scythia, Upper Asia Minor, Europe, Britain

Simon the Zealot: Egypt, Cyrene, Mauretania, Libya, Britain

James, son of Alphaeus: Spain, Ireland, Britain

PARTHIA

CHINA

PERSIA

INDIA

E U R O P E

SPAIN

MAURETANIA

CAESAREA

CARTHAGE

LIBYA

CYRENE

EGYPT

ARABIA

JERUSALEM

MEDIA

PARTHIA

ITALY

ROME

MACEDONIA

CORINTH

BITTUNIA

PONTUS

ARMENIA

CALATIA

SCYTHIA

CASPIAN SEA

BLACK SEA

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

RED SEA

INDIAN OCEAN

ARABIAN SEA

INDIA

CHINA

“Venantius Fortunatus, A. D. 560, says, ‘St. Paul passed over the ocean to the Island of Britain, and to Thule, the extremity of the earth’ (See page 23, *History of Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*, Vol. I).” (The reference to “Thule” could have meant Greenland and/or Iceland.)

Much has been seen of the evangelization of Britain by various apostles and the abundant success they had achieved there. Most of what we know regarding the evangelization of other areas occupied by the lost tribes of Israel comes from works like Cave’s *Antiquitates Apostolicae*. Here is another account of the apostles’ successful ministries in these other regions. It serves as a case-in-point, representative of the work in other areas. From *ACBCC*, Lesson 49, p. 10 we read: “About 112 A.D., Pliny the Younger, governor [or prosecuting attorney] of Bithynia, wrote to Roman Emperor Trajan that *the temples of the old gods were almost forsaken and that Christians were everywhere a multitude!*” Andrew and Philip were assigned to evangelize the tribes of Israel in Bithynia.

In a related context from the source cited directly above, p. 11 reads, “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.” This was an insightful observation. It must have repeatedly been the case, as the gospel was taken to the scattered regions where the lost tribes of Israel were located.

John Replaces Peter

After Peter’s death, John was eventually directed to return to the eastern Mediterranean area to oversee the Church. We now focus on certain events that occurred in the 90s about the time he wrote his three general epistles.

One account relates that the Roman Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96) summoned John to Rome. He asked him about the tradition that Christ was to reign as king and would abolish all other governments. Although Domitian had certainly heard of the account of the execution and resurrection of Christ, he was investigating what appeared to be some type of seditious movement. John was questioned as to how and when Christ planned to establish His future reign.

Here is John’s reply: “You shall also reign for many years given you by God, and after you very many others; and when the times of things upon the earth have been fulfilled, out of heaven shall come a

King, eternal, true, Judge of the living and the dead, to whom every nation and tribe shall conform, through whom every earthly power and dominion shall be brought to nothing, and every mouth speaking great things shall be shut” (“Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian,” pp. 560-562, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Roberts and Donaldson).

Shortly after this event, Domitian banished John to the Isle of Patmos, in the Aegean Sea. Here he received the Revelation and the command to record it. One reason Christ allowed John to be imprisoned there may have been to give him enough time for his task. Isolated, he would be in a position to concentrate, undistracted to receive the visions and to meticulously record all the details of this great prophecy.

Upon his release, John resided in Ephesus for the remainder of his life. He is the only apostle known to have died of old age. According to tradition the Romans attempted to have him executed by immersion in boiling oil, but God miraculously preserved his life. This supposedly occurred before he was banished to Patmos and is recorded in the writings of Tertullian, whose contributions will be discussed in the next chapter.

While at Ephesus (now the Headquarters of the Ephesian Era), John was assisted by Philip and Polycarp (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, p. 774). This Philip, now an apostle, had been a deacon and later an evangelist. He is often confused with the original apostle Philip, who had been martyred in AD 54. At this late stage of John’s life, much of his focus was upon the training of Polycarp, who would be leading the Church at the outset of the Smyrna Era.

The Apostolic Era Ends

John’s death, in about AD 100, ended the apostolic era and what constituted most of what is considered the Ephesian Era. We have covered some of the details of where the apostles served and aspects of their work. Polycarp introduces the Smyrna Era, but we need to backtrack and summarize certain events of the Ephesian Era, and consider their implications.

For continuity, we have focused on the apostles in a general way, and concluded without interspersing other events. We will consider some of those other events in the next section. But first, this summary chart of the first century apostles is of interest. The secular references in the chart do not carry the same authority as Scripture, but do lend much credence.

SUMMARY CHART OF KNOWN FIRST CENTURY APOSTLES

APOSTLE	SOURCE OF DOCUMENTATION
Simon Peter (chief apostle under Christ)	Matt. 10:1-4; Mark 3:14-19; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13
Andrew	
James (son of Zebedee)	
John	
Philip (the original Philip)	
Bartholemew (Nathaniel)	(The above scriptures apply to all 12 apostles)
Thomas	
Matthew	
James , son of Alphaeus	
Simon the Zealot (Simon the Canaanite)	
Lebbaeus Thaddaeus (Judas, son of James)	
Matthias	Acts 1:26; Replaced Judas Iscariot.
James (Christ's brother)	Gal. 1:19; 2:9. Author of the Epistle of James.
Jude (Christ's brother)	Matt. 13:55; I Cor. 9:5. Author of the Epistle of Jude.
Paul	Acts 9:15; Acts 14:14; Rom. 1:1. Was given special commission to the Gentiles, kings and Israel.
Barnabas	Acts 14:14.
Simeon of Cyrene	Acts 13:1. As a teacher, ranked along with Barnabas and Paul. This verse also mentions Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen in the same context.
Philip	Had been a deacon, Acts 6:5 and later, an evangelist (Acts 21:8). Polycrates referred to him as apostle (<i>Ecc. Hist.</i> , bk. 3, ch. 31, Eusebius).
Joseph of Arimathea	<i>Catalogue of Bishops</i> , Godwin, <i>Ecc. Annals of Cardinal Baronius</i> , <i>Church History of Brittany</i> by Cressy. Was a close relative of Christ. Had buried Christ, Matt. 27:57-60 and accounts in other gospels.
Aristobulus	<i>Church History of Brittany</i> by Cressy and <i>Greek Martyrologies</i> . Had been an assistant to Paul (Rom.16:10).
Simon , son of Cleopas	After death of James (Christ's brother) Simon replaced that apostle. Was over the HQ Church at Jerusalem for next 45 years. Had followed Christ and 12 apostles (Luke 24:18; John 19 :25), <i>Ecc. Hist.</i> Euse., bk. 3, ch. 32; was also Christ's relative.
Andronicus and Junia	Romans 16:7 indicates, with somewhat awkward wording, that these men may have been apostles.

Lazarus and others may have been appointed to apostle, but little is recorded of their later lives. Lazarus, whom Christ brought back to life, labored in southern France starting in about AD 35 (according to Cardinal Baronius and others), as Joseph of Arimathea had returned to Britain.

Persecutions and Upheaval

It is important to observe certain trends and events during the growth of the first century Church. Since it was considered to be just another Jewish sect, its growth went unnoticed by the Roman authorities. The early Church certainly *appeared* to be Jewish to the Romans. It kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days and abided by many of the same Scriptures as the Jews. Although Roman law forbade the establishment of any new religion, by the time they recognized it as different from Judaism, it was too late. The roots of true Christianity had become firmly established.

(The source documentation in the balance of this chapter are: (1) *ACBCC*, Lesson 49; (2) *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* [One vol. abridgement unless otherwise noted], Edward Gibbon, ch. 15; (3) *AC Church History Lecture series*, 1987, lecture 5 by K. Stump.)

Chapters 25 to 28 of Acts relate Paul's imprisonment in Rome as a result of trumped-up charges by fellow Jews in Jerusalem. Upon realizing that justice would be denied him, and after waiting two years in Caesarea, Paul appealed his case to Rome, exercising his rights of Roman citizenship. Upon arriving in Rome after the perilous Mediterranean voyage, Paul was placed under house arrest to await trial in about AD 59. He was released two years later, since no formal charges were filed against him at that time. This brings us to when he traveled to Spain to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (as well as some Israelites who had settled along the sea routes). Not only did Paul make at least one trip to Britain, he also taught in various other western regions as previously noted in earlier quotes.

Meanwhile, in AD 64, a great fire in Rome, which raged for six days, destroyed ten of the city's fourteen precincts. Thousands of citizens were killed. Many historians conclude that the Emperor Nero was responsible for it, and Roman authorities suspected Nero's guilt. But shrewd politicians, looking for someone to blame, found the perfect scapegoat in the Christians. Some had noted that they had spoken of the world being destroyed by fire. The Christians considered this fire as punishment from God upon the wicked and expected the imminent return of Christ. (Remember, they did not have the benefit of the

book of Revelation at that time.) They understandably refrained from helping to extinguish the flames. Their actions placed them as prime suspects for those seeking a scapegoat. (*Nero* by Weigall and *Annals* by Tacitus.)

This event led to the first governmental persecution against the true Church of God. Some of the brethren were martyred by lingering torture, while others were devoured by wild beasts in the arena. The new Church at Rome—about three or four years old—was virtually destroyed. Granted, those in the Roman congregation had received the mighty witness of Paul and others to help strengthen them against the times ahead. Perhaps some were more spiritually prepared for this time of brutal persecution. Yet, they had precious little time to ready themselves for such upheaval. Most likely, some were able to escape from Rome. We will later observe true Christians, hundreds of years later, claiming those original brethren in Italy as their predecessors. It is certain that those who died in the faith, without recanting, were triumphant—as were those that were able to successfully escape this persecution.

Although some of the apostles were brought before the emperor for trial and execution after this time, only scattered remnants of the Roman congregation existed. The reason for Paul's return to Rome in AD 68 could well have been to confirm and encourage the surviving remnants of the congregation. The later persecutions brought against "Christians" at Rome, over the next two and a half centuries, were primarily aimed at the counterfeit church. The true Church had been scattered and driven from Rome by the time of Emperor Domitian (*ACBCC*, lesson 49, p. 12).

As mentioned, Paul was arrested and brought to trial in Rome. The Roman authorities found him guilty of crimes against the state and sentenced him to death. A similar fate befell Peter that same year. Though the loss of these two dynamic leaders was devastating, Christ was overseeing His Church. He allowed for this period of initial growth, though it was destined to decline. These called out ones now had to be tested through long periods of resisting false teachers and suffering persecution—often to the bitter end!

The renewed anti-Christian sentiment and resulting persecution were considered by many at the time to be the result of the Jewish rebellion in AD 66. The main cause of their rebellion was *not* their unpredictable fanaticism, as claimed by the Romans. The scandalous, unscrupulous Roman procurators in Judea perpetrated and encouraged outrageous provocations against the Jews. Their action of plundering the temple and looting the priests' ornamental garments, along with

other sacred treasures, proved to surpass the breaking point, and the inevitable revolt had begun (*Wars of the Jews*, Josephus, book II, chapters XIV-XVI). Remember! The Romans considered Christians to be nothing more than a Jewish sect, and took revenge against them *and* the Jews.

Sudden Deliverance

In Judea, in AD 66, the Roman army, under General Cestius, came in sight of the walls of Jerusalem and could have easily taken the city at that time. For some unknown reason, Cestius stopped his momentum and turned back. Then the Jews took heart. Cestius had lost his chance. The Roman army later regained their momentum under General Vespasian. Their advance was suddenly halted, however, as Vespasian raced to Rome to successfully contend for the emperorship. Upon his departure, his son, Titus, assumed command.

These two delays were not random events. God's headquarters Church was still in Jerusalem. Of course, it was only a matter of time before Rome's mighty armies would inevitably defeat Jerusalem. Christ, who oversees His Church, was guiding and altering events to allow His people space to vacate Jerusalem before the city was taken (*ACBCC*, les. 49, p. 11).

Josephus gave a detailed account of various miraculous signs that occurred at the time of Pentecost of AD 69. He related that many had witnessed, shortly before Pentecost, what seemed to be formations in the clouds around Jerusalem that took the form of troops and chariots surrounding cities. "Moreover," recorded Josephus, "at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner court of the temple...they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a multitude, saying, '*LET US REMOVE HENCE*'" (*Wars of the Jews*, book VI, ch. V, sec. 3).

God's people did remove themselves from Jerusalem and Judea at that time. But without God's intervention, they would have never been able to leave, since their fellow countrymen would have considered them as traitors for abandoning their own people during this crucial time. They had to exit in full view of many Jewish fighters, before crossing the Jordan River. Then they had to contend with Roman soldiers who were patrolling the regions east of the Jordan, as their legions were methodically advancing from the east. The new exiles proceeded, with God's protection, northeast to the little town of Pella. Within *days*, after God's people had escaped from Jerusalem, the



JOSEPHUS

First-century Jewish historian, famous for his works *Antiquities of the Jews* and *War of the Jews*; captain in the Jewish army; captured by the Romans; compiled his historical works as a prisoner of war.

EDWARD GIBBON

English historian and scholar who wrote the multi-volume work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; perhaps the most often quoted historian in regard to the true Church.



Romans pushed into Judea and shortly set up the siege. After slightly over a year of much horrible suffering and starvation, the city fell to the Romans. The temple was destroyed.

The Final Stages of Ephesus

The Pella congregation still called itself the Jerusalem Church. A period of declining zeal seemed to characterize the Church at this stage. The Nazarenes, as they were now called by the world, were at a low ebb, partly due to the disappointment of their great expectations for the imminent return of Christ, after the escape from Jerusalem surrounded by armies.

This period of AD 70s marked the time when the organized preaching of the gospel was virtually halted. Certainly, most of the ministries in distant areas among the lost tribes of Israel still had momentum—from Britain to Parthia and beyond. But now, the organization and sense of unified mission that came from Headquarters was missing. Persecution and upheaval in Judea, in particular, crippled the momentum of the Church. By this time, many of the original apostles had been martyred, as were Paul and others.

But Christ was still guiding His Church. He would continue to infuse life into it and to prevent it from dying. After the death of James, Christ's brother, in AD 62, Simon son of Cleopas (Luke 24:18; John 19:25) replaced him at the Headquarters Church at Jerusalem. He led the Church during the flight to Pella and continued to lead it for another 38 years. Here was a truly incredible individual who was already nine years old at the time of the physical birth of Christ. This man was a long-time disciple and also a relative of Christ who had personally known all of the original apostles. After a long life of faithful service, Simon was crucified at the age of *120 years* in the year AD 107 (*Ecc. Hist.*, bk. 3, ch. 32).

Many Leaders—Then Infiltration

After Simon's death, thirteen Jewish leaders presided over the Jerusalem-Pella Church in rapid succession. In AD 135, the Jews were defeated in their second revolt since the Church's inception. After putting down this rebellion, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, renaming it Aelia Capitolina, and forbidding Jews to enter the city.

At this point, the Jerusalem-Pella congregation came under the control of an Italian "Christian" by the name of Marcus. Under his dominant persuasion, the majority of the congregation renounced the

The City of Ephesus



Law of Moses—including the Ten Commandments. This defection gained them admittance to Jerusalem by the Roman authorities. Here is what Edward Gibbon wrote about the few who refused to follow Marcus:

“...the crimes of *heresy* and *schism* were imputed to the *obscure remnant* of the Nazarenes which refused to accompany their Latin bishop...In a few years after the return of the church of Jerusalem, it became a matter of doubt and controversy whether a man who sincerely acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, but who still continued to observe the law of Moses, could possibly hope for salvation... [the followers of Marcus] excluded their Judaising brethren from... the common offices of friendship, hospitality, and social life” (*The Decline and Fall*, Gibbon, ch. 15, p. 149). (Emphasis: Italics here and in all remaining quoted references is ours.)

The majority of the Church, who were so willing to give up the truth they once embraced, proceeded to shun and condemn those who held fast to *what they had all formerly believed*. Those “Nazarenes” who chose to remain loyal to the teaching of the apostles were accused of being divisive—deemed guilty of creating “schisms.” We will see that this pattern reappears much later, near the book’s conclusion.

“Nazarenes” came to be a contemptuous label given by the world to true Christians, especially in Judea. This term later came to include all who still acknowledged and kept the precepts of “the Law of Moses”—in this case, meaning the Law of God, including the Ten Commandments and Holy Days.

As early as about AD 57, the Jews had accused Paul before Felix (the Governor in Caesarea), calling him a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5). The name “Nazarenes” is derived from Nazareth, where Christ had lived, and simply meant “Christian.” For keeping the Law of God, the Nazarenes were looked upon with wonder by the world:

“Nazarenes, an obscure Jewish-Christian sect...they dated their settlement in Pella from the time of the flight of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, immediately before the siege in A.D. 70; he characterizes them as neither more nor less than Jews pure and simple, but adds that they recognized the new covenant as well as the old, and believed in the resurrection, and in the one God and His Son Jesus Christ...born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, and rose again, but adds that, ‘*desiring to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither the one nor the other.*’ They used the Aramaic recension of the Gospel according to Matthew, which they called the Gospel to the Hebrews, but, while adhering as far as pos-

sible to the Mosaic economy as regarded...sabbaths, foods and the like, they did not refuse to recognize...Paul or the rights of heathen [Gentile] Christians” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Ed, Vol. 19, p. 319).

Final Description

Now read Revelation 2:4-5. Concerning the latter part of the Ephesus Era, it states: “Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love. Remember therefore from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent.”

At this point, we bring the review of the Ephesus Era to a close. The era that opened with so much power and zeal declined toward the end—by about AD 100. The further the Church was removed in time from the influence of the original apostles, the more it drifted into apostasy. Part of the reason was the counterfeit movement that was gathering steam throughout the Ephesus and Smyrna Eras of the Church. The main reason was the loss of the first love, as stated in Revelation 2. Since the Ephesus Era did not repent and do the “first works,” the candlestick *was* moved to the next era. Yet, Christ would have never set that standard before them, had it not been attainable.

We will pick up the Smyrna Era with Polycarp leading the Church. Events in Britain during this era will also be discussed. But, to understand the subtle opposition that continually faced those of the Smyrna Era, we must review the development of the counterfeit church in the next chapter.

The Counterfeit Movement

In view of the miraculous signs and wonders performed during the apostolic era of the Church, we could ask, why would anyone want to infiltrate, subvert and deceive such believers? The Jewish religious establishment, who feared and resisted the emerging young Church, used threats and brute force to achieve their end. So did the Romans, although they were initially more tolerant, but later more brutal. Only the instruments of Satan would use such insidious tactics to infiltrate and undermine. Perhaps most of these initial agents understood who and what the Church was. Others, however, were more likely unwitting tools of Satan, following the impulses of the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2).

In this chapter, we chart the development of that subtle counterfeit movement.

Simon Magus

The first and perhaps most influential—and ultimately the most destructive—false teacher that we will study in relation to this false movement is Simon Magus. The word *magus* means *sorcerer* or *magician*. Simon the “Sorcerer” is considered by all who are familiar with this aspect of history to be the founder of the first-century heretical movement away from the truth of God. Ironically, many who branded him for his heretical practices were actually writers and historians who unwittingly followed his movement. Among

them were Justin Martyr, Jerome, and various other writers of the second and following centuries, whom we will cite in discussing this subject.

To say that this Simon was the true founder of the Roman Catholic Church would be correct, but not complete. He died in AD 68. It took nearly three centuries for the system he introduced to amass the power and to evolve through all the stages of modifying and counterfeiting doctrine to come to be known as the Roman Catholic Church. The architect of the movement is not any man or men, but rather the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4)—Satan.

The account of Simon is picked up in Acts 8:9-10. Here is Luke’s description of this man: “But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.”

Simon was baptized with other Samaritans, being captivated by the miracles and signs Philip performed (vs. 13). Then, after the apostles arrived from Jerusalem, Simon offered Peter and John money for the power to lay hands on people and transmit to them the Holy Spirit (vs. 18-19). To this offer, Peter replied, “Your money perish with you, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter: for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (vs. 20-23).

Remember that the Samaritans had been placed in the land from which the northern kingdom of Israel had been taken captive by the Assyrians. These Samaritans had been brought from Babylon and continued to practice their ancient Babylonian religion, mixed with other religions. In particular, they picked up many of the terms from Judaism and Greek philosophy.

Josephus, throughout book II of his *Wars of the Jews*, illustrated how the Samaritans schemed to undermine the Jews at every opportunity—during both periods of Greek and Roman domination. From the time Judah returned to the area of Jerusalem after captivity, the Samaritans plotted to halt the rebuilding of the temple as well as the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem (Ezra 4-5; Neh. 4, 6). They were well established as Satan’s instruments in opposing any phase of God’s Work.

Gnosticism Appears

Simon, the high priest of the Babylonian Samaritan religion, was especially attracted to the philosophy of Gnosticism. As with many schools of philosophy, Gnosticism held that reality could never be understood by those uninitiated in philosophical reasoning. That approach was readily transferred to the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures that the Jews and original Christians embraced. To the Gnostics, all the recorded events of the Bible were supposedly metaphors and allegories never to be taken literally. They required interpretation by qualified scholars well versed in the Gnostic school of thought.

Gnosticism proved to be the best weapon in Simon's arsenal of tricks, more convincing than the demoniac sorcery and magic that worked so well on his fellow Samaritans. (We will come to appreciate that those who followed the use of metaphors and allegories in the 1990s were going back to a false "faith once delivered"—*by the Gnostics.*)

Thus, we have such accounts as these by Edward Gibbon concerning the Gnostics:

"The Mosaic account of the creation and fall of man *was treated with profane derision* by the Gnostics...The God of Israel was impiously represented by the Gnostics as a being liable to passion and to error..." As to the techniques employed by the Gnostics, Gibbon explains: "Acknowledging that *the literal sense is repugnant* to every principle of faith as well as reason, they deem themselves secure and invulnerable *behind the ample veil of allegory*, which they carefully spread over *every* tender part of the Mosaic dispensation." Gibbon continued: "The Gnostics were distinguished as the most polite, the most learned, and the most wealthy of the Christian name; and that general appellation, which expressed *a superiority of knowledge...assumed by their own pride*...The Gnostics blended with the faith of Christ many sublime but obscure tenets, which they derived from oriental philosophy..." (*Decline and Fall*, ch. 15, pp. 150-151).

The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th edition, Vol. 25, states, in its article titled "Simon Magus," that he identified with the "Hellenized Gnosticism of Samaria." The article referred to him as the "Samaritan Messiah" and the "father of all heresy." As the apostolic Church was beginning to expand into new territories, so was Simon's work also set to expand after AD 33, when he was "baptized" and pretended to be

a Christian. As Satan's agent in inaugurating the counterfeit religion, Simon carried his message from city to city, just as Christ's apostles spread the true gospel. He translated the doctrine of grace as license to disobey God's law.

So in the formative decades of the true Church, we have, growing alongside it, this counterfeit movement. By the AD 50s and beyond, the writers of the New Testament would have to occasionally address this issue. Remember that Revelation 2:2 gave this message to the Ephesus Era to their credit: "I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and *how you can not bear them which are evil: and you have tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars.*"

There were many claiming to be apostles (as did Simon) who were impostors and liars. The brethren of the Ephesus Era were able to discern as much. Some of the warnings about these false apostles are apparent in the following scriptures:

II Thessalonians 2:7: "For the *mystery of iniquity does already work...*"

II Corinthians 11:13-15: "For such *are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.*"

I John 4:1: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: *because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*"

Jude 3: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful...to write...and exhort you that *you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*"

Before Simon Magus went to Rome, around AD 42, Peter was sent to Antioch to counteract his false preaching. Paul indicates that Peter was in Antioch at that time (Gal. 2:11). From Antioch, Simon Magus soon went to Rome. Eusebius writes, "...the enemy of salvation [Satan] devising some scheme of seizing upon the imperial city for himself brought thither Simon, whom we mentioned before. Coming to the aid of his insidious artifices, he attached many of the inhabitants of Rome to himself in order to deceive them" (*The Ecclesiastical History*, bk. 2, ch. 13, sec. 1).

Simon's constant companion, while delivering his message, was his mistress, Helen. Justin Martyr writes of her: "A certain Helen, also, is of this class, who had before been a public prostitute in Tyre of Phoenicia,

COUNTERFEIT CONTRIBUTORS

The following summary chart lists some writers, philosophers, and theologians who contributed to the counterfeit movement.

CONTRIBUTOR	DATE (APPROX.)	CONTRIBUTIONS, COMMENTS AND SOURCES
Clement (of Rome)	AD 91-100 (as bishop)	Advocated submission to duly appointed bishops (of Rome) in his epistle; rather than emphasis of scriptural authority. First Roman bishop to exercise authority beyond Rome. Ordained by Paul, yet associated with changing theology (Part 3 of <i>History of C.O.G.</i> ; lectures by Kelly).
Ignatius	AD 67-110	A pupil of John; bishop of Antioch; apostate from the truth; was anti-Semitic; encouraged full separation from Judaism and from Judaizing the Sabbath (<i>From Sabbath to Sunday</i> , Bacchiocchi, p. 214).
Justin Martyr	AD 100-167	A Greek Philosopher and Samaritan; had associated with Church but retained all Platonist leanings during that assoc. Was anti-Semitic; advocated complete disassociation from Jews; deemed law of God as unimportant; critic of Simon Magus, yet essentially a follower of him. (<i>From Sabbath to Sunday</i> , Bacchiocchi, p. 224.)
Barnabus (of Alexandria)	AD 130-138 (date of letter)	A Jewish scholar (not the apostle Barnabas); advocated abandonment of Jewish Sabbath and acceptance of the eighth day (Sunday) to represent the new world-[order]. Allegorized meaning of the Scriptures as did the Gnostics. (<i>From Sabbath to Sunday</i> , Bacchiocchi, pp. 219-221.)
Irenaeus	AD 130-200	A pupil of Polycarp and Papias; raised in Smyrna; apostate from the truth; ventured to Rome; influenced by Justin M. Attempted to conciliate false church & true Church. Did document much of 2nd century history; Bishop of Lyons. (<i>Ency. Brit.</i> , 11th ed., vol. 14, p. 791; vol. 22, p. 21.)
Tertullian	AD 150-220	Philosopher and lawyer from Carthage; was deeply into the Platonic philosophy, as well as Stoicism and Asceticism. Developed monastic orders & solidified the Trinity doctrine. Given title as "the father of Latin Christianity." (<i>Ency. Brit.</i> , 11th ed., vol. 26, p. 661.)
Origen	AD 185-254	Philosopher from Alexandria; prolific writer who wrote over 6,000 different works; steeped in Asceticism; slept on cold stone floors; made himself a eunuch while lecturing to his pupils; blended thoughts of Plato into "Christianity;" instrumental in "refinement" of Trinity doctrine. Given title "the founder of Biblical Criticism." (<i>Ency. Brit.</i> , 11th ed., vol. 20, p. 270.)
Eusebius	AD 260-340	A main historian that documented the first three centuries of both the true Church and the false church; compiled from other historians, mainly Hegesippus; his chief theme was to justify and eulogize Constantine and the church of Emperor Constantine's choice. (<i>ACBCC</i> , les. 49, p. 15.)

and at that time attached herself to Simon, and was called, the first idea that proceeded from him.” Eusebius also references the second century writer Irenaeus about this relationship: “they [those deceived by Simon]...falling down before the pictures and statues of this selfsame Simon and the aforesaid Helen with him, venturing to offer them worship by incense, sacrifices, and libations...they [Simon and Helen] happen in truth to be so full of amazement, folly, and madness...on account of their excessive baseness and obscenity” (ibid., sec. 6, 7).

Starting with a large population of his fellow Samaritans already in Rome, Simon managed to attract a significant following. Here, many people honored him as a god and erected a statue of him on the Tiber River. In Rome, much of Simon’s success could be attributed to his magic demonstrations, such as demon-powered levitation (ibid., sec. 3). It was these demonstrations that later earned him several audiences with Nero, in the AD 60s.

Recall that Peter’s commission was to the lost tribes of Israel. In neither his nor Paul’s letters is there any indication that Peter was ever in Rome. The Catholics have always claimed that not only was Peter the first Roman bishop, but that he was also martyred in Rome. Even if he was brought there for execution, the fact remains that Peter never served there. The false claim that the apostle Peter was the first pope was appropriately labeled “Fiction pure and simple” by the author of the well-known *Halley’s Bible Handbook*, page 768. The person of great “distinction” who bore the title of Peter at Rome was, in fact, Simon Magus. The title of “Peter” or “Pater” or “Patre” was a title of religious primacy that Simon Magus donned. Thus, he carried the title Simon “Peter.” The word “Pater” is of the same derivation as the word “Papa” or “Father” or “Pope.”

Now notice Christ’s direct *command* pertaining to such titles in Matthew 23:9: “And call no man your *father* upon the earth: for One is your Father, which is in heaven.” This verse forbids the use of “Father” as a religious title, as was done by the Babylonian Mystery Religion. Of course, this command does not relate to one’s father in the sense of being a parent.

The individual responsible for designating Peter as the first Pope was Hegesippus, an apostate from the true Church. He must have known that Peter, a married man (Matt. 8:14; I Cor. 9:5), was not a celibate priest and was the antithesis of what the pope represented. Hegesippus “...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” (the title claimed by Simon Magus) (*ACBCC*, lesson 49, p. 15).

Jude 4 summarizes the work of Simon and his followers, and is to the point: “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Other Key Players of the Counterfeit Movement

Eusebius referenced Irenaeus, who had written about Simon Magus’ immediate successor. Known as Menander, he “...exhibited himself in his conduct an instrument of diabolical wickedness, not inferior to the former...He said that he was in truth the Savior sent from the invisible worlds for the salvation of men...Those who were deemed worthy would obtain perpetual immortality in this very life” (*The Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius; bk. 3, ch. 26).

This teaching of the immortal soul was an integral part of the Babylonian Mystery Religion carried over into the counterfeit movement. Nicholas of Antioch is identified in *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* with Nicholas of Samaria, a heretic of Simon Magus’ company. Unrestrained indulgence and promiscuity were the hallmarks of the Nicolaitanes. Christ mentioned them as He commended the Ephesus Era for sharing His attitude toward their actions. Notice: “But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate” (Rev. 2:6).

Another of Simon’s successors was an influential heretic by the name of Cerinthus. This false teacher had confronted the apostle John in the AD 90s. Of Cerinthus, we find, “The Bible does not name Cerinthus, but concerns John expressed in his three epistles refer, without a doubt, to this man’s teachings and influence” (*The History of the Church of God*, part 2, Kelly).

One particular comment recorded by Eusebius, quoting John, well illustrates the true Church’s reception of Cerinthus. The setting involved John and Polycarp entering a public bathhouse at Ephesus, until they saw Cerinthus inside. As they immediately hastened outside, John was recorded to have said, “Let us flee lest the bath should fall in, as long as Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within” (*Ecc. History*, bk. 4, ch. 14, sec. 6).

Another leader of this heretical movement was Marcion, a contemporary of Polycarp. Irenaeus recorded that when Marcion approached Polycarp with the words, “‘Recognize us’...Polycarp displayed the same uncompromising attitude which his master John had shown towards Cerinthus and answered, ‘I recognize you as the first-born of Satan’” (*Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., vol. 22, p. 22).

Ten Proofs Peter Was Not the “Pope” at Rome

Every Catholic is taught and believes that the apostle Peter was the first Roman bishop—the first “Pope”—and that he resided at Rome. If this were true, God’s Word would state it. But, in fact, the Bible directly confirms the opposite. History seems to attest, however, and it is quite possible, that Peter *was* crucified in Rome. This said, here are a series of ten proofs, with scriptural support, demonstrating that Peter never resided at Rome:

(1) Rome is in Italy. This means that Gentile Italians live there. The apostle *Paul* was ordained to be the apostle to the Gentiles, *not Peter*. Paul wrote this to the Gentile Romans: “That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ *to the Gentiles*, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of *the Gentiles* might be acceptable...” (15:16). He also described himself to the Galatians as having the gospel of the “uncircumcision”—the Gentiles—committed to him (2:7).

(2) The Emperor Claudius had banished all Jews from Rome in AD 50. Acts 8:1 describes the “great persecution against the Church” and that “they were all scattered abroad” as a result.

(3) Peter wrote his first general epistle from the city of “Babylon” (5:13). Many have assumed that this is Rome, when it is actually the Babylon of Mesopotamia. It is interesting to note that historians generally confuse—switch—scriptural references to Babylon by applying those that *do* apply to Rome as though they apply to Babylon, and vice-versa—in other words, those that *do not* apply to Rome are assigned Roman designation.

(4) Paul told the Romans, “Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation” (15:20). Paul’s assertion would make no sense had Peter been resident at Rome, having established this congregation.

(5) Then, in light of the previous point, why would Paul offer the following salutation to the Roman congregation, also if Peter had been there for years?: “For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that you may be established” (1:11). Think how insulting this expression would have been to “Pope Peter,” had he been in Rome.

(6) Paul concludes the Roman letter in chapter 16 with separate greetings to 30 different people in Rome—Mary, Andronicus, Junia—(these last two were probably apostles; Rom. 16:7)—Amplias, Urbane, Stachys, Apelles and 23 others—with *no reference* to the one who was supposedly the Pope, guiding the congregation and the entire New Testament Church from that city. No reasonable person could believe that Paul would so *insult* his own spiritual *superior*!

(7) Galatians 1:18-19 and 2:7 demonstrate that Peter was based *at Jerusalem*, from where he periodically traveled to places like Bithynia, Northern Galatia and Babylon, and other places where Israelites (also see #9) had migrated, from AD 38 to AD 49—the dates of these events described in Galatians.

(8) Luke 22:24 states, “And there was a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.” Here is why this passage is important. This debate took place *after* Christ, in Matthew 16:17-19, had supposedly designated Peter as the one who would become the first Pope. While not directly involving Rome, this provides its own proof that Christ never conferred, at least from the other apostles’ perspective, the office of “Pope” to Peter.

(9) This point proves the other side of point 1. Already referenced, notice how Paul, who first describes himself, concludes his statement in Galatians 2:7, with this about Peter: “But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision [Gentiles] was committed unto me [Paul], as the gospel of the *circumcision* [Jews and the other tribes of Israel, referenced in #7] *was unto Peter...*”

(10) In II Timothy 4:11, Paul, commonly understood to be writing this epistle from Rome, states, “*Only* Luke is with me.” Further, in verse 10, he describes how one named Demas had “forsaken” him and gone back to the “world,” with Crescens and Titus having also transferred to other places of duty. None of this makes sense if the “Pope”—Peter—had been present.

By the beginning of the second century, the Churches advocating the hybrid Christianity were gaining in strength. Although it would take another two centuries before they would be given substantial authority, the process of solidification accelerated in the 100s.

Interestingly, two of the first five Roman bishops, later designated in the papal lineage, had previously been part of the true Church. These were Clement of Rome and Linus, both ordained by, and assistants to, Paul. They appeared to be influenced by, if not fully caught up in, the false church's movement.

The emerging Roman Catholic Church substituted many tenets of the Babylon Mystery Religion and the Philosophies for the true doctrines of Christ and the apostles. The doctrines of the Sabbath and Holy Days were dismissed as "Judaizing." The immortality of the soul, and heaven and hell beliefs were adopted and the doctrine of the future millennial rule of the Kingdom of God was gradually phased out. The strange doctrine of the trinity, as presented by demented pagan philosophers-turned-theologians, was gradually accepted. Image worship and Mary worship were "in" and the second commandment was "out." Adherence to the Holy Scriptures to do God's will was replaced by following the precepts of the "duly ordained authorities."

In addition to those listed in an earlier chart, a host of later writers, theologians and scholars also contributed to the ongoing development of Catholic doctrines through the centuries. Some noteworthy contributors were Jerome (340-420), Augustine (354-430), and Erasmus (1466-1536). Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, called the Vulgate version. Augustine molded such distorted doctrines as the Catholic Church fulfilling the prophecy of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Erasmus, who followed over a millennium later, was a scholar and reformer who encouraged critical examination of the source of one's beliefs. He was critical of the hypocrisy of the Roman Catholic Church, and the priests, in particular. Thus, Erasmus laid the egg that Martin Luther later hatched—the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, to be discussed later.

Some Techniques Used to Legitimize Sunday—A Case in Point

There was a particular meeting between Polycarp, the leader of the true Church of God at the onset of the Smyrna Era, and the Bishop of Rome, regarding the Roman church's erroneous actions of changing the time of the Passover observance to a Sunday. This encounter will be discussed in Chapter Seven. The tactics that the counterfeit movement had used to establish precedent were scandalous and unscrupu-

lous, as the following account reveals. We pick up this account after the above-mentioned meeting.

After Polycarp had left the meeting, an unusual letter appeared. This letter is considered by most scholars to have been a deliberate forgery: “Pope Pius, who lived about 147, had made a decree, that the annual solemnity of the Pasch [this Greek word is derived from the Hebrew word *pesach*] should be kept on the Lord’s day [Sunday] and in confirmation of this he pretended, that Hermes [Hermas] his brother, who was then an eminent teacher among them, had received instruction from an angel, who commanded that all men should keep the Pasch on the Lord’s day” (*Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Joseph Bingham, pp. 1148-1149).

“One of the letters forged in the name of Pius, where one Hermas [Hermes] is mentioned as the author; and it is stated that in his book a commandment was given through an angel to observe the Passover on a Sunday” (*Apostolical Fathers*, James Donaldson, p. 324). If this letter was invented after Polycarp’s time in an effort to lend weight to the position of Anicetus, then it was a deliberate forgery. Otherwise, Pius himself was the author of this deceptive letter. Pius died just before the visit of Polycarp to Rome.

Suppose this incident was not a forgery (notwithstanding, most scholars readily acknowledge that it was) and, in fact, did happen. Suppose Hermes or Pope Pius (or Anicetus) was not lying this time around, and that Hermes *did* receive instructions from an angel to change the observance of a time that God had established. Would this have opened the door to legitimize those instructions from the “angel,” in God’s view? We must merely look in Galatians 1:8 to establish whether instructions from an angel carry precedence over God’s instructions through His apostles or prophets: “But though we, *or an angel from heaven*, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, *let him be accursed.*”

The account above was chosen to illustrate the Roman Catholics’ underhanded schemes in adopting their hybrid doctrines. They claimed the power to supersede and change the laws of God when deemed necessary.

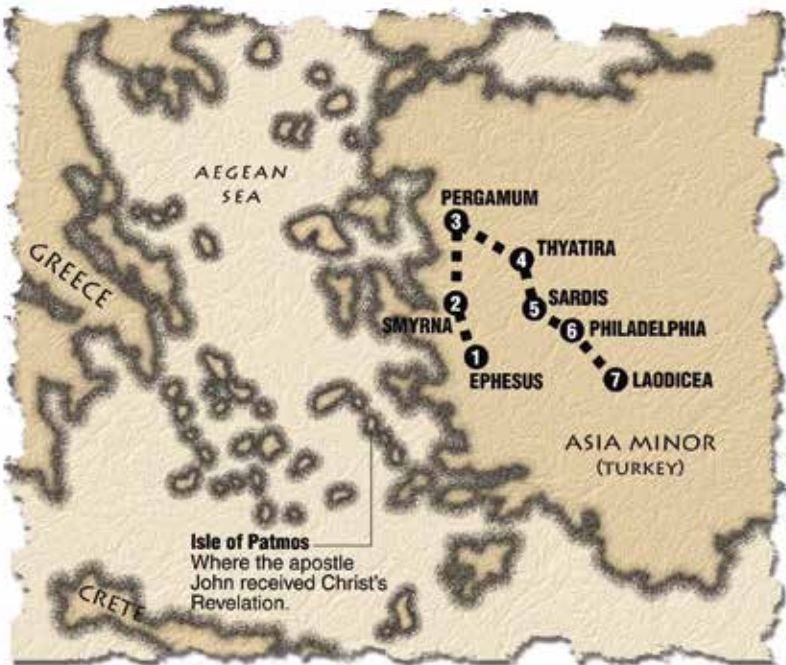
Early Catholic View of the Sabbath

Now for some statements from some of the original architects of Catholic thought, concerning the Sabbath. Justin Martyr’s position exposes their true feelings and *ignorance*. Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi skillfully condenses the philosophy of Justin Martyr in the follow-

ing summary statement on page 186 of his book, *From Sabbath to Sunday*: “The Sabbath for Justin is a temporary ordinance, derived from Moses, which God did not intend to be kept literally, for He Himself ‘does not stop controlling the movement of the universe on that day.’ He imposed it solely on the Jews as ‘a mark to single them out for punishment they so well deserved for their infidelities.’” Justin Martyr’s rank anti-Semitism would almost be humorous, were it not for the deadly persecution, to both Jews and true Christians, that it led to.

The next viewpoint is that of Tertullian (made in AD 200), which is also telling: “...if for these and other such rules [for Sunday observance] you insist upon having positive scriptural injunction, you will find *none*. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them—*custom* as their strengthener and *faith* as their preserver...” (*De Corona*, ch. 4).

In view of the above quote, it would be appropriate to quote one 20th century Roman Catholic theologian, Cardinal Gibbons, from *Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 89, 1917 edition:



ANCIENT MAIL ROUTE

The seven Church eras of Revelation 2 and 3 are named after these seven ancient cities, which were once connected along a mail route.

“A rule of faith, or a competent guide to heaven, must be able to instruct all the truths necessary for salvation. Now the Scriptures alone do not contain all the truths which a Christian is bound to believe, nor do they explicitly enjoin all the duties which he is obliged to practice. Not to mention other examples, is not every Christian obliged to sanctify Sunday and to abstain on that day from unnecessary servile work? Is not the observance of this law among the most promising of our sacred duties? But you may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify.”

(You may wish to read our extensive book *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?* to see a great many more admissions from the Catholics and various Protestant denominations emphasizing what Cardinal Gibbons stated. This also demonstrates that the weekly cycle has never been broken.)

In Summary

To conclude this chapter in the development and character of the counterfeit church, here are some classic quotes and observations from perceptive historians concerning the conspiracy that beset the early Church.

The Lutheran historian Mosheim expresses what could be the most well-directed and powerful observation by any scholar regarding the apostasy of the early Church. It is a short but profound statement: “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” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Mosheim, Vol. 1).

“Robinson, author of the *‘History of Baptism,’* speaks as follows: ‘Toward the latter end of the second century, most of the churches assumed a new form, *the first simplicity disappeared*; and insensibly, as the old disciples retired to their graves, their children, along with new converts, both Jews and Gentiles, came forward and new-modeled the cause.’—*Eccl. Researches*, Chap. 6, p. 51, 1792” (*A History of the True Religion*, Dugger and Dodd, ch. 5, p. 60).

Here is another classic quote, from Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, who refers to the period immediately following the time setting of the book of Acts as the “Age of Shadows.” He states, “...of all periods in the 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" (*The Story of the Christian Church*, p. 33).

The Time of Smyrna

The beginning of the Smyrna Era takes us back to about the turn of the first century with the death of the apostle John and the beginning of the active ministry of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. Smyrna began where Ephesus left off—as the landscape of true Christianity had been devastated by defections and heresy.

At this time, in the Asia Minor city of Smyrna, lived the surviving custodian of the truth, and of the faithful remnants of the Church of God. Having been a disciple of John for many years, Polycarp was well anchored in the faith. He devoted his life to the preservation of the truths handed down from the apostles. This made him a tremendous, stabilizing force in the true Church for many decades, as had been his predecessor.

In the initial decades of the Smyrna Era of God’s Church, the defections of many who joined the counterfeit movement were a constant source of agony for the faithful. To add to these hardships, the Roman government was increasing its persecution against those called Christians—both true and false.

Polycarp and Polycrates Lead the Early Smyrna Era

Here is what the apostle John wrote concerning the defectors from the faith: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not

all of us” (I John 2:19). This principle must have been well understood by Polycarp, given his many years of training under John.

Polycarp spent many frustrating years trying to redeem various defectors back to the faith. Possibly his rationale could have been based on certain scriptures which encourage the redemption of those in such danger. One is found in James: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (5:19-20). Another is found in Jude: “And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (vs. 23).

Polycarp must have been keenly motivated by such altruistic principles, to risk constant trouble to redeem those who had departed from the truth. His efforts appear to have yielded significant success, as shown later in the quote from Eusebius. But the vast majority of those who left the fold were unmoved by Polycarp. Perhaps God intended that His servant Polycarp give them ample, merciful warnings of the seriousness of their actions. This he did.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, clearly portrayed Polycarp’s uphill battle with the heretics. The article on “Polycarp” states this: “The steady progress of the heretical movement in spite of all opposition was a cause of deep sorrow to Polycarp, so that in the last years of his life the words were constantly on his lips, ‘Oh good God, to what times hast thou spared me, that I must suffer such things!’” (Vol. 22, p. 22).

Polycarp in Rome

Historical records document much about Polycarp’s visit with Anicetus, Bishop of Rome, to point out his error in changing the time of the Passover observation—in effect, espousing the pagan celebration of Easter. Here is the account: “Polycarp, a man who had been instructed by the apostles, and...[had conversed]...with many that had seen Christ, and had also been appointed bishop by the apostles in Asia, in the church at Smyrna...The same Polycarp, coming to Rome under the episcopate of Anicetus [bishop of Rome around AD 154], *turned many from the...heretics to the church of God*, proclaiming the one and only true faith, that he had received from the apostles” (*Ecclesiastical History*, “Eusebius,” bk. 4, ch. 14, sec 3, 5).

In this meeting, Anicetus was unable to persuade Polycarp not to observe the Passover. Polycarp had always observed it with John, and other faithful servants with whom he had associated.

Polycarp had presided over the Church for over fifty years after John's death. Irenaeus (the main source quoted by Eusebius) indicated that Polycarp had written many letters to various congregations and individuals, as Paul and other apostles had done. His efforts of admonishing and encouraging the brethren must have been of vital importance at this crucial period. Equally encouraging as his letters, was his example of boldly standing up for the truth when so many had given in to heresy. Eusebius further indicated that within a few months of the meeting with Anicetus, Polycarp was burned at the stake at Smyrna, in AD 155. According to this account, the fire did Polycarp no harm, and it was only by the thrust of a sword that he so valiantly died (*Ecc. History*, book 4, chap. 15, sections 38-39).

Polycrates to Rome

Polycarp's successor, Polycrates, carried forward in the same tradition and courage. In AD 195, Polycrates journeyed to meet with Victor, Bishop of Rome, to persuade him to observe Passover in the Scriptural manner.

That account was recorded as follows: "We...therefore observe the genuine day; neither adding thereto nor taking therefrom. For in Asia great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again in the day of the Lord's appearing, in which he will come with glory from heaven, and will raise up all the saints; Philip, one of the twelve apostles [Author's note: This was the other Philip, as the original apostle Philip had died in 54 AD.]...Moreover, John, who rested upon the bosom of our Lord...also Polycarp...All these observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith" (*Ecclesiastical History*, "Eusebius," bk. 5, ch. 24, sec. 2, 3, 6).

Victor was less tolerant of the truth than Anicetus. After his meeting with Polycrates, he proceeded to excommunicate all the churches of Asia Minor. Only by Irenaeus' persuasion, did he relent from this action. Of course, to be excommunicated from the false church was a moot point.

Irenaeus was the source for Eusebius' documentation of the controversy between Polycarp and Anicetus. He was also the main source of information of Polycrates' confrontation with Victor. Irenaeus was in a unique position since he was acquainted with all parties in the controversy, having been an apostate from the true Church and currently in league with the Bishops of Rome (he was Bishop of Lyons, France). He tried to reconcile the division between those loyal to the

true apostolic Church and those leading the false movement, which was taking control. His efforts proved futile.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, recaps the accounts involving Polycarp and Polycrates' discussions with the Roman bishops. Certain other interesting sidelights appear in this article:

“There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers...The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed. Thus the Passover, with a new conception added to it of Christ as the true Paschal Lamb and the first fruits from the dead, continued to be observed...Generally speaking, the Western churches kept Easter on the first day of the week, while the Eastern churches followed the Jewish rule, and kept Easter [Pascha, or Passover] on the fourteenth day...At that time the Syrians [Nazarenes] and Antiochenes (Quartodecimani) were the solitary champions of the observance of the fourteenth day.

“The *few* who afterwards separated themselves from the unity of the [Roman] church, and continued to keep the fourteenth day, were named *Quartodecimani*, and the dispute itself is known as the *Quartodeciman* controversy” (Article: “Easter,” vol. 8, pp. 828-829).

There were a number of faithful servants of God in the Smyrna era that held fast and strengthened the brethren, of whom little or nothing was recorded. Two of these were Zokker and James, grandsons of Jude, the brother of Christ. They lived about the time of Polycarp (*ACBCC*, lesson 49, p. 15).

Smyrna—A Time of Tribulation

The term “Ebionites” also came into use during this era. Ebionites meant paupers—ones who were poor and destitute. Although there existed various groups who were also labeled with that name, it was also applied to the true Church in various areas in the Smyrna Era.

Notice how Christ addresses the Smyrna Era: “I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but you are rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9).

Christ acknowledges their poverty here. Much of their poverty was the result of tribulation, which was imposed by the mad Roman Emperors and later by the synagogue of Satan. Those who “say they are Jews, and are not,” could be identified as the Samaritans. But here is a more general definition: “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly;

and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom. 2:29).

To be a Jew inwardly simply means to be converted. At that time, the false church, started by the Samaritans that claimed to be converted—spiritual Jews—was nothing less than the synagogue of Satan. That counterfeit church grew in momentum until it was able to influence, and later dominate, the Roman government.

Also, during the Smyrna Era, the Nazarenes of Judea seemed to disappear and the “Ebionites” began to appear in their place. As Edward Gibbon explains, these were the same people: “The name of Nazarenes was deemed too honorable for those Christian Jews, and they soon received, from the supposed poverty of their understanding, as well as their condition, the contemptuous epithet of Ebionites” (Decline and Fall, ch. 15, p. 149). Also note that: “...the Nazarenes of the 4th century are...to be identified with the Ebionites” (*Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., vol. 19, p. 319). Their enemies called them Nazarenes, Ebionites, or Quartodecimani—they called themselves the Church of God.

250 Years of Persecution

About this time, the Church of God in the Eastern Mediterranean area came under increasing persecution. From the time of the first persecutions on the Church, during Nero’s reign in AD 64, the Romans inflicted another ten periods or waves of persecution on the Christians—both true and false—for another two and a half centuries. The true Church endured and survived this perilous time as Christ had promised that it would not be extinguished. In the early 300s, beginning in the reign of Emperor Diocletian, a most severe persecution (303-313) was launched against the true believers. Note the prophecy of this event in Revelation 2:10: “Fear none of those things which you shall suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation *ten days*: be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.”

History bears testimony that many martyrs were faithful unto death during those ten years. These ten prophetic days are translated into ten years, using the day-for-a-year principle of Numbers 14:34.

Remember that God’s Church existed among the lost tribes of Israel, as well. At this time, we turn our attention to the Church of God in the British Isles during the Smyrna Era. In Fletcher’s *Incredible History*, chapter 7, he states, “Although much of this second century material seems to have been somewhat distorted by legend and super-

Lucian—An Unknown Defender of Truth

When many Jews were driven from Judea after AD 135, many fled to Syria. This area became a stronghold for the Church throughout the Smyrna era, and we focus on Syria at the conclusion of this era. This period culminated with 10 years of persecution upon the Church, from 303 to 313. Although many in the true Church perished at this time, little is known of those who endured this persecution. The contributions of one of those martyrs, Lucian, helped greatly to preserve the truth. His efforts far exceeded what most have recognized.

Lucian was born in Syria in the year AD 250. His parents, Christian converts, had died when he was twelve years old. In his youth, he studied under Macarius of Edessa and, after baptism, devoted himself to the continual study of Scripture. He studied at Antioch, where the renowned Malchion was master of the Greek school. There, Lucian excelled as a rapid writer and a celebrated teacher to the point that he was regarded as the founder of the theological school at Antioch in Syria (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 17, p. 100).

Note the following summary of the life of this accomplished scholar, as translated from *Early History of the Christian Church*, by Duchesne: “Lucian was really a learned man; his work on the text of the Old Testament, which he corrected from the original Hebrew, soon became famous; he was a Hebrew scholar, and his version was adopted by the greater number of the churches of Syria and Asia Minor. He occupied himself also with the New Testament. His exegesis differs widely from that of Origen. In Antioch allegorical interpretation was not in fashion” (vol. 1, p. 362).

Lucian and those brethren with him in Antioch (Syria) clung closely to the early simplicity of the apostles’ teachings, while refusing to adopt the unscriptural teachings advocated by the Church at Rome. The brethren at Antioch realized that two opposing movements were taking shape within Christianity. One was based on the blending of ancient

Babylonian mysteries with various philosophical precepts of the time. The other was based on maintaining the purity and simplicity as taught by Polycarp, Polycrates and the original apostolic Church of the first century.

“During the dark ages, the Received Text was practically unknown outside the Greek Church. It was restored to Christendom by the labors of that great scholar Erasmus. It is altogether too little known that the real editor of the Received Text was Lucian. None of Lucian’s enemies fails to credit him for his work. Neither Lucian nor Erasmus, but rather the apostles wrote the Greek New Testament [the book of Mark recorded what was proclaimed by Peter]. Lucian’s day was an age of apostasy when a flood of deprivations was systematically attempting to devastate both the Bible manuscripts and Bible theology...Lucian’s unrivaled success in verifying, safeguarding and transmitting those divine writings left a heritage for which all generations should be thankful” (*Truth Triumphant*, Wilkinson, ch. 5).

Also notice the following from the same source: “Not only did Lucian certify the genuine New Testament, but he spent years of arduous labor upon the Old Testament. As the Greek language was the prevalent tongue in which leading works were published throughout the civilized world, he translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek” (ibid.). As pointed out, the very Greek New Testament used by Erasmus (1466-1536) had been compiled and edited by Lucian over 1,200 years earlier. Erasmus greatly favored his text over Jerome’s Latin *Vulgate*.

Lucian opposed the spurious books called the *Apocrypha*, as well as the trend of that time to allegorize away the Bible’s plain meaning. The allegory movement was led by Clement in about AD 194, as well as Origen around AD 230. Clement, Origen and Tertullian were all leaders of the Alexandrian school of thought. Alexandria, Egypt was associated with the creative philosophical precepts accepted by Rome. Antioch was associated with the Lucian school of thought, which steadfastly held to the teachings of the original apostles. It is significant that Erasmus rejected the manuscripts written by Origen, while strongly favoring the writings of Lucian (ibid.).

Lucian also opposed the movement to establish tradition above the Bible as practiced by Rome. This elevated status of tradition was primarily introduced by Tertullian. Lucian’s alle-

giance to “the truth once delivered” caused him to be labeled as a Judaizer, since he never departed from observance of the Sabbath and the laws of God. This servant also strongly rejected the theory of the Trinity (ibid.).

Lucian was gifted with an unusual discernment of the Scriptures, which he used to perpetuate the foundation already laid by the apostles. At a time when spurious versions of the Bible were proliferating, Lucian defended, preserved and passed on to other generations, the authentic texts of God’s Word. Although his opponents have seen to it that his name has remained obscure, his great accomplishments speak for themselves.

After a productive life of defending and preserving the authentic scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as well as opposing heresy originating from Alexandria, Egypt and the Church at Rome, he was martyred in AD 312. This occurred during the last year of the 10-year tribulation mentioned in Revelation 2:10. During his final imprisonment, “He was carried to Nicomedia before Maximim Daza, and persisting in his faith, perished on the 7th of January 312, under torture and hunger which he refused to satisfy with food offered to idols” (ibid.).

stitution during the Dark Ages, the clear implication must surely be that the remnants of the earlier pure apostolic faith had, by the end of the second century, all but disappeared in Britain. A new and different church was starting to emerge.

“During the third century converted and zealous followers of Christ increasingly found themselves in a minority position. The decadent condition of most professing Christians and ministers...at this time is described as follows: ‘Each was bent on improving his patrimony: forgetting what believers had done under the apostles, and what they ought always to do, they brooded over the arts of amassing wealth. The pastors and deacons equally forgot their duty, works of mercy were neglected, and discipline was at the lowest ebb...’” (*Townsend’s Abridgment*, p. 110, 1816 ed.)

Concerning the severe persecutions of the later Smyrna Era, Fletcher continues: “The church in Britain suffered its first large scale persecution during the reign of Diocletian. It was predicted to be a time of trial and distress to the ‘Smyrna’ era of the Church of God which at this time was mainly confined to the Eastern Roman Empire...it lasted for ten years, AD 303-313...This persecution,

which in some provinces virtually eliminated all traces of Christianity, fell with equal severity on true and false Christians alike.

“Gildas records that some ten thousand died as martyrs in Britain. Bede also described some of the events of the period: ‘...when they had endured sundry torments, and their limbs had been torn after an unheard of manner, yielded their souls up...’”

From the above information we gain added insight as to how the prophecies of Revelation 2 and 3, from all indications, applied to the overall Church and not just exclusively to the Eastern Mediterranean Areas.

Another phenomenon that occurred in the wake of the apostasy and persecution of the first centuries was the fragmentation of the Church, which led to isolated groups drifting into heretical teachings in varying degrees. As a case-in-point, there were three main bodies of Ebionites. The first group accepted the teaching of the apostles strictly to the letter. These were the former Nazarenes of the Pella area, later labeled Ebionites. The second splinter group was rigid and Pharisaical, rejecting the letters and writings of Paul. The third splinter went to the opposite extreme in adopting Gnostic doctrines. This was the “liberal branch.” As the originators of the Gnostics had done, they were skilled at twisting the meaning of Scripture to justify their action or inaction, by using the tool of allegory. The two latter groups had certain few beliefs in common with the true Church, from which they had strayed. Although once considered remnants of the apostolic Church, as time progressed, so did their tendency to collect new heresies (*ACBCC*, les. 49, p. 16).

A valid observation of these ongoing trends was made by Dugger and Dodd: “The renewed zeal of the true followers of Christ, however, was accompanied with an increase among the number of apostate Christians, the multiplicity of sects, and the growth of false doctrine, and the lowering of the true Christian standard. The *breach* between the *true Church of God* and the *sects* was *widening*, and the churches were taking form, which eventually materialized in the Roman catholic church, and the Greek catholic church” (*A History of the True Religion*, ch. 6, p. 70).

In the case of the Ebionites and throughout Church history, the remnants that continued as the true Church of God were those few who tenaciously held to *all* the truth they had been given and compromised on none of it! Once the trend of compromise had begun, the process continued until the group spiritually collapsed. From all indications, those who survived spiritually were those tenaciously holding to, and fully living by, all of God’s doctrines. They valued

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the truth, treasuring it as the pearl of great price. Upon being tested on this point, many thousands in the true Church of God endorsed those *spiritual* convictions of *eternal* rewards—at the price of their *temporary, physical* lives. In the course of human history, few have possessed such profound insight.

Constantine and the Council of Nicea

In the early 300s, during the time of the most severe persecution against all professing Christians, the Roman armies proclaimed their favorite general, Constantine, as Caesar. He had claimed victory after defeating his rival, Maxentius, at the Battle of Milvian Bridge outside Rome. Prior to that battle, he was said to have had a vision of the first two letters of the name of “Christ” (in Greek, *chi* (X) and *rho* (P)) and heard a voice that told him, “By this sign you will conquer.” He felt that the meaning of the letters he had seen was unmistakably symbolic of Christ and thus, he was indebted to Christianity for his victory, in spite of being an established sun worshiper. Immediately upon becoming Emperor, he issued the Edict of Toleration, which gave Christianity legality in the empire. This ended the ten years of severe persecution against the true Church, but paved the way for false Christianity to rise to prominence in the empire (“The History of the Church of God,” Kelly, part 4).

Constantine recognized the benefit of aligning with the counterfeit movement—which called itself Christian. Not only was he indebted to this “power” which helped to establish him as Emperor, he saw this movement as a potential means of unifying the empire. Yet, the Christianity of the Western empire was significantly different from that in the east and from that of other sects in North Africa. Thus, Constantine took measures to “standardize” his newfound ally—Christianity (*ibid.*).

Constantine convened the ecumenical council of Nicea in AD 325 to resolve the doctrinal differences between the various Christian denominations. Before this time, he had already decreed that the day of the sun would be kept throughout the empire. This “day of the sun” was the pivotal point to unify various pagan sun-worshippers with those nominal “Christians” who already had accepted Sunday and had never observed the Sabbath anyway—except for the apostates who defected and joined them.

Thus, this entire episode was a marriage of convenience between Constantine and the Church at Rome. The council of Nicea, directed personally by Constantine, condemned the practice of true

**CONSTANTINE**

Roman emperor who directed the Council of Nicea (AD 325). As part of his effort to standardize “Christianity” throughout the Roman Empire, he outlawed the Sabbath and enforced observance of the “day of the sun.”

Christianity. All of the precepts of the emerging Church at Rome were now decreed as part of the state religion. As protector of this counterfeit Christianity, Constantine forced everyone, pagan or Christian, into either conformity or exile (*ibid.*).

With the enforcement of a false religion upon them, the true Church had no choice but to flee. The Church was to be in the wilderness for 1,260 years from this date of AD 325.

This brings us to the end of the Smyrna Era. One may wonder what happened to the remnant of this Era, during those years of persecution—especially the faithful Ebionites north of Pella in Syria and the Quartodecimani of Greek Asia Minor. “As decades rolled by, as persecutions 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...” (*ACBCC*, les. 50, p. 6).

Pergamos Arrives

As with the other eras, we begin with the message to Pergamos. It starts in Revelation 2:13: “I know your works, and where you dwell, even where Satan’s seat is: and you hold fast My name, and have not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells.”

The Church in the Eastern Roman Empire migrated to the regions in and around Armenia. This was in the general proximity of Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire or Byzantine Empire, as it was called.

One probable application of the phrase of dwelling “where Satan’s seat is” is that the Church was located where Satan’s seat of government was located. The explanation is that the actual city of Pergamos, representing this era, was the center of the Babylon Mystery Religion in Asia Minor. And it should be mentioned that in ancient times this region had been in the northern areas of Nimrod’s kingdom. (See Genesis 10:8-12.) This was also the region of the ancient city of Pethor, which was the home of Balaam. (See Numbers chapters 22 to 25, and Jude 11.) This area was the heartland and stronghold of Nimrod’s religion throughout history. It is of little wonder that the reference could be made of this region: “where Satan dwells.”

The term Antipas is a short form of the Greek name “Antipater.” One relevant translation of this name is “against the pope.” This title would have certainly been applicable to Constantine of Mananali—the first leader of the Paulicians.

God's people took refuge in the regions of Armenia from the time of flight, around AD 325, and were mostly unnoticed by the world and their Catholic persecutors for over three centuries, until about the 650s. It is important to remember that true Christians were most likely already residing in the area before the migrations arrived there from the Mediterranean area of the Roman Empire. The original apostles who had served this area of the lost tribes of Israel were Philip and Andrew. Some of the number who made up the true Church in this area could have been of those remaining Israelite descendants of the converts of the first centuries (having not yet migrated to the Northwest).

The Pergamos Era—Time of the Paulicians

We now trace the account of this faithful martyr, Constantine of Mananali, and the Paulicians, as recorded by Edward Gibbon in *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. V, ch. 54, pp. 386-390. To begin, on page 386, he describes how Constantine obtained a set of Scriptures: "In his humble dwelling in Mananalis, Constantine entertained a deacon, who returned from Syrian captivity, and received the inestimable gift of the New Testament...of the Greek..."

Constantine intensively studied and "attached himself with a peculiar devotion to the writings and character of St. Paul." He grew in understanding as his mind was opened to the piercing truth revealed in these Scriptures. Soon he had established a "movement," as God called those who responded to Constantine's teachings. His followers were called "Paulicians," based on his great respect and admiration for the apostle Paul's writings. Many previous followers of false creeds and religions were either converted to the truth or rallied around Constantine as "sympathizers to the cause." Gibbon continues: "...many Catholics were converted or seduced by his arguments; and he preached with success in the regions of Pontus and Cappadocia, which had long since imbibed the religion of Zoroaster" (p. 389).

To stamp out Constantine's movement, the Byzantine Emperor dispatched an officer by the name of Simeon, along with his soldiers. He gathered some of Constantine's followers and threatened death to those who would not cooperate in stoning their leader. One traitor named Justus willingly stoned Constantine to death (*ibid.*, p. 390).

Simeon was so moved by the resolute faith and bravery of Constantine and his Paulician followers that he was convinced that these were God's people. Embracing the doctrine and the movement

that he was sent to persecute and destroy, Simeon himself became a dedicated believer, much like Paul had done. He renounced his former life and wealth as his mind was opened to the truth. He became a leader of the Paulicians. After carrying on the same extended work of Constantine for another three years, Simeon was also martyred. He was burned at the stake, having been accused to Emperor Justinian II by the *same traitor* who stoned Constantine. This example contains many pertinent lessons. Christ's command to put away false brethren, who are walking contrary to the faith—the truth—is central. Tolerating this traitor led to the betrayal and death of two faithful leaders of God's Church (*ACBCC*, les. 50, p. 9).

Nevertheless, in the decades and centuries that followed, the Paulicians flourished under able and inspired leaders such as Paul, Genesius and Joseph. During the years 801-835, a leader of the Paulicians by the name of Sergius helped greatly to put things in order for the Paulicians. He condemned the error of militarism practiced by his predecessor, Baanes. For thirty-four years he labored fervently to bring the Paulicians to repentance and back to the truth. He wrote: "I have run from east to west, and from north to south, till my knees were weary, preaching the gospel of Christ" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 11th ed., vol. 20, p. 960). Astonishingly, soon after his death, the bulk of the Paulicians reverted to the same errors that Sergius had condemned and set in order during his life.

A few critical clarifications need to be made regarding some early historians' false claims about the doctrines of the Paulicians. The following quote explaining them (consisting of the following four paragraphs, with some inset commentary) is derived from the *ACBCC*, lesson 50, page 11:

"...some claim—echoing Photius of the 9th century, that they [the Paulicians] rejected Peter and followed only Paul...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... Furthermore, Paulicians *used* the writings of Peter. (They also used the Old Testament which some falsely say they rejected.)"

Continuing from the same source: "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."

Before continuing, it should be noted that those who owned these books and writings were often murdered. Only the *Key of Truth*, hid-

den for centuries, preserved in out-of-the-way Armenia, remains—and that was put into writing centuries later, 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!” (ibid.)

And now for the final clarification from the preceding source: “One of their chief accusations was that Paulicians were Manichaeans, believers of the ancient Persian...doctrine of dualism. But this was a false charge. Several early writers admit the Paulicians totally rejected Mani, founder of Manichaeism. 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 [student of Origen], 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 to the truth. It was their common practice to brand all opponents indiscriminately Manichaeans.”

The above information is vital as already stated, since these false claims have leaked into most of the available historical sources pertaining to the Paulicians. The above clarifications were necessary to uncover some of the veils of distortion that hung over the records of the Paulicians to better form a true perception of them. When many drifted away from the truth in the ninth century, perhaps some did embrace Gnosticism or Catholicism, but these had ceased from being God’s people.

Although the *Key of Truth* is a set of manuscripts from a corrupted age (850s—950s), when many true doctrines had been compromised, they do offer us a glimpse of some of the Paulicians’ beliefs, concerning their opposition to Catholic theology and practices. Here is a summary of the Paulicians’ doctrines, from a variety of sources including the *Key of Truth*, translated by Conybeare, and the 11th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and is quoted from *The History of the Church of God*, part 4, by Kelly:

- They baptized only adults, citing Christ’s example. He was 30 years old.

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- They did not baptize in a font, but by immersion.
- They believed that Christ, although crucified for man, did not command adoration of the cross.
- They did not believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary, the mother of Jesus, nor did they consider that she was a mediatrix.
- They were characterized by their obedience to the Ten Commandments and believed that a Christian knows Christ and keeps God's Law.
- They rejected the Catholic mass, communion and confession.
- They believed that the Church was not a building, but a body of people.
- They believed that true repentance was a prerequisite for baptism.

In the *Key of Truth*, Conybeare also adds some valuable historical background about the earlier Paulicians. He makes the obvious connection between the earliest Paulicians and the Quartodecimans. As he indicated, "this is what we would expect to find" (p. CLII). One particular statement by Conybeare, concerning the Paulicians who authored the manuscripts of the *Key of Truth*, deserves close attention: "The Sabbath was perhaps kept and there were no special Sunday observances" (p. CXIII). This was an indication of the fading commitment to the truth by the ninth century—after the time of faithful Sergius. True believers would have been more forthright and definitive about their devotion to the Sabbath. The tendency of these following generations, corrupted by compromise, should *not* be attributed to *all the Paulicians* over their entire period of 400 or more years.

Notice Christ's warnings to the brethren of the Pergamos Era: "But I have a few things against you, because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate" (Rev. 2:14-15). Remember that Balaam's practice was to go as far as he could in defiance of God—as much as he could "get away with."

The best definition of the doctrine of Balaam comes directly from an account of the people who fell into that error. Notice this: "They [Paulicians] permitted external conformity with the dominant Church, and held that Christ would forgive it" (*Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., vol. 20, p. 961). Of course, the act of practicing what they knew to be error soon became ingrained. This compromise caused a blurring of the conscience as it carried over to their children attending the mass and following Catholic practices. The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes was that of unrestrained indulgence. Once those former brethren broke

down their walls of resistance and started following Catholic practices, their mental defenses eventually vanished as they returned fully to the world. Thus, the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes usually completed the job that the doctrine of Balaam had begun—wholesale abandonment of keeping God’s law.

The Paulicians suffered persecution and military defeat that Christ surely brought upon them for taking up the sword. See Revelation 2:16: “Repent; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

History relates what happened: “The empress Theodora (842-857) hung, crucified, beheaded or drowned some 100,000 of them, and drove yet more over the frontier...” (ibid., p. 960). In time, the Paulicians were relocated to the Balkans by the Byzantine emperors to serve as buffers from the Bulgars (*Decline & Fall*, ch. 54, pp. 394-395).

The Bogomils

We now turn our attention to the next significant group, located in the area of the Balkans, and Bulgaria in particular.

Those who constituted the Church of God in the following unfolding of time and events were called Bogomils. We had previously stated that it would have been wrong to assume that all of the Paulicians would have been composed of the Churches that fled after the time of the Council of Nicea. Likewise, it would be premature to assume that the Bogomils consisted entirely of the displaced Paulicians and converts from Paulician missionaries. Some of the Bogomils most likely consisted of remnants of the early apostolic Church established in that particular area. There have been a few examples cited from this period of groups claiming to exist from the time of the apostolic Church, especially in the region of the Alps. Yet, as removed by better than eight centuries, it is incredible that the continuity of believers remained unbroken. Certainly, not every member of every family, nor every family in every generation became converts, but the converts were of a sufficient number that the Church in a given region—although *few* in number—maintained an unbroken continuity for centuries!

This was especially true of the Vaudois who continued from the first-century apostolic Church for better than ten centuries. The Vaudois will be discussed later. For the Church to remain intact for so long without a wholesale apostasy seems incredible by any standards. Presently, it seems to be an increasingly rare phenomenon for one

generation to endure in the faith, much less 15 or 20 generations! The latter-day great apostasy, to be discussed later, shows that the moderns are lacking certain essential traits of commitment, constancy and endurance that existed to a much greater extent in these Christians of earlier periods. In Revelation 3:8, the Philadelphian faithful are told that they have only “*a little strength.*” Perhaps the constant bombardment by media and materialism has taken a cumulative toll—devastating in its effect.

Almost all that is known about the Bogomils is from information recorded about them by their enemies, the Catholic Church. The Bogomils, as their predecessors, the Paulicians, assumed a strong anti-Catholic stance. They believed that they were in the direct line from the original apostles in a continuing succession of the true Church. They emphasized that the Roman Catholic Churches were houses of demons. They opposed Mary worship, infant baptism and all Catholic rituals. They, as the Paulicians, strongly opposed the trinity and the doctrine of transubstantiation—the Catholic belief that the bread and wine of the communion became the real flesh and blood of Christ. They believed that Christ came to overcome Satan and therefore qualified to rule the world. Intense persecution was an everyday fact of life for these brethren, as it was for those who had gone before them (*Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., vol. 4, pp. 119-120).

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, continues about this group: “The Bogomils were without doubt the connecting link between the so-called heretical sects of the East and those of the West. They were, moreover, the most active agents in disseminating such teachings in Russia and among all the nations of Europe. They may have found in some places a soil already prepared by more ancient tenets which had been preserved in spite of the persecution of the official Church, and handed down from the period of primitive Christianity” (*ibid.*, p. 119).

The general period of the Bogomils at the height of their activity was from the late ninth century through the eleventh century. One of their leaders who stood out as an inspiring example of zeal and dedication was Basil. He and his twelve subordinate ministers had evangelized that region of the Balkans with great success for decades. So significant were the results of Basil’s ministry that the Emperor Alexius Comnenus, from Constantinople, became personally involved in a plot to entrap him. After they did, the emperor moved to destroy the Bogomils, as related here from *The History of the Church of God*, part 5, by Kelly: “Alexius then ordered all Bogomils who would not recant to be burned alive. Among those was Basil—one of many faith-

ful believers willing to give their lives for the way of life that they professed.” Of course, the Bogomils continued in spite of the actions of Comnenus and other emperors. Their remnants, in the Balkans, later became known as the Paterines.

The Church of God, being sustained by Christ, was destined to continue. The Bogomils in their peak years, as mentioned above, existed toward the end of the Pergamos Era and overlapping into the beginning of the Thyatira Era, as we understand the general time-frames of the seven Church eras. We now turn our attention toward the west to southern France, northern Italy, Switzerland and surrounding areas—the center of activity of the Church of God for the next few hundred years of the Thyatira Era.

The Age of Thyatira

The Thyatira Era is documented to a much greater extent than any preceding era. We are focusing on an area rich in history, concerning its ties with the apostolic Church. These areas, especially southern France, had been originally evangelized by Peter, John, and Paul. Lazarus and others spent the remainder of their lives serving in these areas. We will discover that some remnants from the apostolic era had continued there for many centuries.

Some historians try to identify representatives from the Bogomils or Paulicians as the primary source of knowledge of the truth in this area of Europe. Certainly, they did a commendable work throughout much of Europe, especially in light of the constant, severe persecution they endured.

However, the *main* “connecting link” was primarily the surviving threads of believers and teachings of the apostolic Church that fled to the wilderness of this region many centuries earlier. As leaders were called, trained and prepared by God, they were not operating in a vacuum. Portions of the Church of God continued to survive here for many centuries, disseminating knowledge of the truth. This served to give the emerging Thyatira Era a “jumpstart.” No doubt, some of these surviving elements were to be traced to the first century Church. But in most cases they were traced back to the time of the Church’s flight into the wilderness, subsequent to the Council of Nicea—essentially the second wave of the true Church’s influence in Southwestern Europe.

The Roots of the True Church in the Valleys of the Alps

We now consider some of the claims of the groups which had fled here in the fourth century for refuge, according to Revelation 12:6. Also, some claim to have originated from the first-century apostolic Church in that region. The next two pages contain some amazing quotes compiled from *A History of The True Religion* by Dugger and Dodd, chapters 9, 10, 11, and 20. The narrative will continue after the presentation of these interesting accounts. (The italics are sometimes original and sometimes added, generally to highlight key points of doctrine or of time-setting.)

A correct understanding of the foundations of this vibrant Thyatira Era hinges upon the appreciation of these incredible roots. The Vaudois, or Waldenses—the earlier historians considered them to be one-and-the-same—existed for many centuries before the time of the Thyatira Era, as will be demonstrated.

Notice this insight into the grudging respect held for the Waldenses, even by their enemies: “Some of the popish writers themselves own that this people never submitted to the Church of Rome. One of the popish writers, speaking of the Waldenses, says, ‘*The heresy of the Waldenses is the oldest heresy in the world.* It is supposed that they first betook themselves to this place among the mountains, *where they existed before Constantine the Great*, and thus the woman fled into the wilderness, from the face of the serpent (Revelation 12:6)... The people being settled there, their posterity continued from age to age; and being, as it were, by natural walls, as well as by God’s grace, separated from the rest of the world, they never partook of the overflowing corruption” (*Edward’s History of Redemption*, period 3, part 4, sec. 2).

“Multitudes however, fled like innocent and defenseless sheep from these devouring wolves. *They crossed the Alps, and traveled in every direction*, as Providence and the prospect of safety conducted them, into Germany, England, France, Italy, and other countries. There they trimmed their lamps, and shone with new luster. Their worth everywhere drew attention, and their doctrine formed increasing circles around them...” (*Jones’ Church History*, p. 208, ed. 1837).

“The fleeing Christians who escaped from the wrath of the Roman church and state, found a haven in the mountains and valleys of the north of Italy, and the south of France, in main, although they fled into all nations wherein they could find an entrance and protection from the persecutions of the papacy. Though these Christians were

known by many names for various reasons in their new homes, yet the predominating name for them seems to have been ‘Vaudois,’ which means ‘Valley Dwellers.’ From the fact they dwelt in the valleys of the mountains they received the name ‘Valley Dwellers,” or, in the native tongue, ‘Vaudois.’ The Vaudois, known as such by the world, but holding to the true Bible name, *were persecuted for the true faith. They observed the seventh day of the week, according to the commandment, immersed for believers’ baptism, and kept the Passover, or the Lord’s Supper, once a year, in the first month”* (*Persecutions and Atrocities on the Vaudois*, pp. 348-349).

Here is what Gilly says about these thirteenth-century “Valley Dwellers,” having fled the papal church’s wrath in its early centuries, still abiding under the protection of the Almighty in the Waldensian wilderness:

“They occupy a mountain district...and yet from this secluded spot, have they disseminated doctrines, whose influence is felt over the most refined and civilized part of Europe. They [had]...simple virtues, and *retain the same religion, which was known to exist there more than a thousand years ago. They profess to constitute the remains of the pure and primitive Christian church...*” (*Excursions to Piedmont*, p. 259).

In his *History of the United Brethren*, Crantz speaks of these Christians in this way: “These ancient Christians date their origin from the beginning of the fourth century, when one Leo, at the great revolution in religion under Constantine the Great, opposed the innovations of Sylvester, Bishop of Rome. Nay, Rieger goes further still, *taking them for the remains of the people of the valleys, who when the Apostle Paul, as is said, made a journey over the Alps into Spain, were converted to Christ*” (p. 16).

““Their enemies confirm their great antiquity. Reinerius Saccho, an inquisitor, and one of their most implacable enemies, *who lived only eighty years after Waldo, admits that the Waldenses flourished five hundred years before that preacher...*Gretzer, the Jesuit, who also wrote against the Waldenses, and had examined the subject fully, not only admits their great antiquity, but declares his firm belief that their...discipline, government, manners, and even the errors with which they have been charged, show that the Albigenses and Waldenses were distinct branches of the same sect, or that the former sprang from the latter”” (Dr. Rankin’s *History of France*, vol. III, p. 198, 202; *Jones’ Church History*, p. 233).

In a confession of their faith, one Waldense member stated, “... declaring that they proffered the doctrine contained in the Old and

New Testaments and comprehended in the Apostles' Creed, and admitted the sacraments instituted by Christ, and the ten commandments, etc...They said they had received this doctrine from their ancestors, *and that if they were in any error they were ready to receive instruction from the word of God*" [only the true Church has ever expressed this claim—both then and now—hence, another way to identify it] (*Jones' Church History*, p. 355, ed. 1837).

"The Reformers held that the Waldensian Church was formed about 120 AD, from which date on they passed down from father to son the teachings they received from the apostles. The Latin Bible, the Italic, was translated from the Greek not later than 157 AD" (Allix, *Churches of Piedmont*, Ed. 1690, p. 177; Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*).

"The Waldenses were among the first of the people of Europe to obtain before the Reformation, the possession of the Bible in Manuscript of their native tongue. They had the truth unadulterated, and this rendered them the special objects of hatred and persecutions...Here for a thousand years, witnesses for the truth maintained the ancient faith...in a most wonderful manner it (the Word of Truth) was preserved through all ages of darkness" (Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, p. 42).

"The method which Allix has pursued in his History of the Churches of Piedmont, is to show that in the ecclesiastical history of every century, from the fourth, which he considers a period early enough for the enquirer after apostolic purity of doctrine, there are clear proofs that doctrines unlike those which the Roman church holds, and conformable to the belief of the Waldensian and Reformed churches, were maintained by theologians of the north of Italy down to the period when the Waldenses first came into notice. Consequently the opinions of the Waldenses were not new to Europe in the eleventh or twelfth centuries, and there is nothing improbable in the tradition, that the Subalpine Church persevered in its integrity in an uninterupted course from the first preaching of the Gospel in the valleys" (Gilly, *Waldensian Researches*, pp. 118-119).

These quotes reinforce the fact that strong ties existed between the Church of God at the beginning of the Thyatira Era and the Church that sought refuge in the wilderness as previously discussed. Indeed, this was the same Church whose roots went back to the apostolic era, as echoed in the last quote. These quotes also emphasize that not only did those of the true Church know who they were, but their enemies knew as well. Thus, we have sampled some of the many ties to the apostolic Church in this area.

The New Resurgence of God's Church—In Thyatira

By way of background, the ancient city of Thyatira was a city of merchants and weavers. As we might expect, the era of Thyatira was likewise based upon this same craft and industry. In these Middle Ages, southern France, where the era began to blossom, was a center of the textile industry in Europe.

About 1104, a man from this region began to preach repentance throughout Languedoc and Provence. Christ had begun the resurgence of His Church in this fourth of seven Church eras—Thyatira. This era's first leader and probable apostle was Peter de Bruys. For nineteen years, this man preached with great strength and persuasiveness, such that he was able to silence the Catholic priests and officials sent to hinder or threaten him. A new phenomenon occurred: Some of the Catholic priests in the area were converted into the Church of God. This especially occurred under the leadership of Henry of Lausanne, a successor of Peter de Bruys. Since Henry had been a Catholic monk before conversion, he well understood Catholic theology and convincingly refuted every aspect of it before many listeners. Thus he carried on Peter's tradition of winning converts from the Catholics—even their officials. It should be pointed out that Peter rarely passed up opportunities to destroy symbols of Catholic idolatry in the form of crosses, altars and steeples—reminiscent of Gideon during the period of the judges. This fact is known primarily due to the charges brought against him by the Catholics, as recorded by the Abbot of Clugny (*Dictionary of Sects and Heresies*, p. 423 from and including *The History of the Church of God*, p. 6).

Concerning the powerful and persuasive style of both Peter and Henry and the fact they were both apostles, the Abbot of Clugny sarcastically retorted to them: ““Has the whole world been so blinded... [that it should] have to wait so long for you, and choose Peter of Bruis and Henry, his disciple, as exceeding *recent apostles*, to correct the long (standing) error”” (*ACBCC*, les. 51, p. 6).

Peter Waldo

The world had known the followers of Peter de Bruys as “Petrobrusians” and the followers of Henry as “Henricians.” Yet they identified themselves as the Church of God. Although Peter was burned to death in about 1125 and Henry later died in prison in about 1149, the resurgence of the Church was not to be undermined. In spite of the tempo-

rary eclipse caused by the death of these leaders, Christ was preparing an apostle to do the greatest work since the time of the original apostles up to that time. The man He chose was Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant of Lyons. He, as Peter de Bruys, had not been called in a vacuum, as far as familiarity with the Church was concerned, since the Dauphiny region had been thoroughly evangelized for a long period.

Upon the death of a close friend, Waldo was shocked into reality. He gave much of his wealth to the poor, following the precept of Matthew 19:21. Christ saw his sincere diligence and proceeded to open his mind to the truth. During this time, Waldo invested a portion of his wealth into translating the Scriptures into the vernacular. He devoted much effort and intensity into studying the Word of God, much as Constantine of Mananali had done five centuries earlier, when Christ opened his mind. Waldo's wife and children believed he had lost his mind at this time, and sought to separate from him, not understanding the concept of true conversion. History indicates that he and his wife were later reconciled (*ACBCC*, les. 51, p. 6).

Revelation 2:19 begins the description of Thyatira: "I know your works, and charity, and service, and faith, and your patience, and your works; and the last to be more than the first." The Church of God has long taught that this refers to the resurgence in this era, under the leadership of Peter Waldo.

The following summary offers fascinating insight and explains many of the factors making Waldo the ideal candidate for carrying out this phase of Christ's Work:

"Waldo brought the same practical common sense that had made him successful as a businessman to the organization and Work of the Church. He had the education and experience, which so few in God's Church had (I Cor. 1:26). Jesus Christ had probably guided that experience, unknown to Waldo, long before his conversion. As he preached, others united themselves and their efforts to his. They became, as it is said, 'as many co-workers for him.' They dedicated their lives and their property to the spread of Christ's gospel. This little group became known as the 'Poor Men of Lyons.' But that was not the name of the Church. They called themselves the Church of God, or simply Christians" (*ibid.*, p. 6).

Waldenses Clarified

One final comment should be made concerning the derivation of the name "Waldenses." This name is the one commonly used to identify the resurgence of the true Church during the Thyatira Era. This is cor-

rect, but it is important to keep in mind these two central points: (1) The Waldenses or Vaudois had existed for many centuries before the Thyatira Era began and (2) the Waldenses were *not* named after Peter Waldo. This is more fully covered in the next brief quotes completing this topic. This is intentionally stressed here because many church historians fail to make this distinction, in spite of all the information to the contrary.

From *A History of The True Religion* by Dugger and Dodd, chapter 15, we read, "From E. Comba's work, Guild Hall Library, London, we get the following. 'The Waldenses objected to being called after Peter Waldo. They teach that we are a little Christian flock, falsely called Waldenses.' Further they say, 'We are proud of working,' and reproached the Roman clergy with idleness."

"These people were numerous in the valleys of Piedmont. Hence the name Vaudois, or Vallenses was given them, particularly to those who inhabited the valleys of Luverne and Argorgne. A mistake arose from similarity of names, that Peter Valdo, or Waldo, was the first founder of these churches. For the name Vallenses being easily changed into Waldenses, the Romanists improved this very easy and natural mistake into an argument against the antiquity of these churches, and denied that they had any existence till the appearance of Waldo" (*Townsend's Abridgment*, p. 405).

The Main Work in Thyatira

Waldo began to preach in about AD 1161, and his efforts made much headway. Since the Word of Christ was clear and understandable, this servant and his growing army of workers needed only to present these words to the people in their everyday language. Of course, much of their success depended upon their conviction and power of persuasion, and momentum continued to grow. More sets of the Scriptures were painstakingly copied. The immediate areas around Provence were thoroughly evangelized. From this point, Waldo and his workers ventured into the area of Picardy, in northern France, with continuing success. Upon resistance from local officials, they moved on to Flanders and Holland with greater success.

The initial nineteen years of Waldo's ministry proceeded without any great persecution by the Roman Catholics. When the Archbishop of Lyons forbade the "Poor Men" from continuing to preach, they responded, "*We must obey God rather than men,*" echoing Peter's instruction and example from Acts 5:29. Then they were cited to appear before Pope Alexander III and Waldo stated his accomplish-

ments of presenting to the people the Scriptures in their common language. Strangely, the Pope agreed to Waldo's continuance of this, but left the final decision to the Lateran Council of 1179. But this council condemned Waldo and his "Poor Men" by declaring that "the Roman Church cannot endure your preaching!" Waldo's representatives, who appeared before that council, responded, "Christ sent us. If you were His Church you would not hinder us." So Waldo and his co-workers continued to preach wherever they went. It took the Archbishop of Lyons five and a half years, and a new pope, to finally drive them away from his domain of Lyons (*ACBCC*, les. 51, p. 7).

One particular group in Italy, that broke away from the Catholic Church, asked Peter Waldo to become their leader. With this group, a second branch of the Waldenses was established in Italy. A college, located in the Angrogna Valley in the French Alps near Turin, was founded to train ministers. This college became the headquarters of the Work and the expanding Church of God of this time. At the college, small booklets were written and multiple copies were produced. All the copying had to be laboriously done by hand, occupying many volunteers in that task. The literature was given free to the public. Tithes and offerings from many countries paid the cost of the college and the literature produced. As the Work expanded into many different countries, different translations of the Bible were made—in the vernacular of the people.

Ministers Trained

Mature men, at about the age of twenty-five, were those chosen to be students at the college. After attending classes for three or four years these men were ready for the full-time Work. If their fruits showed that Christ had called them into the ministry, they were ordained by the laying on of hands. The ranks of the ministry were established according to the biblical practice. This meant that elders and deacons were ordained according to the needs of the work to be done. Pastors and evangelists were ordained among the seasoned ministers.

Many considered Peter Waldo to be an apostle, although he refused to be called anything greater than chief elder. Waldensian ministers were called "barbes" (uncles) to help conceal their identity as ministers. In their journeys and assignments, these ministers traveled in pairs—a younger minister with an older one. In this case, the older was able to instruct the younger, and pass on the benefits of experience and wisdom gained through many years in such service (*ibid.*, p. 9).



WALDENSIAN EMBLEM: Above is a representation of the Waldensian emblem or coat of arms dating from the tenth century. Note how the fourth star, which represents the Thyatiran Era of the Church, aligns with the candlestick in the center. Seven stars represented the angel or messenger of each given era, while seven candlesticks represented each of the seven Church eras (see Rev. 1:20). This emblem shows how the Waldensians of Thyatira understood they were part of the fourth in a succession of seven eras of the true Church.

During the time they were allotted, the Waldensians truly beamed forth the light of truth to a world in darkness.

Memory Preserves Bible!

Consider this astonishing fact: Due to the scarcity of Bibles and the danger of being apprehended for carrying one, ministers were generally required to commit to memory the gospels of Matthew and John, all the letters of Paul, and the Psalms and Proverbs. In addition, youths were taught in their early years at school and at home to memorize entire chapters and, later, entire books of the Bible as insurance against the loss of their written scriptures, which were sought out by the Catholics to be destroyed by fire. In given regions, different youths would be assigned different books in order to protect the entire set of Scriptures (*A Short History of the Waldenses in Italy*, Sophia Bompiani from *The History of the Church of God*, pt. 7).

This quote, from *Pegna's Directory of the Inquisitors*, in *Jones' Church History*, pertained to the Waldensians' incredible knowledge of the Scriptures. Jacob de Riberia says that he had seen peasants among them who could recite the book of Job by heart, and several others *who could perfectly repeat the whole New Testament*. Consider this incredible quote in testimony to the extraordinary dedication of these brethren:

“The bishop of Cavaillon once obliged a teaching monk to enter into conference with them, that they might be convinced of their errors, and the effusion of blood might be prevented. This happened during a great persecution in 1540, in Merindol and Provence. *But the monk returned in confusion, owning that he had never known in his whole life so much of the Scriptures, as he had learned during those few days, in which he had held conference with the heretics.* The bishop however, sent among them a number of doctors, young men, who had lately come from the Sorbonne, at Paris, which was renowned for theological subtilty. One of them openly owned, that he had understood more of the doctrine of salvation from the answers of the little children in their catechism (question and answer sessions), than by all the disputations which he had ever heard (at the University at Sorbonne or elsewhere)” (*True History of the True Religion*, ch. 15).

The Passagini, as some brethren were called in the Italian Alps in about 1200, were noted for observing Old Testament law, excluding the sacrificial rituals. They kept the Sabbath and the festivals (*Mosheim's Eccl. History*, part 2, ch. 5, sec. 14, p. 127). And as recorded here: “The Waldenses recognized that they were the true successors of the apostolic church. They kept the *Sabbath*, also the yearly

Passover. And each September or October (in God's seventh month—see Lev. 23), they held at the headquarters church a great 'conference.' As many as 700 persons attended from afar. New students were chosen, ministerial assignments were made, *and crowds gathered daily to listen to sermons*. What could this gathering have been but the Feast of Tabernacles!" (*ACBCC*, les. 51, p. 11).

Emphasis on Character

In discussing the conduct of God's people at this time: "The early Waldenses practiced overcoming and education in every walk of life. They were obedient, clean, honest. Even their enemies acknowledged they could find no fault with their lives. They would not lie or swear...nor do anything to others which they would not have done to themselves...They dressed and acted modestly...They were chaste, temperate in all things, in control of their emotions, diligent, continually keeping busy, founding their whole teaching on the Bible. Their enemies marveled" (*ibid.*, p. 10).

Their persecutors knew that these believers were far more obedient and honest than any of their fellow Catholics and would use these attributes to single them out: "Whosoever refuses to curse, to swear, to lie, to kill, to commit adultery, to steal, to be revenged of his enemy, they say he is a Valdois [French for Waldenses], and therefore they put him to death"—*Voltaire's Gen. History*, ch. 69" (*A True History of the True Religion*, ch. 13).

As Waldo proceeded north, he appointed Arnold Hot to be pastor of Albi. Arnold's followers were called "Arnoldists," not to be confused with those associated with Arnold of Brescia in Italy in about 1140. Waldo also sent Joseph and Esperon into Dauphiny and Provence, and the people of their districts were named, after their respective leaders, "Josephines" and "Esperonists." The papal bull of 1184 anathematized these groups, as well as the Poor Men of Lyons and the Humiliated (the Italian group that had previously left the Catholic Church to become Waldenses). Others anathematized were the Passagines (Waldenses of the Alps), Cathars (ascetic puritans, loosely associated with the true Church, although some of these did become converts) and Paterines (Italian Cathars).

Besides all the elements of God's Church being anathematized by the pope, the civil leader in 1194, over Provence and the areas to the west, decreed against them. These "Waldenses, Zapatati or Inzabbati [keepers of God's Sabbath] who otherwise are called the *Poor Men of Lyons*" were considered worthy of punishment and thus ordered to

leave his district. Yet the lesser officials and general population essentially protected God's people.

Then, in a response to these decrees, "In 1207, as chief spokesman for all the Albigenes, Arnold Hot expounded these theses: that the Roman Church was antichrist, and that Christ did not establish the Mass. With him were 'Ponticus Jordanus, Arnoldus Aurisonus, Philabertus Castrensis and Benedictus Thermo.' Not many years after, holding firmly to their faith, Arnold and several associates were marched to the stake and burned" (*ACBCC*, les. 51, p. 11).

The Albigenian Crusade

In 1208, Pope Innocent III organized the Albigenian Crusade, backed by much of northern, pro-Catholic France. The civic leaders in most areas of southern France had been sympathetic to the Waldenses. *They refused to murder their best citizens at the whimsical decrees of the corrupt Roman Catholic clergy.* Thus, the church also turned its wrath against the general population of these southern regions, who were rejecting the civil domination of Rome—the great whore of Revelation 17 expected all civil authority to obey her. This Albigenian Crusade, beginning in 1209, destroyed the Provencal civilization, the most brilliant in Europe.

"When it was over, after 20 bitter years, that civilization had been completely destroyed. South France had become a backward region completely subject to Paris and Rome.

"The infamous *Inquisition* was then set up to complete the job by eliminating religious objections. Papal bull decreed severe punishment against any person suspected of even sympathizing with 'heretics.' Confiscations, imprisonments, burnings and every imaginable form of persecution continued for more than a hundred years. Thousands died. In the city of Montsegur alone, 200 persons were burned in one day."

Waldo and many of his co-workers had moved into Germany and Bohemia, continuing to evangelize in spite of the intense persecution of the Inquisition. For the first 19 years (1161-1180), Waldo's work was centered around Lyons and reached much of southern France. During the next 19 years (1180-1199), it expanded to virtually every region of Europe—with great success. For the next 19 years (1199-1218), Satan moved his church, with much wrath, against the Work that God was doing through His Church.

Note the following sequence of events, during the most momentous and perilous times that the Church had seen in many centuries—

on the heels of tremendous success. “When the Lateran IV Council of 1215 *forbade the reading of the Bible in the vernacular*, it virtually *closed the door* on the evangelistic Work of God’s Church. *And Jesus Christ allowed it!*

“By 1218, Waldo now dead and the Waldenses divided, the Work became ineffective. About 1215 also, the pope instituted the Franciscans (*Preaching Friars*) and Dominicans (*Minor Friars*) to combat more forcefully the Lombard *Humiliated* and the *Poor Men of Lyons*, respectively. In 1233, the Inquisition was put in their charge.

“The Council of Toulouse, 1229, strengthened the rule against reading the Bible—the Inquisition enforced it by torture and fire! (In 1242 the Council of Tarragona even prohibited the *clergy of the Roman Church* to read the Bible!)

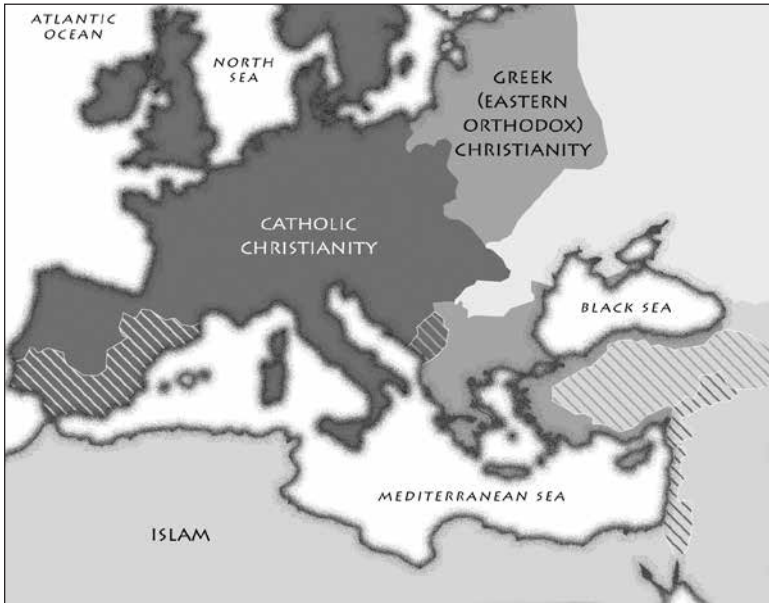
“The one additional [19-year] cycle (1218-1237) allowed to headquarters and College now drew to a close. Gregory IX issued another bull against the Waldenses in 1231. From 1231 to 1233 a general persecution raged in Germany, cutting short the Work in Holland. By 1235, persecution on a large scale began at Milan, original seat of the Lombard Waldenses. The archbishop ‘razed their school’—apparently the College—but *left the people free!* On the French side of the Alps, killing and burning reached the Valley Louise in 1238. *The Thyatira WORK was through!*” (ibid., p. 15).

Now to review Revelation 2:20-21, with a further description by Christ of the Thyatiran era: “Notwithstanding I have a few things against you, because you suffer that woman Jezebel, which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.”

It is overwhelmingly clear that this “Jezebel” of the Middle Ages—the Roman Catholic Church—continually strove to bring God’s servants into her communion. Some of the Waldenses, in a weakened condition and coerced by fear of persecution, compromised with this “woman” and thus began to commit spiritual fornication with her. They did this by *appearing* to keep Sunday or by *appearing* to submit to her by allowing her priests to “baptize” their infant children. But notice here what Christ said to those Thyatirans who *totally and completely separated themselves* from Jezebel’s idolatrous practices in Revelation 2:24-25: “But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. *But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.*”

RELIGIOUS DOMINANCE

Regions dominated by religion during the Middle Ages.



POPE INNOCENT III

Most powerful of all the popes; instituted the Inquisition; organized the Albigensian Crusade (1208) to extinguish virtually all Christians in southern (Provençal) France.



WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A TRUE CHRISTIAN

For centuries, being a member of the Church of God meant facing the real possibility of losing one's life. Shown below are just a few of the various ways men have used to torture and kill God's people.



Torture



Beheadings



Burnings



Eaten alive by wild animals



Roasted alive



Skinned alive

As the next four centuries passed, only a few did not compromise. Most eventually merged with the Protestants, who came out of their parent church in protest!

Where the Saints Have Trod

It would now be helpful to recap some of the incredible examples of those who held fast in the face of unthinkable adversity. We are fortunate to have on record some of these accounts as prime examples of those who held fast to God's Way, with uncompromising passion. These quotes are derived from *A History of the True Religion*, ch. 16-17.

Concerning Biblias, a female martyr, during the persecution at Lyon and Vienne, it states, "The fact was pressed upon her to acknowledge that the Christians ate their children. In her torture she recovered herself, it is said, and awoke as out of a sleep, and, in answer to their interrogations, thus remonstrated: 'How can we eat infants—we, to whom it is not lawful to eat the blood of beasts?'" (*Jones' Church History*, p. 106).

Of the persecution against the Vaudois of La Guardia, Wylie says: "Enticing the citizens outside the gates, and placing soldiers in ambush, they succeeded in getting into their power upwards of sixteen hundred persons. Of these, seventy were...tortured, in the hope of compelling them to accuse themselves of practicing shameful crimes in their religious assemblies. *No such confession, however, could the most prolonged tortures wring from them.* 'Stefano Carlino,' says M'Crie, 'was tortured till his bowels gushed out' and another prisoner, named Verminel, 'was kept during eight hours on a horrid instrument called the hell, *but persisted in denying the atrocious...[slander]*'" (Wylie, *Hist. of the Waldenses*, p. 115).

"Everything relating to the Waldenses resembled the scenes of the primitive church. *Numbers died praising God, and in confident assurance of a blessed resurrection;* whence the blood of the martyrs became again the seed of the church...Almost throughout Europe *Waldenses were then to be found; and yet they were treated as the off-scouring of the earth, and as people against whom all the power of wisdom of the world were united...*" (*Townsend's Abridgment*, pp. 405-409).

"But it was reserved to Innocent the Third, than whom no pope possessed more ambition, to institute the inquisition; and the Waldenses were the first objects to its cruelty. He authorized certain monks to frame the process of that court, and to deliver the supposed

heretics to the secular power. The beginning of the thirteenth century saw thousands of persons hanged or burned by these diabolical devices, whose sole crime was, that they trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, and renounced all the vain hopes of self-righteousness, idolatry and superstition..." (ibid., p. 416).

"The French barons, incited by the motives of avarice which Innocent suggested, undertook the whole work with vigor. The Waldensian Christians then had no other part to act, after having performed the duty of faithful subject...*but to suffer with patience the oppressions of Antichrist.* Three hundred thousand men, induced by avarice and superstition, filled the country, for several years with carnage and confusion.' 'The castle of Menerbe on the frontiers of Spain, for want of water, was reduced to the necessity of surrendering to the pope's legate. A certain abbot undertook to preach to those who were found in the castle, and exhort them to acknowledge the pope. But they interrupted his discourse, declaring his labor was to no purpose. Earl Simon and the legate then caused a great fire to be kindled, and burned 140 persons of both sexes. *These martyrs died in triumph, praising God that he had counted them worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ.* They opposed the legate to his face and told Simon, that on the last day when the books should be opened, he would meet with the just judgment for all his cruelties. Several monks entreated them to have pity on themselves, and promised them their lives, if they would submit to the popedom. *But the Christians "loved not their lives to the death."* only three women of the company recanted" (ibid., p. 421-2).

Through Much Tribulation

The following account is lengthy, but is included for its unique and invaluable expressions by Jacob Hutter, a leader in God's Church during the ongoing persecutions of the 1500s. His group were Waldenses from numerous Alpine villages who had been mercilessly driven out (partly due to their refusal of military conscription) by King Ferdinand of the House of Hapsburg—succeeding Charles the Great in the fourth revival of the Holy Roman Empire. This group, numbering two to three thousand, consisted of various Alpine nationalities, who took refuge in Moravia. Soon after their arrival, King Fredrick ordered their expulsion. Then, as part of a diabolical plan, he withdrew his orders. After Hutter's group had built hundreds of homes and other structures, Fredrick reinstated his expulsion order, this time using military force. These afflicted peoples were once again mercilessly driven from their homes. The account continues with the following

quotes from *Martyrology*, an old book by George Van of London as quoted in *A History of the True Religion*, ch. 19.

“The dense forests on the confines of Moravia afforded them a hiding place. Amid the dark alleys and shades, the minds of the wanderers were animated to patience, constancy, piety and devotion, by the exhortations of their leader. “*Be ye thankful unto God,*” ran the words of Hutter, “*that ye are counted worthy to suffer persecutions and cruel exile for his name. These are the rewards of the elect in the prison-house of this world, the proofs of your heavenly Father’s approbation.*” Thus did his people Israel suffer in Egypt, in exile, and in persecutions: some in torments, in sufferings, and in martyrdoms, enjoyed the favor of their Lord. *Sadness be far from you; put aside all grief and sorrow, reflect how great the rewards awaiting you for the afflictions ye now endure.*” Hutter further addressed the following epistle to the marshal, in the name of all.’

“We brethren—who love God and his word, the true witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ, banished from many countries for the name of God and for the cause of divine truth, and have hither come to the land of Moravia, having assembled together and abode under your jurisdiction, through the favor and protection of the most high God, to whom alone be praise, and honor, and laud for ever: we beg you to know, honored ruler of Moravia, that your officers have come unto us, and have delivered your message and command, as indeed is well known to you.’

“Already have we given a verbal answer, and now we reply in writing: viz., *that we have forsaken the world, an unholy life, and all iniquity. We believe in Almighty God, and in his Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who will protect us henceforth and for ever in every peril, and to whom we have devoted our entire lives, and all that we possess, to keep his commandments, and to forsake all unrighteousness and sin. Therefore we are persecuted and despised by the whole world, and robbed of all our property, as was done aforetime to the holy prophets, and even to Christ himself.* By King Ferdinand, the prince of darkness, that cruel tyrant and enemy of divine truth and righteousness, many of our brethren have been slaughtered and put to death without mercy, our property seized, our fields and homes laid waste, ourselves driven into exile, and most fearfully persecuted.’

“After these things we came into Moravia, and here for some time have dwelt in quietness and tranquility, under thy protection. We have injured no one, we have occupied ourselves in heavy toil to which all men can testify. Notwithstanding, with thy permission, we are driven by force from our possessions, and our homes. We are now in the

desert, in woods, and under the open canopy of heaven: *but this we patiently endure, and praise God that we are counted worthy to suffer for His name.* Yet for your sakes we grieve that you should thus so wickedly deal with the children of God. The righteous are called to suffer; but alas! woe, woe, to all those who without reason persecute us for the cause of divine truth, and inflict upon us so many and so great injuries, and drive us from them as dogs and brute beasts. Their destruction, and punishment, and condemnation draw near, and will come upon them in terror and dismay, both in this life, and in that which is to come. For God will require at their hands the innocent blood which they have shed, and will terribly vindicate his saints according to the words of the prophets.’

“‘And now that you have with violence bidden us forthwith to depart into exile, let this be our answer. *We know not any place where we may securely live; nor can we longer dare here to remain for hunger and fear. If we turn to the territories of this or that sovereign, everywhere we find an enemy. If we go forward, we fall into the jaws of tyrants and robbers, like sheep before the ravening wolf and raging lion.*’

“‘With us are many widows, and babes in their cradle, whose parents that most cruel tyrant and enemy of divine righteousness, Ferdinand, gave to the slaughter, and whose property he seized. These widows and orphans, and sick children, committed to our charge by God, and whom the Almighty hath commanded us to feed, to clothe, to cherish, and to supply all their needs, who cannot journey with us, nor, unless otherwise provided for, can long live—*these, we dare not abandon.*’

“‘We may not overthrow God’s law to observe man’s law although it cost gold, and body and life. On their account we cannot depart; but rather than they should suffer injury we will endure extremity, even to the shedding of our blood. Besides, here we have houses and farms, the property that we have gained by the sweat of our brow, which in the sight of God and men are our just possession: to sell them we need time and delay. Of this property we have urgent need in order to support our wives, widows, orphans, and children, of whom we have a great number, lest they die of hunger...We complain of this injury before God and man, and *grieve greatly that the number of the virtuous is so small.* We would that all the world were as we are, and that we could bring and convert all men to the same belief, then should all war and unrighteousness have an end.’”

The reader is left to ponder this stunning statement from the history of the Church of God!

The City of Thyatira



Major Events in the Late Thyatira Era

To summarize events of the 1300s through the 1500s, we will first examine a Waldenses minister in Germany named Echard. He came in contact with the true Church as a persecutor, much like Paul and Simeon had been. During the fourteenth century, Echard martyred many hundreds in Germany. Following his conversion, his ministry was as fervent as his persecuting. After preaching the gospel with great passion, he too was apprehended and burned as a martyr.

As an overview of the Thyatira Era, we find the major labor of God's Church during this time was to translate, copy and make known the Scriptures. Most of the manuscripts that the Catholics had confiscated and stored, in monasteries and cathedrals, were ultimately traceable to the work of God's Church. Few scholars in the Middle Ages had the ability to read Hebrew and Greek, so they used the Waldensian version, written in Provençal.

Meanwhile, the Waldensians in the Netherlands became known as the Lollards, and were also reaching out to surrounding areas. A chief Waldensian minister, Walter the Lollard, with his brother Raymond, carried the gospel into England with much success (*ACBCC*, les. 52, pp. 3-4).

A major breakthrough occurred in the late 1300s, as John Wycliffe, an English theologian, Oxford professor and eminent scholar, undertook the process of *translating the Bible into English*. (Though not in God's Church, he condemned and exposed the Catholic's deliberate plot to limit the Bible's availability.) His followers and associates soon completed the project after his death, distributing Bibles throughout England (*ibid.*, pp. 4-5).

In the 1400s, the Lollards became a driving force in England, making use of Wycliffe's translation and the revised translations. They preached the gospel there, as Waldo had done in Provence three centuries earlier. God's Church had not disappeared, although it had been greatly hindered in continental Europe.

In the 1450s, another major breakthrough occurred—the art of printing with movable type was developed in Germany. The famous Gutenberg Bible was one of the first books printed. Printing quickly spread to Holland, England and all over Europe. The New Testament version in greatest demand in all Europe was the vernacular version derived from none other than the Waldenses' version. The impulse to spread the Word of God, resulting in the invention of printing, was primarily a result of the momentum of the Work of God in the

Thyatira Era. The demand for more Bibles was an immediate effect of that Work. God's people were instrumental in this way. Although the Protestants take credit for this, this is incorrect, since the Protestant Reformation did not start until about 1517.

The Reformation Comes

The inevitable Reformation followed in the wake of such dedicated scholars as Erasmus in the early 1500s. By diligently editing a number of Greek manuscripts, he compiled the most accurate New Testament to that date. His criticism of his own religion, Catholicism, was unrelenting and outspoken. He was driven by a desire to reform the Catholic Church. His criticism was not heeded within, but it did make an impact without.

In contrast to the Waldenses, whose unquestionable conduct impressed friend and foe alike, the Catholic Church was scandalous and corrupt at every level. The practices of simony (offices and positions for sale) and indulgences (permission to sin in advance, for a price) was too much for some Catholics, such as Martin Luther. Erasmus was the catalyst, but Luther proved to be the force behind the Reformation, which was essentially the breakaway of the daughters from mother Rome, in protest.

Luther and the Sabbath

It is interesting to note that Luther had admired the Waldenses for quite some time. Their effect upon him was much greater than most history books acknowledge. Notice this quote from *A History of the True Religion*, ch. 20:

“Luther himself, while it is said believed in and practiced the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, did not prescribe it in his articles of faith for his followers, in the copies that we now have access to. However, it has been said that in his original thesis, Luther advocated the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, but that his colleagues objected on the grounds that it was an unpopular doctrine, which would have a tendency to repulse supporters of the Reformation who were *not as pious as they should have been*, but were of great assistance against the usurpations of the papacy.”

Also notice this quote pertaining to Luther's commentary on Exodus 16:4, 22-30, regarding the Sabbath:

“Hence you can see that the Sabbath was before the Law of Moses came, and has existed from the beginning of the world. Especially

have the devout, who have preserved the true faith, met together and called upon God on this day.”—Translated from *Auslegung des Alten Testaments* (Commentary on the Old Testament), in *Sämmtliche Schriften* (Collected Writings), edited by J.G. Walch, Vol. 3, col. 950 [St. Louis edition of Luther’s Works, 1880].

“Luther said of the Waldenses ‘that among them he had found one thing [in particular] worthy of admiration, a thing unheard of in the popish church, that, laying aside the doctrines of men, they meditated in the law of God day and night, and that they were expert, and even well versed, in the knowledge of the Scriptures’ (*Jones’ Church History*, p. 263).”

“The Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Knox, and others), with all their zeal and learning, were babes in spiritual knowledge when compared with the Waldenses, particularly in regard to the nature of the kingdom of Christ, and its institutions, laws, and worship in general” (*ibid.*, p. 326).

Persecution Comes to an End

Four centuries of intense persecution finally took its toll on the Waldenses. During the late 1500s, a greater degree of religious freedom had come to exist in Britain. By the 1600s, the door started to open for emigration to America. But in much of Europe, the outlook was still grim for surviving Christians.

Jones says of the extermination of the Churches of the Waldenses in the Piedmont valleys: “I professed to give the history of the churches of Piedmont and other places commonly designated as Waldenses and Albigenses, not of individuals; and as I considered these churches to have been utterly dispersed and scattered by a series of persecutions which terminated in the year 1686, I consider myself to have brought the subject to its legitimate close” (*Jones’ Church History*, Preface, p. IX, ed. 1837).

Thus closes the Thyatira chapter. The Waldenses, the Lollards—the Church of God in various locations—completed a great work. Much evidence remains for consideration. We must not ignore or forget the great lessons of the suffering of the Church in the wilderness! Undoubtedly, many thousands of saints from this era are now dead in Christ, awaiting resurrection.

Sardis' Time Comes

An important biblical timeframe must be referenced again here as we enter the Sardis, or fifth, era of God's Church. Recall that the Church's long years of persecution and productivity in continental Europe began in AD 325, the date of the Nicean Council and the flight of the Church. This brings us to the year 1585. Immediately following, in 1586-1587, England became free, once and for all, from the yoke of Catholicism with the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. Although other Catholic monarchs appeared later, they were powerless to restore Catholic power in England.

At this time, the Dutch nationals were trying to free themselves of the merciless domination of the Spanish under Philip II. The turning point of the Catholic threat against England was the defeat of the Spanish Armada by Divine intervention. An incredibly disastrous storm decimated the mighty Spanish fleet in 1588. This also paved the way for Dutch independence, which was soon realized. England, under Queen Elizabeth I, had begun to grant a greater measure of religious tolerance, giving the Church of God opportunity to rekindle its efforts. Though greater tolerance did exist in Holland, the rest of Europe allowed considerably less religious freedom.

There existed two other innovations at that time which would have seemed to put the Church of that period in a distinct advantage in preaching the gospel to the world. First—the invention of printing, using movable type, which allowed reproduction of manuscripts at a rate and cost efficiency never before achieved. Second—the existence

of the Bible in the vernacular, especially in England, to a degree unknown before that time.

In spite of these potential advantages, which would seem to have given the Church a real boost, history does not reveal any powerful resurgence in that era. We do find evidence of great effort on the part of individual ministers and members. Missing is the momentum of an organized effort, backed by a dedicated body of believers, in preaching the gospel to the world. This trend is true to the prophecy of this era in Revelation 3:1-4. Here is Christ's description of the fifth era: "...I know thy works, that you have a name that you live, and are dead. *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.* If therefore you shall not watch, I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you. You have *a few names even in Sardis* which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: *for they are worthy.*"

We will review some of these "few names even in Sardis"—these courageous individuals who exerted such incredible effort. The initial focus will be on the British Isles. God had caused a resurgence of His Church to occur in the British Isles (especially in Ireland and Scotland), beginning during the early portion of the Pergamos Era. Remember, the persecution against the Church in Britain was so intense during the Smyrna Era that no threads of continuity could be traced back to the apostolic era, as was the case in the Alps. The Alps afforded a degree of sanctuary, whereas no such refuge was available in the British Isles.

After the initial focus on Britain, we will turn to America, where many emigrated from Britain, Holland and all areas of Europe, thirsting for religious freedom. Certainly, God's Church was represented from the earliest phases of immigration to the new world. Before tracing the history of God's people in Britain, for the initial phase of this era, another area is to be considered first—Transylvania during the close of the Thyatiran Era and the dawn of Sardis.

God's Truth—Pure and Simple

It was here that God opened the mind of an ex-Catholic priest, Francis David, to the truth. He was condemned, imprisoned in 1578, and died the next year. His small flock continued to hold to the truth revealed to David. Notice this statement of interesting developments in the aftermath of this situation:

“Meanwhile, Christ had struck down and called to His service a rich Hungarian (Szekler) noble. Andreas Eossi turned to the study of the Bible as a result of a long sickness, and the deaths of his wife and all his sons. Though he had no knowledge of Hebrew, he found the truth clearly revealed in the Bible. Well versed in church history, he dismissed as folly the idea that one could learn religion only at one of the recognized theological institutions.

“In the year 1588, he began to lead a group of the people who formerly listened to Francis David. Under his direction they began to live by every word of God and put into practice the whole Bible, the Old Testament as well as the New. The history of these people may be found in the book *Sabbatarians in Transylvania* by Samuel Kohn.

“They saw the Bible enjoined the keeping of the true weekly Sabbath on the 7th day. They recognized in it a type of the future state of ‘spiritual marriage’ when the Church would be married to Christ. They rejoiced each Sabbath adorning themselves for it in their best attire. They knew the 7th day typified that great time of rejoicing in which they—Gentiles—could be a part of the ‘bride of Christ,’ ruling with Him in the seventh thousand years.

“They also kept all the *annual* Sabbaths or Holy Days. They kept the true Passover with unleavened bread, understanding it was the continuation of the Old Testament Passover, but now in *remembrance* of the Redeemer who died for the sins of all mankind. Their civil New Year was the Feast of Trumpets. The so-called ‘Christian’ festivals—Christmas, Easter, etc., they declared were the inventions of popes! They rejected the ‘baptism’ of such ‘Christians,’ and even made a distinction between clean and unclean meats.

“They understood that they, being Gentiles, and in part descended of the family of Japheth by flesh birth (most were Hungarian), had become a part of spiritual *Israel* and sons of Abraham (see Eph. 2:12-20 and Gal. 3:29).

“Most important of all, they inculcated the moral conduct emphasized by Jesus Christ—love for God and man, moderation in all things, respect for authority, honor to those in civil offices, etc.

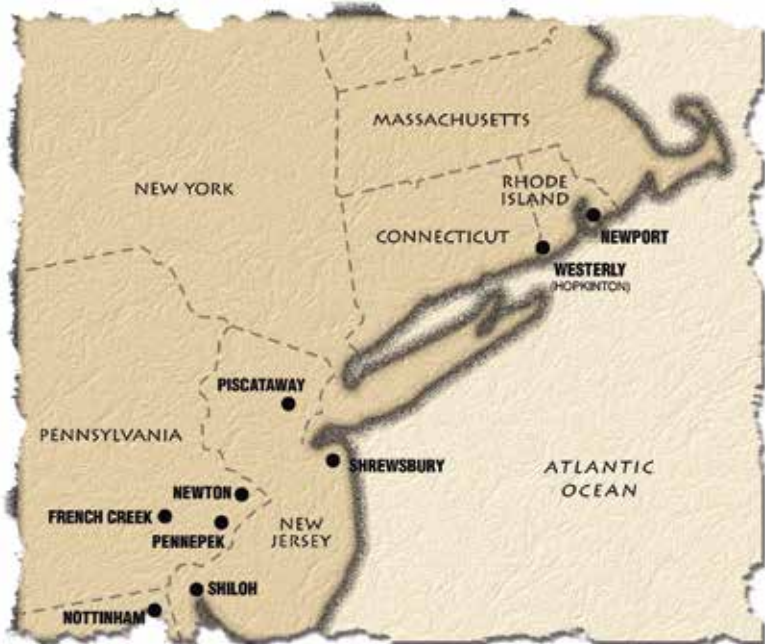
“About 1600, they compiled—and printed—a hymn book of 110 paraphrases of Psalms and other poetical passages of the Bible. Forty-four relate to the Sabbath, 5 to the new moon, 11 to Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, 6 to Pentecost, 3 to the Festival of Trumpets, 1 to the Day of Atonement, and 6 to the Festival of Tabernacles” (*ACBCC*, les. 52, pp. 12-13).

This was a fascinating presentation of truth that was revealed to Frances David and Andreas Eossi, directly from the pages of God’s

SABBATH-KEEPING CONGREGATIONS IN BRITAIN (Founded by 1730)



SABBATH-KEEPING CONGREGATIONS IN AMERICA (Founded by 1745)



Word. We can now clearly recognize a trend in which leaders of God's Church, in various periods, were taught directly by God from the Bible. *God* opened their minds to see the plainness of His truth. Just as Paul "conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16), David and Eossi also were taught by direct revelation from God's Word. This trend becomes more and more evident as one continues through the course of Church history. It is understood that many had only portions of the Scriptural manuscripts, yet were still led to an incredible degree of understanding.

After Eossi's death, his group mostly disintegrated. Under the wavering leadership of his stepson, the sheep eventually scattered. Later, the group was somewhat strengthened and stabilized, as many Sephardic Jews became believers after 1629, but only a few in his group continued to hold to the truth—another trend so evident in history.

Leaders of the Sardis Church in England

Because the truth was originally dispensed throughout all of the British Isles in the Ephesus Era (and later resurgence during the Pergamos era), during the time of Sardis, the Church existed mostly in the confines of England. One of the first leaders in the early 1600s was a defender of the Sabbath by the name of John Traske. He had dispatched others to evangelize, which apparently led to many conversions. He was imprisoned for his teachings. He recanted after three years, in order to secure his release. His wife, having a stronger spiritual constitution, died after fifteen years in prison—without recanting her convictions.

Another leader, Theophilus Brabourne, a former Puritan minister in Norfolk, published books advocating the true Sabbath, in 1628 and 1632. Cox's *Literature of the Sabbath Question* says of him, "[He] may be regarded as the founder in England of the sect at first known as Sabbatarians..." Brabourne, as Traske had done, later recanted when put under serious threat. But, in Cox's words, "His followers, however, did not all accompany him back to orthodoxy (Church of England)" (Vol. 2, p. 6, *ACBCC*, les. 53, p. 4).

A leader named Philip Tandy had abandoned the Church of England and adhered to the Sabbath and other true doctrines. In 1642, another book was written, by James Ockford, in defense of the Sabbath. His enemies labeled him an Anabaptist, but he and his followers called themselves the Church of God. The publication of books became more common at this time, but not with the momentum

An Oasis of Religious Freedom

Recently discovered Church records and personal journals have disclosed much that was previously unknown about the first recorded Church in America. This vital information was researched in the early- to mid-1980s, casting fascinating light on this early phase of Church history in the American colonies.

The first evidence of the Church of God in America is found in Rhode Island. This was the ideal place for the Church to grow, because it was the only colony whose charter specifically guaranteed religious freedom without persecution. Most of the other American colonies were far less tolerant of those outside whatever was the locally sanctioned religion. For example, Puritan colonies such as Massachusetts and Connecticut held strict intolerance toward other religious creeds. Therefore, Rhode Island gradually became a refuge and haven for Quakers and Sabbatarians, as well as fundamentalists, known as Baptists. Naturally, all of these sought freedom from persecution, and Rhode Island offered it.

When Sabbath-keeper Steven Mumford arrived in 1664, in the Rhode Island city of Newport, there were, to his knowledge, no Sabbatarian Churches anywhere else in the colonies. There, he and his wife associated for a time with a group of religious fundamentalists. Although the group called themselves Baptists, they were not like Protestants of today. They did not tolerate such things as crosses or steeples and basically sought to follow strictly what the Bible taught. Even their name reflected the correct belief in baptism by immersion. The Protestant Reformation had only occurred a few decades before this time and the standard Protestant theology, generally following the precepts of Rome, had not yet been fully established.

In time, Mumford sought to preach the truth to others. He followed the examples given in Acts 18:28 and 19:8 in his approach to this. He did not try to siphon off members, but rather to make the truth known and allow others to act upon their conviction.

By 1670, seven people began meeting in the Mumford home, where they made a covenant with God to keep all of His

commandments. Those who initially came with the Mumfords were primarily the main leadership of the church that they had been attending. Ten years later, in 1680, the number meeting with the Mumfords in Newport had only increased to eleven—but the real growth was beginning to develop in the southwestern part of the colony.

About this time, the Church began publishing small pamphlets or tracts. These were also handed out in Connecticut and Massachusetts, where gatherings on the Sabbath were illegal. Interest grew, and, with more immigration, responses increased, especially from these adjacent Puritan colonies. Also, in 1680, a church building was strategically located at Westerly, Rhode Island, on the border of Connecticut, to accommodate the influx of new members. Growth continued in that region, mainly from the pamphlets being made available, especially in Connecticut.

After the turn of the century, although he was never the pastor, Mumford continued as “patriarch” of the Church in Rhode Island, until his death in 1707. A number of fervent, dedicated ministers had served the brethren during this time, such as William Hiscox, William Bliss and others.

By 1730, there were 1,000 members at Westerly, with 2,000 in attendance on a regular basis. The Westerly Church came to be known as the largest church in all the colonies of *any* denomination! This growth necessitated the building of a new church, erected 5 miles away at Hopkinton, to help accommodate the influx of new members. The membership in Rhode Island included a number of prominent people. The majority of the founders of what later became Brown University were Sabbatarians who attended the Church in Rhode Island. Also among the members were the governor of the colony, Richard Ward, and his son, Samuel Ward, who went on to become governor himself. (We have seen that the Sardis era had lost certain truths, and involvement in politics and government had become acceptable.)

It is also interesting that the church buildings of these Sabbatarians always displayed a plaque of the Ten Commandments above and behind the speaker. Even the grave markers of those who died in the 1600s and early 1700s conveyed expressions of the fact that they had been Sabbath keepers and were awaiting the resurrection of the dead, generally only really understood by true Christians.

needed to thunder the message to the world. Sabbath observance was still illegal in England at this time. At least two ministers (one was John James, who will be discussed later) were martyred for conducting services outside the legal confines of the Church of England (*ibid.*, les. 53, pp. 4-5).

Leading Families

Christ's Work was sometimes continued through certain families. The Stennett family provided ministers for the Church of God in England for four generations. Then the Bampfield brothers—Francis and Thomas—wrote and published books on the Sabbath, creation and the laws of God in about 1675. Francis had been imprisoned in 1662 for questioning and criticizing the Church of England, in which he had formerly been a pastor. He spent much of the rest of his life in various jails, eventually starting a Sabbath congregation in the Dorchester jail. Upon release, he began to hold Church meetings in London, in his own hired house. The congregation he started in his home was to continue for over a hundred years. He was seized again by the authorities for his religious convictions and teachings. He soon died in prison. Edward Stennett became pastor of the Church he had started (*ibid.*, p. 5).

Here is some insight about Francis Bampfield, drawn from his autobiography, preserved to this day:

“In his book, Bampfield draws a parallel between his own calling and ministry and that of the Apostle Paul. Like Paul, he too was not called by men into the ministry but by God. He was also an educated man and talented scholar of Hebrew.

“Born in Devonshire in 1614 it was said that he was ‘designed for the ministry from his birth.’ He entered Wadham College, Oxford, in 1631 and left in 1638 with a degree in the Arts. Shortly after this, he was ordained a deacon in the Church of England by Bishop Hall.

“He was later given a position in Dorset, with a salary of 100 pounds per year. A zealous, hardworking minister, he purchased books and Bibles for his congregation, out of his own pocket.

“His personal study of the Bible brought him to an understanding of the truth of God. For a time he was permitted to preach these newly discovered truths to his Dorset congregation; in 1662, however, he was forced to make a decision—would he obey God or the State?” (*The Incredible History of God's True Church*, Fletcher, ch. 11).

Recall that Christ had warned those of Sardis to remember how they received the truth. It came from those Lollards and Waldenses

The City of Sardis



of the Thyatira Era *who held fast to the death—not from those who had left it*. Yet, in England, and later America, the main trait of Sardis brethren was the tendency to continue fellowship with those who had fallen away. Those of Sardis insisted upon the need to show “love” for differing opinions, inviting outsiders to speak in their meetings. However, condoning such falsehood—which harmed both believer and hearer—did not show *real* love. This false concept was why Sardis eventually became “dead.”

“Edward Stennett was one of the few, at that time, who could clearly see the very real danger of allowing ‘apostates,’ as he called them, to continue in fellowship with the church. These false ‘brethren,’ when permitted to remain within the local congregations, often did as much damage to the work of the true servants of God as ‘outside’ persecutors. Stennett spoke out strongly on this point, but being little more than one voice in the wilderness had little effect on the general trend within the church” (ibid., ch. 12).

Dr. Peter Chamberlin, another dedicated minister of that period, strongly condemned every form of compromise. This man was a graduate of Cambridge University and pastor of a Sabbath-keeping congregation. He warned against those who would annul the Ten Commandments and purport that Christ had given them license to disobey. He continued, “‘Hath not the little horn [Dan. 7:8] played his part lustily in this [the Catholic Church or the Church of England], and worn out the saints of the Most High, so that they become little horn men also’” (The Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America, p. 1264).

Here is some insight concerning Dr. Chamberlin’s accomplishments: “During his long and interesting life he became ‘Physician in Ordinary to three Kings and Queens of England...As for his religion he was a Christian keeping the commandments of God and faith of Jesus, being baptized about the year 1648 and keeping the seventh day for the Sabbath above 32 years’” (*The Incredible History of God’s True Church*, Fletcher, ch. 12).

The following information sheds light on the fact that some of the above men had been ministers for the Church of England. This included Francis Bampfield:

“A great many Church of God ministers of the seventeenth century were former ministers of the Church of England. The reason why God called these men was probably that few others in that age had the necessary education and leadership qualities. Even the ability to read was by no means as universal a skill as it is today. A few such men even held high political office prior to their conversion” (ibid.).

“Thomas Bampfield had been Recorder of Exeter, member of the Commonwealth Parliament, Speaker of Richard Cromwell’s Parliament. He lived at Dunkerton, near Bath...Francis won him to Seventh-Day Baptist principles, and he subsided into a quieter life” (ibid.).

Pertaining to the leaders of the Church in England during this period, one final account remains: “John James was arrested and brought to trial, found guilty under the new law against non-conformity. He was sentenced to the barbaric fate of being hung, drawn and quartered. It was said that ‘This awful fate did not dismay him in the least. He calmly said “Blessed be God, whom man condemneth, God justifieth!””

“In his final words to the court he simply asked them to read the following scriptures: Jer. 26:14-15 and Psa. 116:15. In keeping with the gruesome custom of the time, after his execution his heart was taken out and burned, the four quarters of his body fixed to the gates of the city and his head set up on a pole in Whitechapel opposite to the alley in which his meeting house stood” (ibid., ch. 10).

In spite of pillars like Drs. Stennett and Chamberlin, the Church in England diminished in the late 1600s. Most of the English churches, slipping from the truth, eventually adopted the name “Seventh Day Baptist” in place of “Church of God.”

We now look to the New World, where many weary Christian survivors of persecution sought refuge.

The Church in America

Remnants of the Church of God, seeking greater religious freedom, began immigrating to America in earnest by the late 1600s. Almost certainly, tiny groups existed in the colonies before the mid-1600s, but no record of them has been preserved. The first record of any group forming was when Steven Mumford proselytized among Baptists in Newport, Rhode Island. (See inset.) A congregation eventually formed there and in nearby Hopkinton.

Before coming to Rhode Island, in 1664, Mumford had been an associate of the Stennetts in England. He maintained communication with them, receiving valuable advice. As immigration continued, congregations were established in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania (*ACBCC*, les. 53, p. 7).

By the time of about 1818, the majority of Sabbath-keeping congregations in the United States agreed to merge, under the banner of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference. Around this time, they

also adopted the doctrines of the trinity and the immortal soul. To the world, this change may have been more acceptable, but those who did this ceased being part of God's Church. Only a tiny fraction continued remaining faithful, holding fast to the true name and doctrines of the Church. Then, as a result of the defunct Adventist movement, after 1844, a significant number of these Adventists began to show interest in the Sabbath. After about two years, the bulk of these Adventists began to associate with the remnants of the true Church. But those particular Adventists were never part of the spiritual Church. They had only *associated* with God's Church for a season. The majority began to follow a woman, Ellen G. White, whom they deemed to be a prophetess. By 1860, they opted to change their name to something "more descriptive of their beliefs"—Seventh Day Adventists.

As had been history's pattern, only a very small number of members of the Church of God did not go along with the deceived majority. These few were mostly from Ohio, Iowa, and Missouri—the surviving remnants of the Church of God. Soon, this small group was printing a monthly paper entitled *The Remnant of Israel*. They later changed the title to the *Sabbath Advocate* and, finally, to the *Bible Advocate*. This small Church began to organize a general conference, following the pattern of the Protestants. The name Church of God (Seventh Day) was adopted, with headquarters at Stanberry, Missouri. During the last seventy years of the Sardis Era, only a few individuals repented and went on to "strengthen the things that remained," as Christ had commanded. In place of the true gospel—the Kingdom of God—they preached what they called the "third angel's message," which they had obtained from the Adventists (*ibid.*, pp. 10-11).

An Era Ends

These events bring us to the close of the Sardis Era. Much space could be dedicated to details of the political infighting of the Church of God at Stanberry, leading to the split of 1933 (the next and sixth era beginning in October of that year). But, an overview of the entire era is more important. Here is a summary of the conditions that led to the Church's decline, amidst peace and prosperity. History warns of the danger of seeking peace and security as the goal of existence:

"While the Sabbath-keepers of Europe were under the fire of persecution, and being driven from one country to another, they were humble and devoted to God. They trusted in the Lord to lead and deliver, and were fervent and instant in prayer, and earnest in spirit. However, after they came to America, and had enjoyed for a hundred

years, or more, the religious liberties granted first by the charter of William Penn, and later extended to other colonies, *some ceased to pray as earnestly as before*, and settled down to a state of formality in worship, *depending upon the laws of man for security, instead of the intervening hand of God*. Consequently, some began gradually drifting away from the former piety and love for the Bible, and the Bible only, for their faith and practice, and took upon themselves another name besides the one divinely given of God. In their history in America, this was mainly among *the first signs which marked their drift toward the world*" (*A True History of the True Religion*, Dugger and Dodd, ch. 22).

But this condition and trend would see a dramatic turn unlike anything the Church of God had ever experienced...

The Amazing Philadelphia Age

Here is the first portion of what the living Jesus Christ wrote to those of Philadelphia—the sixth era of His Church—from Revelation 3:7-9: “And to the...church in Philadelphia write...I know your works: behold, I have set before you *an open door*, and no man can shut it: for you have *a little strength*, and *have kept my word*, and have *not denied my name*. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.”

This era was prophesied to be in sharp contrast to the one that preceded it—and the one that follows. The “open door” in verse 8 above will become evident, along with the fulfillment of other points in Christ’s description.

The account of this era will be shown to be very similar to certain other eras and periods of resurgence in God’s Church, in that God continued the pattern, this time most powerfully, of working through one man—never committees or groups. The basis for much—but certainly not all—of this narrative is the *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, volumes 1 and 2.

While the dying phases of the Sardis remnants were absorbed with political infighting, Christ had selected Herbert W. Armstrong, located in Eugene, Oregon, to lead this next extraordinary phase of His Church. God called Mr. Armstrong in the fall of 1926 and he was baptized six months later. He was ordained by the Church of God in

early 1931, as God was preparing to use him to formally begin the Philadelphian era of the Church in October of 1933.

Mr. Armstrong had been trained in the business world, particularly advertising, and had developed uncanny skills in getting people's attention. Christ had orchestrated events in the background, to get this man's undivided attention, by causing his successful, thriving business to be swept away, not once, but three times. Through his wife, Loma, he was motivated to undertake a most extensive study of the Bible. His purpose was to prove to her that Sabbath-keeping was unscriptural. But, to his dismay, he was forced to accept that God had, indeed, ordained that His true Sabbath (the seventh day, not the first, of the weekly cycle) be kept.

About the same time, one of Mr. Armstrong's relatives challenged him, maintaining that evolution, not a divine creation, could be the only possible origin of all life. He disagreed with his evolutionist relative, but could not prove the point one way or the other. This prompted Mr. Armstrong to enter into a six-month, in-depth study in order to prove the existence of God, whether the Bible was His Word, and whether His laws (particularly including the Sabbath command) were still binding upon mankind. During this study, Christ began to open his mind to the truth. Remember, God had opened the minds of many of His servants through history, in like manner, through personal intensive study. As did the others, Mr. Armstrong emerged with a deep conviction and ability to teach that understanding to many others.

This would prove vital in the decades to come!

First Contact with Sardis

Mr. Armstrong believed Christ's promise that He would not let His true Church die out (Matt. 16:18)—but where was it? He knew that true Christians faithfully kept all of God's commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath. But to his knowledge, the only Sabbath-keeping churches were the Seventh-day Baptists, the Seventh-day Adventists and the Church of God, Seventh-day.

Mr. Armstrong's daily Bible studies revealed that Christ promised to keep His disciples in His Father's name (John 17:12), and that the Bible lists the name of God's Church 12 times—"Church of God." This ruled out the Seventh-day Adventists and the Seventh-day Baptists, who were named by human beings.

Mr. Armstrong's search for the true Church had narrowed to the Church of God, Seventh-day. And yet, he wrote this about what he saw:

“They were so small, so uneducated, except for their limited amount of ‘Sabbath-keeping’ Bible knowledge—and their work, as I found, so ineffective and unproductive, I could not believe they could be God’s one and only true Church” (“History of the Beginning and Growth of the Worldwide Church of God” series, *The Good News*).

At that time, the Church was small and scattered, with less than 2,100 members, most living in rural areas. There were very few local congregations, and none as large as 100 members, and its ministry consisted of men who had little education. Though its elders preached with zeal, they lacked the power to attract sizeable audiences—the kind of preaching that moves people to action, stirs them up, and leads them to want to change their lifestyles.

The Troubling Question

How could such a tiny, scattered, virtually dead organization be God’s one true Church? This question constantly troubled Mr. Armstrong’s mind. He described his feelings this way:

“I could not then reconcile myself to believing a church so small, so fruitless, with an uneducated ministry, could be God’s one and only true Church” (*ibid.*).

Because he could not come to grips with this in his mind, Mr. Armstrong *associated* with its membership, but never became an *official member* of that organization.

It would be helpful to examine the contrast between Mr. Armstrong and the Sardis ministry during the time that he was being prepared by Christ for a greater Work. The following information comes from the same serial article by Mr. Armstrong (*ibid.*, ch. 2). After Mr. Armstrong had completed his initial studies and had come into contact with some brethren in the Church of God, he made arrangements to speak to a minister.

This account begins: “My first encounter with a Stanberry minister had been in the spring of 1927—the first of their ministers I had seen. He, too, had little or no education, but a dominant and argumentative personality...But now I wanted to talk to a minister of the Church of God about...baptism.” Upon meeting this minister and explaining his interest in baptism, the minister replied: “‘I haven’t any time to waste on an unbaptized man,’ he said, insultingly...I was taken aback at his gruff, insulting manner.” After a short conversation that left Mr. Armstrong understandably disenchanted, he finally replied, “I’m glad that you are not my judge.”

Asked to Speak

In August of 1927, Mr. Armstrong was invited by certain local brethren of the Church of God to speak to them, and he agreed to do this. The subject of his sermon was the recent healing of his wife from near death. On this occasion, her doctor had indicated that Mrs. Armstrong had less than 24 hours to live. Mr. Armstrong gave the details of the afflictions, her subsequent anointing, and her instant miraculous healing. Later that afternoon, a Sardis minister “vehemently attacked” his sermon.

Mr. Armstrong wrote, “He quoted the scripture saying many would come saying they had done many wonderful works in Jesus’ name, but He would reply, ‘Depart from me, ye that work iniquity’ (Matt. 7:23). Of course he *twisted* this scripture out of context” (ibid.).

Even though Mr. Armstrong was not a minister, the newly elected officers asked him to hold an 11-night evangelistic campaign in Harrisburg, Oregon. This was the first time he had ever preached before the general public, and it yielded fruit: Four new converts asked to be baptized.

Since he was not ordained, Mr. Armstrong consulted with a visiting Stanberry minister, who was confined to his bed due to a broken leg. Both men examined Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:37-41, and the example of the deacon Philip in Acts 8, who baptized those to whom he preached in Samaria. Both men concluded that Mr. Armstrong had God’s authority to baptize these four new converts. So he baptized them.

This brought him criticism from certain church leaders at Stanberry because the Oregon Conference had paid for Mr. Armstrong’s expenses, even though he was not a member of the Church of God, Seventh-day. This was only the beginning of much more opposition to come.

Mr. Armstrong summarizes what happened with Sardis ministry: “From the very first, in my association with these Sardis brethren, I was treated by their ministers as a greenhorn tail-ender. The Sardis brethren all loved me. But their *jealous ministers* used every device constantly to humiliate me and persecute. God blessed my efforts to produce ‘fruit,’ but their efforts produced none!” (ibid.).

An Emerging Need

During the Eugene campaign, the Oregon Conference hired another minister, Roy Dailey. He and Mr. Armstrong were assigned to con-



From a portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert W. Armstrong

duct a campaign in St. Helens, about 25 miles north of Portland. Despite newspaper ads and advertising circulars, the campaign was a failure.

With the Conference's permission, they switched to Umapine. After two weeks of campaign meetings, Mr. Dailey rushed off to attend a Conference business meeting, fearing that he was about to be laid off. But Mr. Armstrong chose to stay behind and continue the campaign—which, when he worked alone, had produced a small congregation of five local members, including four new converts.

They did not have a trained and experienced local minister to lead them, so Mr. Armstrong organized this small group into a local Sabbath school, and appointed one of them to act as superintendent and teacher. The tiny flock lasted for a while after Mr. Armstrong left. However, without a faithful shepherd to lead and protect God's flock from "grievous wolves" (Acts 20:29), they scattered and disappeared.

These and other events would lead Mr. Armstrong to understand two things:

(1) When he teamed with ministers of the Sardis Era, no fruit was borne. This is explained in chapter 3 of the previously quoted series: "By now I had begun to notice that *when I worked alone God blessed my efforts and spiritual fruit was borne*. But I noticed that not one of the Sardis ministers ever produced a convert. I asked some older members in the church, and not one of them could remember of a single new convert ever having resulted from the work of one of those ministers" (ibid., ch. 3).

(2) God's people need faithful, loyal ministers to teach, protect, feed and guide them—otherwise, they cannot spiritually and doctrinally survive. Many unsuccessful attempts to start and maintain thriving congregations would prove this point time and again. How Mr. Armstrong would ultimately be led to solve this problem will be addressed momentarily.

After the Sardis Church rejected new truths, such as the annual Holy Days and the identity of Israel, Mr. Armstrong continued, undeterred by their action. Mr. Dugger, the leader of that Church, had admitted in a private letter to Mr. Armstrong that his teaching pertaining to the identity of Israel was correct. Most likely, these new understandings were rejected for fear of offending loyal tithepayers. Christ led him to disassociate with them by the mid-1930s, and to step out in faith, giving up even his tiny \$3-per-week salary.

Mr. Armstrong began with a congregation of 19 people, including his own family of six. These early brethren were the pioneers of what became the Philadelphian Era.

The “Open Door” Appears

Christ was now able to begin opening doors for the Philadelphian phase of His Work. The door to begin proclaiming the true gospel to the world, first by radio (*The World Tomorrow* broadcast) and printing press (*The Plain Truth* magazine), was opened in 1934. At the same time, Mr. Armstrong slowly added certain crucial pieces of literature that could be offered to the public. Within its first 19 years, the broadcast grew tremendously, until it blanketed North America.

The next phase, beginning in 1953, saw the gospel broadcast in Europe, over Radio Luxembourg, the world’s most powerful station at that time. This occurred exactly *one 19-year time cycle* after the initial broadcast, in 1934, *and was exactly one hundred 19-year time cycles* from the time the original apostles traveled beyond Asia Minor into Europe. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

The Plain Truth began in the form of 350 copies cranked by hand on a mimeograph. Years later, Mr. Armstrong wrote, “It is doubtful whether any institution in human history started from as humble and small beginnings. When God starts something on His power alone, it is big from the beginning. For example, the creation of the universe—the creation of the Earth. But when God starts something through humans, it usually, like the grain of mustard seed, starts the very smallest and most humble, and then grows as the spiritual character of the humans develops” (“Now It Must Be Revealed How the Worldwide Church of God Began,” *GN*, May 1979).

This magazine was part of what Mr. Armstrong called a “Three-Point Campaign”: The radio broadcast brought in listeners—the magazine gave readers greater details of what the Bible actually teaches—and these were followed and reinforced by nightly evangelistic campaigns.

The Plain Truth magazine was destined for tremendous growth, reaching a circulation of 8,270,000. No other single servant of God, or group of servants working together, has ever reached more than a fraction of this number throughout the history of God’s Church! Consider that the actual readership was estimated to be three times this number, or about 25 million. However, even this number is further dwarfed by the estimated 250 million people (10 times more) who heard his voice broadcast around the world, on radio or television! Truly, an extraordinary Work and ministry was underway.

But let’s go back in time. It is worth noting here what the radio station manager, Mr. Frank Hill, told Mr. Armstrong in late 1933, pertaining to the early-morning, 15-minute, free radio broadcasts

they were producing: “Mr. Armstrong, you’ve stirred up havoc among the ministers in Eugene. They held a meeting of their Ministerial Association yesterday and informed me they don’t want you on the air anymore—and they will see to it that one of them is here for the morning devotional every weekday hereafter. It appears that members of their congregations are coming to them and bringing their Bibles, and pointing out what you’ve been preaching and embarrassing the ministers *by asking why they are preaching the very opposite of what the Bible says*” (ibid., ch. 4, *GN*, Aug. 1980). Mr. Hill then offered Mr. Armstrong a half hour slot at half the station’s cost to go on the air. The new program began on January 7, 1934.

Three Colleges Begin

As mentioned, in the past, Mr. Armstrong had held nightly evangelistic campaigns in various towns and cities in Oregon and Washington. His efforts yielded newly baptized members, who were then organized into local Church of God congregations.

However, without a trained minister to spiritually feed, protect and lead them, these new converts got pulled back into the world, or were deceived by false leaders bringing wrong doctrines. In the end, not one of these small congregations survived more than six months.

Mr. Armstrong began to realize that God wanted a college once again—an institution of higher education founded on His principles and His teachings. This college would educate and train young people to become leaders. Some would become ministers and lead congregations that would continue to be established. Others would serve in the ever-growing Work, which would be headquartered on the campus.

God’s college would also be coeducational, training young women to take on vital roles in the Work beside their husbands. This new college would develop the character and personality of fresh, young, teachable minds, providing poised, properly cultured, well-rounded individuals. Ambassador College’s basic purpose was to teach its students how to live—not just how to make a living.

In spite of severe initial hardships, opposition and growing pangs, the college grew into a tremendous success. Within the 1950s, the benefits of a well-trained ministry were seen. Qualified ministers and assistants began taking their place in the field and at headquarters. Membership continued to grow.

Explosive Growth

During the turbulent 1960s, the Work and God's Church continued to mushroom in size and power. By the end of the decade, *The Plain Truth* reached more than 2.2 million copies per year. The Radio Church of God exploded in attendance, from approximately 7,000 in 1960 to more than 54,000 in North America by 1969.

Up until 1960, there had only been one Feast site for the brethren to attend God's fall festival. But in 1961, another site was added. Another came in 1963. By the end of the 60s, there were five major (and two smaller) Feast sites in North America, ranging from 7,602 to 12,250 attendees, with many additional sites located in other parts of the world. The Work was also exploding!

In the meantime, Ambassador College was also growing, acquiring new properties that greatly expanded the scope of the Pasadena campus, including the addition of properties nearby that were not directly contiguous with the 59-acre campus. The college began to take on an extraordinary, even breathtaking, beauty and contour of upper and lower campus that could only be likened to a very large, perfectly manicured garden. In fact, there were the lower gardens, the Italian sunken gardens, the Japanese gardens, and several others. The 1970s would see the college win national awards year after year, recognizing it as the most beautiful campus in America, and thus probably the world.

In 1960, a second campus opened, this time in the United Kingdom. Once again, Mr. Armstrong was led to another magnificently landscaped property, located on a ten-acre estate 19 miles northwest of London, in Bricket Wood.

With the Work growing around the world in quantum leaps, it was necessary to train more students with an international background so that they could return to serve in their own countries, either in the ministry or in the growing number of regional offices serving an expanding Church, now with members on every continent and in scores of countries.

Also in 1960, Mr. Armstrong completed his first trip around the world, in which he had arranged for 39 radio stations to blanket Australia with the program.

In 1964, God inspired Mr. Armstrong to establish yet one more Ambassador College campus, this time in Big Sandy, Texas.

International offices of the Work were set up and staffed in several countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, the

GROWTH OF THE PHILADELPHIA ERA

Under Herbert W. Armstrong's leadership, the membership of the Worldwide Church of God (previously called the Radio Church of God) mushroomed in size. Shown is the number of congregations that appeared over the years.

By 1960



By 1965



By 1976



Philippines, South Africa, New Zealand, Germany, Mexico and the Caribbean. These all allowed for greater efficiency in serving local peoples where they lived.

In 1967, *The Plain Truth* became a four-color magazine, with 52 pages per issue. By the end of the decade, the magazine had become truly respected and well-known, and was being read by every strata of society across the world, including the “rich and famous” and various world leaders, who understood that it was an absolutely unique publication, unlike anything else they were reading.

With the growing presence of *The World Tomorrow*, now expanded to include television, and the Work continuing to increase by 30 percent each year, the Church changed its corporate name to better reflect its size and growth. In 1968, the Radio Church of God became the Worldwide Church of God (WCG).

The 1960s were truly the decade that changed the Church and its impact around the world in carrying out Christ’s Great Commission of taking the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world—and warning the modern nations of Israel.

While the world was undergoing enormous changes in the “turbulent 60s,” none of them for the better, God’s Work was fast-forwarding, enjoying extraordinary unity, peace and growth. Though this was to change later, and in a dramatic way, wonderful fruit continued to be borne in virtually every aspect of the Work throughout the decade.

Visiting Heads of State

In 1968, Mr. Armstrong’s ministry entered an unprecedented new stage. King Leopold III of Belgium sent word through the Church’s German office that he would like to meet Mr. Armstrong. The two met at the king’s Belgian chateau, and started what became a long friendship. It also led to the opening of a monumental door—one that would put Mr. Armstrong in the presence of kings, presidents, prime ministers and other heads of state around the world.

Nothing in the first 35 years of the Church’s existence—or its first 1,900 years—would have signaled to Mr. Armstrong what God was about to do. He could not have imagined that he would eventually meet leaders such as India’s Indira Gandhi, Israel’s Golda Meir, the President of Indonesia, the President of the Philippines, Prince Mikasa of Japan, Egypt’s Anwar Sadat, England’s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the King of Thailand, and a great many others—over one-third of the world’s heads of state!

The City of Philadelphia



Growth Continues

By the 1970s, congregations existed in all of the larger and mid-size cities in the United States and Canada. Many existed in Britain, Australia and Africa, throughout Latin America, and around the world, with members in over 120 countries. Television was also utilized, beginning in earnest in the 1970s (with the exception of a brief 13-week television trial in the mid-1950s).

By the late 60s, and constantly until 1977, Mr. Armstrong was visiting world leaders, fulfilling his commission to witness to kings and leaders. Preaching the gospel of the soon-coming Kingdom of God occupied over 80 percent of his time—about 300 days a year. Not since the time of the original apostles, had the gospel message gone out in such power.

In 1977, Mr. Armstrong suffered complete heart failure. Those present insisted that, according to his vital signs, he was lifeless. CPR was administered and he was revived.

Upon rehabilitation, Mr. Armstrong found himself having to quell a rebellion, in which a liberal element within the ministry had been posturing for control of the Church during his extended absence. He was able to purge most of the instigators. In 1979, a small group of dissidents petitioned the state of California, which led to an attack by the state. They attempted to place the Worldwide Church of God into receivership, pending investigation of the dissidents' charges. This amounted to a major crisis for the Church and the Work. But, as He always had, Christ saw His Church through this crisis. Through Mr. Armstrong, He made some major moves over the next three and a half years to put the Church *back on track*.

The result would be dramatic!

Getting “Back on Track”

One by one, Mr. Armstrong re-established doctrines that had been watered down or discarded by the liberals who had been at work behind his back while he was traveling the world. He also set about to put the end-time Work “back on track.” This process consumed him and was the constant theme in the Church for at least three and a half years, from June 1978 until November 1981, when the use of cosmetics was again no longer permitted. During this period, the term “back on track” was used at least as often as Mr. Armstrong’s well-known reference to “the two trees” of Genesis 2 and 3.

Mr. Armstrong also turned his attention to the youth of God's Church. In Y.O.U. (Youth Opportunities United), weekend activities were set up for teenagers—basketball, track and field, dances, etc. The camps comprising the Summer Educational Program (S.E.P.) had already existed, teaching teens to broaden their interests and helping them to build confidence.

In 1981, a youth magazine (*Youth 81, 82, 83*, etc.) was launched. Each issue offered articles that pointed teens in the Church in the right direction, while helping them prepare for life's challenges. Y.E.S. (Youth Educational Services) lessons and activities were established for young children and preteens, teaching them God's ways.

The Feast of Tabernacles became the largest annual, multi-site convention on Earth. Full-page ads were published in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times*, among others. A massive international *Plain Truth* Newsstand Distribution Program was put into action.

Congregations that had stagnated in size for years suddenly returned to life. Once again, the Church was growing at almost 30 percent per year. Many thousands responded to the gospel and were moved to live a new way of life!

Statistical growth soon returned to the near-explosion level that had been enjoyed by the Church in nearly every category in which it had so recently been declining.

Herbert W. Armstrong Dies

In January of 1986, Herbert W. Armstrong died. For the first time, the Worldwide Church of God existed without his steadying leadership. Here was a very large Church and an immense organization that Christ had raised up. There had been two major crises in the 1970s, in which some members left the Church, but a complete apostasy had certainly not yet taken place. What happened in the 1970s was to be an enormous lesson, and a sobering warning for the 1990s. The Church has long understood that II Thessalonians 2:3 foretold a full defection from the truth (apostasy) just prior to the Return of Jesus Christ.

Would this lesson and warning be quickly forgotten?

For 3½ years, from mid-1978 through 1981, Mr. Armstrong taught, warned, encouraged, admonished, and corrected the Church and set it back on track, even being led by Christ to “rescue” it, on two occasions, from threats by dissenters from within. From January 1979, and for two years thereafter, he staunchly withstood what had been an illegal encroachment into the Church by the state of California.

Would God's people remember from whom they had learned the truth that they possessed, *in his absence*? Would all those loyal ministers still remain loyal *in his absence*? In less than a decade, the answers became all too apparent. Mr. Armstrong was dead and the brief Philadelphian Age would *very quickly end!* However, while the *era* was coming to an end, a faithful remnant of Philadelphia remained. These few will be discussed in Chapter Thirteen.

Time Like No Other

At this juncture, it is critical to summarize. Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly the Radio Church of God) from 1934 until his death in 1986. Over the course of his ministry, hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. The scope and power of his ministry was unprecedented in almost 2,000 years of New Testament Church history—and probably in all history!

Over time, God revealed, through this man, hundreds of true doctrines, which had been lost over the centuries. In a clear and powerful way, until his death, he also warned of terrible calamities prophesied for the modern nations descended from ancient Israel. Even though he came under extraordinary attack throughout his life, he never allowed this to deter him. Although Mr. Armstrong is gone, the huge impact of his ministry and God's warning through him still resonate.

But another condition—another way of thinking—had also been established. Christ described one more Church age to come—one more era or phase. Right on schedule, this weakest of all eras of Christ's Church arrived in the end time, and engulfed the majority of God's people.

Laodicea—the Blind Era

After the death of Herbert W. Armstrong, the Worldwide Church of God continued to follow the truths that had been placed into the Church under his leadership.

But this continuance lasted for no more than about one year.

Like Paul at the end of his life (Acts 20:17-38), Mr. Armstrong had also, in essence, “warned with tears,” for more than three years, of what could happen after his “departing.” He was most concerned with what could take place again if he were no longer in the picture.

His concerns proved to be well-founded. It quickly became obvious that wolves had entered the corporate sheepfold that Christ had founded through Mr. Armstrong. No one could have possibly imagined what would happen—nor how fast.

The apostasy foretold to come at the end of the age ushered in the Laodicean Era. It was intended by God to be a great test upon His people. Christ had to allow such a test to distinguish real brethren and true ministers from tares and imposters.

Now we would find out if the loyal ministers (and brethren) would *remain* loyal in Mr. Armstrong’s absence. I Corinthians 11:19 (which summarized this situation) reads, “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.”

The brethren who loved the truth would eventually start gravitating together outside the Worldwide Church of God, but the process would take over a decade to culminate.

Deplorable Condition

We should first look at the description in Revelation 3:14-22 of the final and Laodicean era of God's Church. These verses describe the awful condition of God's people at the end of the age. Notice Christ's strong correction and admonishment:

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would you were cold or hot. So then because you are *lukewarm*, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*: I counsel you to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, *that you may see*. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: *be zealous* therefore, and *repent*. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: *if any man* hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (vs. 15-20).

This scripture indicates that the Laodiceans are not COLD—they do have *some* zeal and *some* understanding of the truth, in contrast with the apostates who threw *everything* away. To these prosperous, *self-sufficient brethren*, who are content with their *own self-prescribed version of the truth*, Christ says, "I counsel you to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that you may be [spiritually] rich..."

An Apostasy Comes

Some important trends of the apostasy need to be summarized. In the latter half of the 1980s, most of the brethren were blissfully unaware that a hostile takeover of the Church had already occurred at the level of highest authority. But it was only a matter of time until it was made known. During this time, some of the preliminary doctrinal changes were subtly made, and the conspirators at first moved cautiously.

In fact, as early as 1987, beginning with the meaning of the Passover symbols, changes started to occur—with these early errors often referred to as "clarifications." Like all truths of God, changes invariably affected other doctrines. Altering or discarding one doc-

trine meant altering or discarding the others connected to it—and once these were changed, doctrines and traditions connected to them “had” to be changed as well.

One by one, *all* the teachings of God’s Church were either slowly altered, almost matter-of-factly, and then done away with completely, or discarded outright. At first, these changes began slowly—but they eventually escalated, furiously assaulting God’s people, and at unprecedented speed. All doctrine was openly said to be “on the table.” Brethren were initially told that they could “believe anything, but just stay in the Church and don’t talk about it to others.” But, for instance, anyone who taught that Christians must keep the Sabbath was to be disfellowshipped. This was also true of ministers who spoke out against other changes.

The Architecture of Destruction

Here are some of the things that took place in the Church after Mr. Armstrong’s “departing”:

All previous baptisms of new attendees from churches outside God’s Church were to be accepted as valid without question.

Many of the more doctrinally sound evangelists and senior ministers were demoted, retired, fired, or transferred far from Headquarters.

All Ambassador Colleges were eventually closed, due to the church’s financial implosion. The youth (Y.E.S.) Bible curriculum was replaced with a Protestant course containing teachings on Sunday observance, Christmas, and Easter.

Church Bible studies were cancelled at the local pastor’s discretion. Secular speakers began to appear at the Feast of Tabernacles. Following the formats of the churches of the world, church services began to include much more supposed “gospel” music and “prayer.” New baptism, marriage and funeral ceremonies were released. A new hymnal was produced that included many Protestant “favorites.” Pentecostal-like prayer meetings were added and often held weekly, with both men and women leading. Eventually, all biblically-based Feast sites were cancelled, and the entire format and meaning of the Holy Days were altered to fit traditional Christianity.

In addition, *The Good News* magazine, *The Plain Truth* Newsstand Program, *The World Tomorrow* telecast, and the 32-lesson *Bible Correspondence Course* were eventually discontinued. All the books, booklets and articles that Mr. Armstrong had written were removed from circulation and cast from local Church libraries. All publications began to reflect sexual and political correctness. Quotes from

Protestant ministerial journals and secular experts filled all WCG literature and telecasts. Money, not faith, determined which doors the Church walked through.

In time, virtually every one of the hundreds of true doctrines of the Bible were cast aside in favor of the world's popular (usually pagan) counterfeits. Eventually, with no exceptions, the Church's teachings and traditions were changed or done away. Birthday celebrations and eating unclean meats were brought into the Church, as were crosses and the trinitarian view of God—replacing the true God, and effectively disfellowshipping Him from what could then no longer be His Church. Therefore, His Law—the Ten Commandments—eventually had to be cast aside and declared “non-binding” on Christians, supposedly now, according to Protestant belief, kept for them by Christ and “nailed to the cross.”

Those of the true Church—not to be confused with the *corporate* Worldwide Church of God—faced a life-changing decision: leave and, as Mr. Armstrong often said he would do if necessary, “walk across the street and start over,” or stay and be devoured by “grievous wolves” occupying the highest ranks of the ministry.

Tragically, following history's pattern, most members would choose the latter!

History Repeats Itself

After the original apostles died, you learned that the false church did come in and largely destroy the *visible* Church, and because of persecution, often including threats, imprisonment, torture and death, most people gave in and departed from the truth of God's Way, and therefore from the true Church, during the period called “The Lost Century.” Yet, as Jesus promised, His Church has always survived. It has never completely disappeared or been destroyed—though it *has* certainly remained a “little flock” that has kept His Word, and the Church that has been kept in God's name.

Peter warned, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be *false teachers among you*, who privily shall bring in DAMNABLE HERESIES, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And *many shall follow their pernicious ways*; by reason of whom THE WAY OF TRUTH shall be *evil spoken of*. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of *you*” (II Pet. 2:1-3).

Before his death, Paul explicitly warned the Ephesian elders to understand what would happen after he was gone. Notice: “Take

heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to *feed the Church of God...* For I know this, that after my departing shall *grievous wolves enter* in among you, *not sparing the flock*. Also of your own selves shall men arise, *speaking perverse things*, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).

History records that this is *exactly* what happened during (and after) The Lost Century.

So, a major defection within the true Church happened again at the end of the twentieth century, occurring precisely as Peter and Paul had warned would happen in the first-century Church. This requires explanation.

Summary of Events—and Reaction

God called me into His truth in 1966. I was blessed to learn and to know His marvelous Plan and to be personally trained by Herbert W. Armstrong. My relationship with this man primarily began when I met and married his secretary in 1971.

God used Mr. Armstrong to re-establish truths that had been lost to His Church for centuries. Attendance in the Church exceeded 130,000 shortly after his death—when his successors did, in fact, “enter in” and “arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”

From the time of Mr. Armstrong’s death in January 1986, this process of destruction lasted approximately nine years. As has been the historical pattern, the vast majority (perhaps three-quarters) completely departed from the truth, the true Church and the true God. They scattered back into the world or remained where they were, returning to and re-accepting hundreds of false doctrines and practices. (The complete story has been told in my book *There Came a Falling Away*.)

The other 25 percent, who did not accept the direction of the false teachers who captured the visible corporation, also scattered into a variety of organizations that held to varying amounts of the truth the Church had learned under Mr. Armstrong’s leadership. Who these groups represent in prophecy will be revisited later.

All that I have described here was actually prophesied to occur. Paul was also inspired to foretell and warn of this latter-day falling away just before the Return of Christ. Notice what he recorded: “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [the Return of Christ described two verses earlier] shall not come, except there come a *fall-*

Overview of Church Eras

Below is a listing of the seven successive eras along with the approximate dates and key events of each era. (The term “RC” in the chart is an abbreviation for Roman Catholic.)

CHURCH ERA	DATES (approx.)	EVENTS
Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7)	AD 31-100	Apostolic era (AD 31-98). Persecution begins at Rome (AD 64). Church flees to Pella; Jerusalem falls (AD 69-70).
Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11)	AD 100-325	Church leaders attempt to combat heresy (AD 150s-190s). Ten years of severe persecution (Rev 2:10; AD 303-313). Nicene Council outlaws true religion; Church flees (AD 325).
Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17)	AD 325-1000	Constantine of Mananali leads Church (about AD 675). Sergius leads Church (about AD 800). Paulicians relocate to Balkans (about AD 800-900).
Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29)	AD 1000-1600	Peter DeBruys and Henry of Lausanne lead Church (1104-1135). Peter Waldo leads Church (1161-1217). RC Inquisition begins against Church (1229). Gutenberg Bibles printed (1450). RC persecution for the 1,260 years restrained after 1585. Destruction of Spanish Armada (1588).
Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6)	1600-1934	Church revives in England as persecution abates (1600s). Bampfields and Stennetts lead Church (about 1650-1750). Stephen Mumford establishes Church in America; 1668. Arriving immigrants set up churches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey (1700s). Many depart Church to align with Adventists (1840s-1860s). Church of God Seventh Day established in Stanberry, Mo. (early 1900s).
Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13)	1934-1980s	Herbert W. Armstrong begins first radio broadcast (1934). Radio broadcast begins in Europe (1953). Literature, TV and radio reach over 100 million (1970-1980s). Mr. Armstrong dies (1986).
Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22)	1980s-present	Remnants fragment after apostasy into many disagreeing, doctrinally compromised groups and organizations.

ing away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (II Thes. 2:3). (The man of sin referred to here is one who appears at the end of the age, not in the first century.)

Paul explained that this falling away would affect all who “received not the *love of the truth*, that they might be saved” (II Thes. 2:10). The Greek word for “falling away” is *apostasia*, meaning literally “to defect from the truth.”

When God called me, this prophesied “falling away” had, of course, not yet occurred. While all in the Church had been warned it was coming, most still became entangled in false teachings because they had not stayed close to God, as they should have, through fervent prayer, Bible study, meditation and regular fasting. They were caught unaware.

Reality Crashes Home!

By the middle of the 1990s, the realization of what was happening struck home to those who were led by God’s Spirit. Now it had become apparent to all who had eyes to see and ears to hear that a full-blown apostasy—this time, a *wholesale departure* from the truth—was taking place. The doctrinal changes had moved far beyond the liberals’ watering down of true doctrines that had occurred in the mid-1970s.

In place of the truth, a newly reinvented form of evangelical Protestantism had been presented to the Church. The instigators no longer needed to make any effort to conceal the conspiracy. Mr. Armstrong and everything that he stood for were openly ridiculed by the apostate leaders.

Through the years, Mr. Armstrong had thundered to the Church, “I don’t think most of you get it!” Little did he know how right he actually was.

Most “brethren” left the truth with barely a second thought—as easily as they would leave a restaurant, or take a sip of coffee. Those who stayed in the WCG embraced their new “freedom” in rejecting tithing, God’s Sabbath, His annual Holy Days and Feasts, and a host of other laws and principles of God. Truly, as the apostle Peter had warned, the “sow had returned to her wallowing in the mire” and the “dog had returned to his vomit” (II Pet. 2:22).

Amazingly, about 60 percent of what were thought to be God’s people, from an original number that had grown by 1990 to above 150,000 (and perhaps up to as many as 160,000), vanished into thin air—back into the world. These three-fifths, about 90,000, just disappeared entirely. Some of these gave up religion altogether. Others returned to the professing Christian denominations they had formerly attended.

The City of Laodicea



However, perhaps another 25,000 to 30,000 people *remained* in the now spiritually dead WCG itself, in the ruse of following (blindly), as supposed, “God’s government.” This was in spite of the fact that the men who had seized and were carrying out the church’s government had thrown out the truth, what defines—the *only* thing that defines!—the Church of God, and thus where God’s government could reside and continue.

Together, these two groups were perhaps 120,000 (or 75 percent) who had willingly given up all of the truth.

Again, the remaining approximately 25 percent stayed faithful to *varying degrees* of truth. Of course, to do this, they had to leave the corporate organization (WCG). However, the vast majority of those who left voiced their pet ideas of what doctrines and traditions to keep and which to alter or throw away. Essentially, they agreed that Mr. Armstrong was right about many teachings—but they could not agree on where they felt he was wrong, and thus, could not “walk together” (Amos 3:3). These would eventually split and re-split into more than 300 differing groups—“splinters” and “slivers”—together constituting the new Laodicean Era.

In contrast, of the “surviving” 25 percent, again following the pattern of history, only a *tiny fraction* strove to hold to *all the truth* that God had given through Mr. Armstrong!

A New Equilibrium

After about 1995, a certain at least partial “equilibrium” seemed to slowly take shape. The remaining approximately 35,000 somewhat “surviving” believers had sought and found new corporate homes in the wake of the apostasy. These brethren (with certain—and many!—flatterers accompanying them) had begun searching among those leaders who—they thought—had “stood up for the truth.” But, having only retained *varying portions* of the truth themselves, these brethren unconsciously sought leaders and fellow brethren who were like-minded. However, in every case, they generally saw themselves as “standing for the truth.”

The Larger Groups

A brief profile of the bigger organizations that appeared in the wake of the apostasy further defines what has become today’s picture of Laodicea.

In December 1989, the first post-apostasy splinter was created—The Philadelphia Church of God. This organization, trading on the

name “Philadelphia,” which was all that some needed to hear to trust its leader, eventually became home to several thousands, who went there believing that it would help them “hold fast” to the full truth. This group eventually settled into following a self-professed prophet. This man went on to take many titles that belong to God. Seeing almost every large and small prophecy in the Bible mangled, many—but tragically not all—true brethren who followed him have already fled his destructive influence, but others continue to pass through this organization’s painful cycle of disillusionment.

Two years later, in December 1991, another man left to form the relatively small Church of the Great God. This man claimed that the Work of the Church was completed and that Mr. Armstrong had wrongly over-emphasized preaching the gospel. As a result, producing no fruit in the Great Commission, and filled with doctrinal errors, over time, several hundred people came and went from his group. It has always remained about the same small number.

In January 1993, a third group formed—the Global Church of God. Relatively quickly growing to several thousand in attendance, it was led by a self-proclaimed “senior evangelist” who ultimately held to less truth than the first group, but who did not take titles belonging to Christ. This organization suffered a split in 1998, and from that point came to be known as the Living Church of God. It has continued to suffer even more loss of truth over time, and has never returned to its size prior to the split.

As a side note, it was the Global Church of God that I entered in March 1993, believing the leader’s initial—and solemn—promise to compromise *none* of the doctrines taught by Mr. Armstrong. (Recognizing that the first two groups described just above were not even remotely options that I could consider, I continued for a time in the Worldwide Church of God teaching the truth without compromise, and trying to warn as many as possible, until the time came that the organization would terminate me for unwillingness to accept their repackaged Protestantism.) I remained with the Global Church of God until May 1999, when it became absolutely clear that its leaders were not going to either acknowledge or continue in all of the doctrines taught by Mr. Armstrong. My extensive personal biography tells much more of this story.

In May 1995, the largest splinter formed—the United Church of God. It consisted of several hundred ministers and certain senior WCG “leaders,” and close to 20,000 people at its inception. This last-to-leave wave of brethren and ministers had finally decided to end their inaction after witnessing almost 300 doctrinal changes. They

organized under the leadership of an elected committee, which in turn elected the organization's leader. While this organization has more members and ministers than all the other large and small groups put together, it has by far the least amount of truth.

In 1998, the United Church of God also suffered a major split within its ranks, losing approximately 2,000 attendees, when the church's president, upon being voted out of office, decided to start his own church. As with the Global Church, this split was essentially a power struggle between two factions on its elected committee, and was almost entirely unrelated to doctrine. Both of these two large organizations have continued to suffer additional smaller offshoots leaving their ranks.

Like the majority who remained in Sardis, the United Church of God, having begun with many false doctrines already in place, may soon pass out of Christianity altogether. This is because both ministry and followers continue to devise and accept additional wrong teachings, and are watering down most of the remaining truths they have. This organization's march back to the world continues to accelerate even beyond the most liberal early forecasts.

The Philadelphia Church of God has also suffered numerous splits—probably more than any other group—often over administration and a truly tyrannical, dictatorial government, but more often over the leader's unbiblical supposed "new revelations," similar to what Ellen G. White proffered to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The tiny "slivers" that have left it invariably get into their own equally confused wrong understanding of even the largest points of prophecy.

The result of all this has been that the Living Church of God and a couple of other smaller groups generally came to see themselves as the best "option"—as the "true remnant of Philadelphia"—believing themselves to be more balanced, loving and "able to grow" than the Philadelphia Church of God, and more zealous and doctrinally faithful than the United Church of God.

All of these groups, with numerous other small ones, forgot that Christ's Church is one, undivided organization under God's form of government, and that it both teaches all of the doctrines of the Bible and carries out the Great Commission as the Bible reveals and as Mr. Armstrong taught it to the Church.

Worshippers—Not Followers

The apostasy proved itself able to expose every kind of wrong thinking present in the Church. For instance, and this became a serious

problem, some former brethren demonstrated themselves not to be *followers* of what Mr. Armstrong taught (I Cor. 4:16; 11:1), but rather those who unwittingly *worshipped* him—the man.

In this sense, some of the brethren who “survived” the apostasy proved to be little different than Catholics, in that they fell into a kind of unwitting adoration of Mr. Armstrong’s *person*, instead of continuing to worship God while holding to the doctrines Mr. Armstrong was taught by Christ. Just as Catholics claim to look to Mary, but in reality *worship* her instead of *God and Christ*, these former WCG members seem to also require a physical representation—a *human idol*—in order to practice their religion. Yet virtually none seem able to see this in themselves.

Certain people who attended the Worldwide Church of God also left and formed a variety of tiny, or very tiny, splinters—another category of “slivers”—or just stayed home, listening to Mr. Armstrong’s tapes and little else. These ceased to grow. Circumstances whiplashed this particular faction to the extreme right. Such arch-conservatives need to focus on a *PERSON* to aid in their worship, and this caused them to lose sight of continuing the Work that Mr. Armstrong did or in actually *practicing* the truths that they had learned from him.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the apostle John recorded a principle that has application to this kind of thinking. Notice: “But the hour comes, and now is, when the *true worshippers* shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship Him. GOD IS A SPIRIT: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (4:23-24).

In the end, the apostasy produced an astonishing array of wrong thinking, wrong doctrine, wrong administration, wrong ideas, wrong focus—and wrong conduct. Human nature had been unleashed, and there was no reining it in after this had happened. Rebels, false teachers, flatterers, religious hobbyists, false prophets, axe-grinders, opportunists, politicians, troublemakers, gossips, demagogues and imposters of every conceivable kind had permanently emerged to take their place within the landscape of the final era.

However, we will see that the “true worshippers” John referred to did survive!

Defining Laodicea

Laodiceans can be described as those who keep some—and in a few cases many—of God’s laws and ways. However, they lack the zeal necessary to represent the Philadelphian condition.

In summary, the Worldwide Church of God corporate leadership and its remaining followers completely left the truth, making it a dead church. Before continuing, and before one can understand all that has happened since, it must be recognized that those reflecting Laodicean thinking and those reflecting a Philadelphian desire not to compromise truth both left the Worldwide Church of God! To conclude otherwise is to believe that the WCG is still part of Laodicea. Therefore, brethren of two different interests—but both initially in the same general *condition!*—were forced to flee together. As explained, this departure process from the WCG continued throughout the 90s.

To properly understand the Laodicean Era, a reference to Revelation 3:10-11, pertaining to Philadelphia, is necessary. Notice: “Because you have kept the word of My patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth (vs. 10). Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown” (vs. 11).

Verse 10 deals with Christ’s warning to His servants about escaping the horrific calamities to befall the world in the near future. Verse 11, the charge to “*hold...fast* what you have,” is applicable to God’s people at all times, but especially at this juncture, when the pressures are such that this instruction had to be repeated with emphasis! Christ admonishes those of Philadelphia to remain faithful until He “comes quickly.”

The promise to be kept “from the hour of temptation [trial]” (Rev. 3:10) applies to a Philadelphian remnant continuing into and through the Laodicean Era. Those who remain truly faithful are protected!

History—Full Circle

Recall the differing classes of Ebionites who existed in the Smyrna Era. In the center were those former Nazarenes who maintained the apostles’ teachings to the letter. These were the fewest in number and most despised by the majority that had rejected the law of God. The majority faction accused them of causing division by not moving along with the bigger group. These were the liberals who, in following leaders like Marcus, were prone to compromise, adopting the latest intellectual fad—in that case, Gnosticism. Likewise, the faithful Quartodecimani of Asia Minor were betrayed by the “enlightened” majority who abandoned the truth. At the other end of the spectrum were those who seemed more comfortable with a Pharisaical code of beliefs in an atmosphere of despotism.

History has repeated itself, going full circle. Such shades of the past historic spectrum have come into existence in this final era of the

Church—in the twenty-first century. As Solomon said, “There is no new thing under the sun.” God’s people continue to make the same mistake for generations, centuries and millennia, and this was foretold to be the case at the very end of the age.

The People Rule

The word *Laodicea* means “the people rule, judge or decide.” The doctrinal divisions that characterize this last age, endless false teachings that have split the people of this era into many different competing groups, reflect how the *people’s rule* precludes *Christ’s rule* among His brethren outside His faithful Church.

We saw that the final and Laodicean era of the Church is described by Christ as “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” He also says that this era is “lukewarm” and lacking in zeal (Rev. 3:14-22). This passage describes Christ’s offer to all who have held to part of the truth. This last era is now dominant, and is to remain so just prior to the soon-coming Return of Jesus Christ.

Christ is outside all the organizations in which the people are deciding doctrines for themselves. (Philadelphians hold to all truth because they are determined to “let no man take their crown” – Rev. 3:11). In Revelation 3:20, He says to all in this era, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.” He is personally “calling” these sheep “by name” out of danger (John 10:3-5), not only from physical harm later, but from real threats to their spiritual existence now, and eternally. (For former members and those otherwise once affiliated with the Worldwide Church of God, my book “*Anoint Your Eyes*” – *Christ’s Warning to His People* offers much more detail about the *transition from the age of Philadelphia to Laodicea*. This vital book was written for any with an interest in learning how to recover from the condition affecting the final era.)

Jesus will continue to call Laodiceans “by name” (John 10:3-4) and knock on their doors. Sadly, many in this era will continue to shut Him out spiritually and will not be protected from the events soon to come upon an unsuspecting world (Luke 21:34-36)!

Peaceful Coexistence

Just as Mr. Armstrong strove to live peacefully alongside the Sardis era of the Church, and bore them no ill will, Philadelphians today strive to live peacefully (Philadelphia means “brotherly love”) with

those of a Laodicean mindset and bear them no ill will. We know that many more will awaken to Christ's warning and return to God's Church, and we are striving to warn them of what lies ahead. (In fact, a great prophecy found throughout the Bible shows that all of God's people will be regathered back into the true Church—one organization—at the end of the age.) However, *this* book is not written for or specifically directed to these weak brethren. It is to instruct *new* people that God is calling now (those hearing the truth for the *first* time). But it must include the above thorough description of eras so these are better able to understand recent events in the true Church, and to avoid the same pitfalls into which so many others fell!

Now we can focus on the present location of the true Church.

A Few Remain Faithful— The Restored Church of God

Many write us with questions about who and what we are. Most commonly the question is simply: What is The Restored Church of God? It is this Church of which I am Pastor General.

The organization with which you have come in contact is unique in every sense—different from all others on Earth. It is one whose members are dedicated to letting their light shine in a world desperately needing light!

This chapter brings the compelling story of a Church empowered by a deep conviction, derived from understanding that genuinely happy lives can be a reality now—and that a wonderful world is soon to come to all nations!

Two Stories

In 1979, a newspaper reporter contacted a pastor serving a large congregation in the Northeastern United States, requesting to interview the pastor and attend services. An article was to result from the reporter's interview and his impression of the services he attended. At that time, the church had suddenly come to national attention, and most were generally unaware of its beliefs.

However, the promised article for the newspaper's Sunday edition never appeared. Wondering why, the pastor called the reporter, who confessed that he had originally intended to indict the Church as a cult, but no longer had the heart to do so. When asked why, he explained that

seeing so many friendly, happy people completely disarmed him, and this caused him to abandon his article.

This Church also held the world's largest annual multi-site convention, with over 120 sites spanning the globe. Wherever its members gathered, it made an enormous impression. One example: The Georgia State Patrol assigned to the convention site at Jekyll Island, Georgia, indicated that over 10,000 church members there were much more manageable than a few hundred police officers meeting for a nearby convention.

The cooperation of the attendees and the fact that the Church appointed its own traffic, parking and security officials translated into the Georgia State Patrol needing no additional help. All other conventions (including the law officers' convention) required substantially more patrolmen, with numerous difficulties for those responsible for maintaining order.

Invariably, reporters around the world noted that these conventions were a delight to host. They enjoyed seeing so many well-mannered families enter local convention centers. "Unpretentious," "down-to-earth," "happy" and "sincere people radiating an inner peace" were often-used terms describing this Church.

Why is this missing in today's world? What did these people know that everyone else does not? Is there more to this than meets the eye?

Universal Desire

All people long for happy, peaceful, abundant lives. But how many today actually enjoy this kind of wonderful life?

Knowledge is exploding! Mankind has produced astonishing materialistic progress. Breakthroughs in science and technology have never been greater. But have they been able to bring a rich, full, joyful life to everyone? Have education and the knowledge explosion brought this? Has religion succeeded in producing peaceful, abundant lives worldwide? Have governments found the answers to mankind's greatest questions? Are statesmen providing the example leading to the way that produces true happiness?

In every case, the clear answer is NO! Plain answers are lacking.

Vast new frontiers of expanding scientific knowledge have not brought the happiness that leaders and scientists prophesied would accompany it. Neither have laborsaving devices, which were supposed to bring people more leisure time to "enjoy themselves." Instead, mental illness, loneliness, self-pity and despair, suicide, alcoholism, drug addiction, as well as other forms of escapism, and general discontent with life, abound everywhere.

Immorality and human degeneration have never been worse. The world is filled with problems—famine, poverty, civil unrest, disease, pollution, religious confusion, war, terrorism, crime, debt, ignorance and political upheaval. And things continually grow worse.

Marriage is under assault as never before. Adultery is rampant—traditional home and family life is blurring and in danger of becoming extinct. The vast majority of families are now broken, confused and out of control, with countless children growing up without both parents. Teen-aged pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases are fast becoming the norm. Parents feel helpless in raising moral children in today's immoral world.

Thousands of wars have been fought in the name of religion. Hundreds of millions of lives have been wiped out in the name of peace! Still there is no peace! Humanly-devised solutions always fail to bring lasting peace—anywhere in the world.

At every turn, mankind has bungled and botched all efforts to solve its biggest problems. As a result, humanity suffers from every conceivable evil and ill. Misery, confusion, unhappiness, discontent, and desperation abound.

But there *is* a way that produces true happiness and peace. Some have discovered a way of life and are living and following this way that yields joy, contentment, prosperity, true success—and lasting fulfillment.

Yet, this includes only a few. Why? The answer lies in a basic *law*.

A Great Unseen Law

There are many unseen laws that govern life. For example, everyone understands the law of gravity. If one accidentally drops a brick on his foot, the result could be broken bones. If a skydiver jumps from an airplane, and the parachute fails to open, the result is certain death. This is easy to understand.

Here are some examples of another unseen law that is just as real. If a person is constantly sick, it is obvious that laws of health (proper diet, enough exercise, sufficient sleep, etc.) are being broken. The *effect* of bad health has one or more *causes*. If a marriage ends in divorce, it can also be attributed to one or more causes: lack of communication, financial woes, death of a child, sexual problems, unhappiness on the job, etc. If someone is arrested for drunk driving, it is not hard to see the *cause* of the arrest.

Most never identify “cause and effect” as a universal **LAW** governing almost every action in life. They are unaware that this is a general principle at work in the world.

Every effect can be traced to one or more causes. Unwanted or illegitimate pregnancies, crime, drug addiction, bankruptcy, and a thousand other effects, can all be linked to specific causes.

But why can man not see this law at work when looking either at the world as a whole or at lives individually? Why has religion also ignored this important relationship between cause and effect?

There *is* a hidden cause for the conditions of the world and its inhabitants.

However, aware of this, there are some, scattered around the world, living joyful, abundant lives. These people stand out, glowing with genuine happiness, having purpose in their lives. But this is not due to luck or chance—there is a *cause*! Most people ignore right causes—and, as a result, reap a host of bad effects.

God-Centered Way of Life

The cause, for both ends of the spectrum, involves one's way of life. Those few experiencing happy lives follow God's Way. They are members of the Church of God, known today as The Restored Church of God, the successor to the Church described in the middle chapters of the book, and in the beginning of this chapter. Each member is dedicated to LIVING Christianity!

It could be said that there are two different ways of life. One is best described as the "give" way—the way of *love* and *outgoing concern*—God's Way! The other is the opposite or "get" way—the way of *selfishness* and *self-concern*—the way of this world. For 6,000 years, man has lived his own way—the *get* way.

Most people are interested in enjoying pleasures and accumulating physical things. As has been observed, "Life is about seeing who can die with the most toys." That may be true of this world, but it is not true of the Christian way.

Christ taught, "It is more blessed to GIVE than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Practicing *this* way of life leads to the abundance, peace, prosperity, supreme happiness and joy all seek. The Restored Church of God follows the same way that Christ and the original apostles taught.

God's *spiritual* Law—summarized in the Ten Commandments—can be separated into two basic categories: (1) Love toward God, as expounded in the first four commandments. Christ summarized them in Matthew 22:37: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and (2) love toward fellow man, summarized in the last six commandments: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (vs. 39).

Practicing—*living!*—God’s Way is the CAUSE of the happiness of those in this Church. Each member, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is dedicated to living the way of GIVE—the God-centered way of life. The Restored Church of God is a united body of people focused on making a difference in the lives of individuals. It is determined to help others, to teach them this same way.

The happiness that true Christians experience is not a shallow, false happiness. It runs deep in the life of each member. Why? Because a God-centered way of life produces this! In fact, the Bible is literally filled with passages about joy and happiness, but few know of them.

God—the Creator of all life on Earth—gave mankind a detailed *Instruction Manual* containing vital information, explaining *what* we are, *why* we are, and *where* we are going. While the manuals and textbooks of institutions of higher learning teach students *how to make a living*, man’s Maker teaches him *how to live*, through His Word—the Holy Bible. God’s people are dedicated to following His Word and to living by every principle that derives from it. They live these principles and experience the effects—happy marriages and families, productive lives and careers, contentment and fulfillment.

But what about the rest of the world? Again, *why* is there so much evil today? *Why* the increasing crime, unrest, rioting, wars and violence? *Why* is immorality exploding? *Why* do over half of marriages in today’s society fail?

Civilization has lost—completely ignored—crucial information!

Knowledge Was Lost

Humanity has lost the knowledge of God’s way of life and how to live it. Man does not know *why* he is, *what* he is and *where* he is going. Society has lost the understanding that brings happiness, joy and prosperity. It does not know the way to peace (Rom. 3:17; Isa. 59:8).

Why is this?

As simple as this may sound, the cause of all the world’s troubles began in the Garden of Eden. God had first created all things and had taught Adam what is right and wrong—but Adam insisted on deciding right and wrong for himself. Humanity has followed Adam’s decision—and way—and been miserable ever since!

The world has lost sight of a decision made by Adam and Eve. They chose not to eat of the Tree of Life, which God had told them they could freely do, choosing instead to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, referenced earlier. Again, mankind ever after has followed in their footsteps—the way of GET.

This explains a modern world filled with troubles, evils and ills! The knowledge and understanding of God's Way became lost.

From Creation, until the First Coming of Jesus Christ, only a few followed *God's* instructions regarding right and wrong. Adam's son Abel chose the right way of life. Several generations later, Enoch walked with God. His great-grandson Noah was the only person of his day who followed God. His son Shem followed in his footsteps. Soon after the flood, there was Abraham, the father of the faithful. Following him were Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

In the time of Moses, God raised up His nation, Israel. He made a covenant with the Israelites, yet they rebelled soon after. While God attempted to have the Israelites follow His Way, they rejected Him. At the same time, the rest of the world continued in the original way that Adam and Eve chose.

This was the world before Christ—one in which only a tiny few walked with God. Almost all had rebelled, and the knowledge of God's Way was lost to the vast majority. This was a world needing a Savior to reconcile it to its Creator. It was during this period that many prophets brought the *good news* of a Messiah soon to come with a message for all nations.

The Messenger and His Announcement

Jesus came not to save the world and rule as King *then*, but rather as a Messenger—a newscaster—with an announcement. His message was the gospel—meaning, *good news*—of the coming KINGDOM OF GOD.

In order to announce the Kingdom of God, Christ had to first overcome Satan, the god of this world. This would qualify Him to *replace* Satan and become King of God's soon-coming Kingdom.

He also came to reconcile mankind to the Father. From the moment Adam and Eve rejected God, humanity has been cut off from God (Isa. 59:1-2)—and from the knowledge of the give way, which produces the good things in life. Being perfect, Christ gave His life for humanity. By His sacrifice—His death—He paid the penalty for the sins of all.

The Kingdom that Christ announced is the world government of Almighty God, soon to come, which will rule all nations and bring everlasting peace and prosperity. *This* gospel message included the fact that, upon repentance and faith, people could become God's begotten children. Then, after a lifetime of overcoming, growing and giving, these begotten children would one day be born again, entering God's Kingdom, at the Resurrection.

Birth of the Church and God's Work

Jesus understood and taught His disciples that of Himself He could do nothing (John 5:30). The Spirit of God enabled Him to accomplish all that He did. Prior to His ascension to heaven, Christ told His disciples He would send them God's Spirit.

This event, the beginning of the Church of God, occurred in AD 31. Jesus described the significance of what happened: "But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). God then gave His Holy Spirit to 120 disciples, quickly followed by 3,000 more raised up to support the work of the twelve apostles.

The Work of God also began at this same time. Delivering to the world (in this age to all nations) the gospel—the GOOD NEWS of the coming Kingdom—the *true* gospel!—has always been the Work of God! Infused with the Holy Spirit, God's people were now empowered to fulfill His mission.

When Jesus stated, "I will build My Church" it went far beyond just beginning, increasing and caring for it. There is a marvelous TRANSCENDENT PURPOSE for the Church Christ built!

God's Work—The Mission

Christ's Church has a mission. Every member is called to become a part of the exciting Work of God.

This mission—this Work of LOVE—has a two-fold commission. The First Commission is "Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The Second Commission is to feed the flock of God—to supply each member of God's Church with spiritual food (John 21:15-17). As God's members are fed, they grow spiritually, allowing them to serve and dedicate themselves more to the First or Great Commission.

Fulfilling the First Commission is far more complex today than in the age in which the original apostles lived. However, teaching in the information age is also more exciting. Vast amounts of knowledge travel at incomprehensible speed. Within all this information is the refreshing knowledge of God's way of life. The Restored Church of God is spreading the gospel at a rate and efficiency that the Church has never before seen. Great numbers of people can now learn as much as they wish, when they wish—and as fast or often as they

choose. Many millions around the world are learning sound, proven principles, straight from their Bibles, helping them to live happier lives and become better citizens.

The Restored Church of God is a fountain of true knowledge in a parched world grappling with ever-increasing evils!

The First Century Work Falters

Under the original apostles' leadership, the initial growth of the Church was dramatic. But almost immediately after the first generation of the Church, we saw that the Work began to falter. It lost momentum due to Roman persecution and, as we saw, pressures from the rise of a different church.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Work ebbed and its warning to the world grew faint. But it never died. Christ promised that His Church would never disappear, and therefore neither would its Work! By the early twentieth century, as the vitality of the Church and Work was waning, a new era arrived. The time had come for God's end-time message to go around the world.

A New Era—A New Life

We learned that, in the fall of 1926, God called and soon began to use a man named Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986). He led the Church of God for 52 years, beginning in late 1933, when he established the Radio Church of God (later named the Worldwide Church of God).

With the arrival of the twentieth century, the time had come for Christ's message to go to the entire world. Under Mr. Armstrong's extraordinary leadership, a new era emerged, resembling the first century Church. It was an era that had vitality, experienced tremendous growth throughout the world, and focused on living and sharing the way of GIVE. Empowered by God's Holy Spirit, the living Jesus Christ was its active Head. Over time, God restored to the Church all the teachings that had been lost through the centuries. With these teachings was the all-important centerpiece—the *true* gospel message.

This message, suppressed for centuries, was now revived!

With the passing of time, the Work of God exploded beyond imagination. Doors opened before the Church as it diligently strove to spread Christ's gospel message.

The Worldwide Church of God averaged 30% growth each year for the first 35 years after 1934—1935 through 1969. This allowed God's message to boom forth all over the world.

In 1934, *The World Tomorrow* broadcast went on the air for the first time. Starting very small, on only a single 100-watt radio station, the program eventually grew to 400 radio and television stations, with an estimated 250 million listeners!

The Plain Truth—a free magazine of understanding—was published for the first time in February 1934. This magazine dealt with world issues, family values, health and proper education. Again, this also started small, with only 250 copies printed. Yet, Christ's voice was behind the message of *The Plain Truth* and we saw the magazine grow to a subscription of 8.27 million worldwide, with an estimated 25 million readers.

In 1947, the Church founded a college. This was needed to provide God's ever-expanding Work with an educated ministry. In time, the Church had established three colleges, focused on making a difference in the lives of their students—teaching them how to live, not just how to earn a living.

Booklets about God's laws, His Master Plan, the true gospel, the Sabbath, the Holy Days, dating, marriage, smoking, drugs, managing personal finances, the laws of success, true conversion and so many others were given freely to a great many people. Readers were taught how to live!

As the Worldwide Church of God expanded, many lives were touched. Vast millions read and heard the truth of God's way of life. They began to understand that there is another way—a life of giving, and understanding spiritual cause and effect—a God-centered path through the maze of confusion and unhappiness of today's world. Many outside the Church experienced the benefits of this wonderful education.

Yet, just as the Work faltered a generation after the first-century Church began, it also faltered after the death of Mr. Armstrong.

Recent Church History

In a truly historic move, and creating one of the great (albeit tragic) stories in religion of the twentieth century, the leaders who succeeded Mr. Armstrong eventually changed all of his teachings. As time passed, it became clear that the Worldwide Church of God was no longer growing, but rather shrinking. The magnitude and influence of God's clear, powerful message faded, and was eventually lost altogether.

This caused several groups to separate from that church. But it must be underscored that all groups that left had accepted some of the doctrinal changes taught by the new Worldwide Church of God leadership.

Those who realized the need to hold to the complete, original teachings, to fully follow *God's Law of Love* (I John 5:3; Rom. 13:10), saw that every organization had accepted some changes. Desiring to keep intact the entire formula, which, again, yields such wonderful peace, happiness and abundance, The Restored Church of God was formed. Those holding to the full truth continued to be led by Christ, allowing them to successfully carry on the magnificent, enriching Work of God.

Pastor General of the Church, David C. Pack, ordained in the Worldwide Church of God, and serving in the ministry since 1971, came to realize that no leader or organization was upholding all the original doctrines taught by Mr. Armstrong. Having been personally trained by Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Pack understood the need to continue the mission as he had been taught and to reach the entire world with the same gospel message. Under his leadership, The Restored Church of God was born.

Recapturing True Doctrines

Though all of the many biblical truths were thought to have disappeared in the smoke and haze of the turbulent apostasy and aftermath, each one has been carefully restored to its original state, in The Restored Church of God. Mr. Armstrong personified the Philadelphian Era and the Work with *The World Tomorrow* broadcast, *The Plain Truth* magazine and many other books, booklets and articles.

Likewise, in this most turbulent and perilous of times, Christ selected an individual, especially prepared for the job of helping to gather the Philadelphian remnant, feeding and defending that collective flock, taking the gospel to all nations and continuing the special warning to the modern nations descended from ancient Israel. He is also commissioned to warn those of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14) of what lies ahead for them if they do not "anoint their eyes" to recover from spiritual blindness (vs. 18). And, just as Mr. Armstrong personified the Work in the previous era, so The Restored Church of God reflects the Philadelphian Work in this final era because nothing less than a relentless energy and drive, that characterized Mr. Armstrong, could possibly complete the job that looms ahead.

New Leadership

By way of very brief background, The Restored Church of God leader, David C. Pack, was called into the truth in the middle of 1966. He was sent into the full-time ministry in 1971 and has directly served

or pastored many thousands of brethren over these decades. For over fifteen straight years, Mr. Pack was sent to numerous troubled Church areas to reestablish order where the previous pastor had resigned, or had been suspended or terminated.

After various opportunities to gain additional experience by developing certain projects, while serving as a field pastor, he later served on the Council of Elders and as a Regional Pastor in one of the large splinter organizations that had formed early in the apostasy.

As Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong had worked together as a team, such was also the case in the early years with Mr. and Mrs. Pack. Mr. Pack's wife (who died in 2007), the former Shirley Ochs, was Mr. Armstrong's secretary beginning in the early 1960s. She served while a student at Ambassador College and, later, full-time in that capacity. It was through these circumstances that Mr. Pack became close to Mr. Armstrong for about fifteen years, from 1971 when he married, until Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986.

Although assigned to the field ministry rather than Headquarters, he had the opportunity to confer with Mr. Armstrong on an individual basis, more often than some who worked around him at Headquarters. He had an opportunity to spend countless hours discussing with Mr. Armstrong a wide range of matters, decisions and certain crises that the Church was undergoing at various times. This period of instruction and learning, often focusing on the fulfillment of prophecies now just ahead, proved especially valuable to him in ways that he could not appreciate until recent years.

While serving in the ministry, circumstances required that Mr. Pack fulfill an inherited obligation to serve as owner and President of his father's North Carolina corporation for about five years. This background provided the experience and understanding necessary to better coordinate the final thrust of God's Work. As secretary for Mr. Armstrong, his wife had also acquired firsthand experiences in the many aspects of a worldwide Work.

As accounts were related about Mr. Armstrong's dealings with the Sardis ministry, so a number of accounts could be given, detailing Mr. Pack's uncompromising stance against heresy at any level. He constantly confronted his superiors, calling their hand time and again as they deviated from the true doctrines of the Church of God. He was fired twice for preaching the truth, the second time while other senior ministers were permitted to continue unchecked, spreading new false doctrines and ideas within the splinters that had emerged from the WCG. (Again, Mr. Pack's extensive biography offers complete detail of the thumbnail presented here.)

May 1999

The Restored Church of God was formed in May of 1999, in the midst of ongoing upheaval in the wake of the apostasy. This resulted from Mr. Pack's unrelenting stand against compromise within the splinters, which put some of the leaders on the spot with their new or compromised teachings. The best solution in the eyes of these leaders was the easy path of "shooting the messenger," rather than confronting their "old guard" ministers.

You will recall that circumstances in 1933 freed Mr. Armstrong from the compromising restraints of Sardis ministers. Similarly, 66 years later, Mr. Pack was forced to establish The Restored Church of God to be free from the restraints of those who were not totally committed to holding to all the truth!

As Restored was getting underway, an effective tool was capitalized upon first—sermon audiotapes were prepared for distribution around the world. These sermons covered topics that helped accelerate the progress of those reawakening to lost understanding. Prepared from mid-1993 through 1994, the series of three sermons on the "30 Reasons to Follow the Truth," including another sermon entitled "Truth," had been clear and strong for God's doctrines. It was this last sermon that brought Mr. Pack's immediate termination from the Worldwide Church of God in early 1993.

These sermons, more than any others, circulated among many thousands of the approximately 35,000 who survived the apostasy and did help thousands leave the apostates. Additional sermon series, such as "The One True Church Doctrine (four parts)," "The Towering Government Doctrine (six parts)," "the Body of Christ (two parts)," and *many* others, were also very helpful. These sermons recapture precious truths that Christ's apostle, in the Philadelphian Era, always taught.

Mr. Pack's thorough book, *There Came a Falling Away*, documented, as no other source, the extent to which the apostates abandoned the truth, and the silly, shallow doctrines they offered in its place. A companion book titled, *Except the Lord Build the House*, also documented, along with several other books, other elements of Mr. Armstrong's teachings. Among Mr. Pack's other literature, more books were written that have been helpful in warning of different dangers existing at the end of the age in the wake of the apostasy.

These books have also chronicled the tremendous persecution that God's Church and servants have had to endure through the

ages, in every era—often at the hands of those once thought to be “brethren.” Taking an unpopular stand, one that goes against the majority, in “*defense of the gospel*” (Phil. 1:17), has brought unrelenting persecution against both The Restored Church of God and Mr. Pack. Like so many others who have gone before him throughout history, he has been persecuted, misrepresented and, literally, put on trial before his peers, over and over again! But, through experience as a troubleshooter in several pastorates, he developed perseverance.

Therefore, as the apostle Paul went on to say, we are “in nothing terrified by our adversaries” (vs. 28).

Brief History of The Restored Church of God

This reorganization of the Church of God began not as an offshoot of the Worldwide Church of God, but rather as the continuation of the Church as originally founded—carrying on the original apostles’ ministry and teachings. The Restored Church of God started on the basic premise of the need to teach the good news—the GOSPEL—of the soon-coming Kingdom of Almighty God. Our beliefs are the same faith that was “once delivered unto the saints.” Christ never changes (Heb. 13:8), nor do the teachings of His Church!

The first several years of The Restored Church of God’s existence were primarily *preparatory* to the continuation of the Work that Mr. Armstrong had started. While never neglecting to feed the flock, all the tools that the Church once used—free books and booklets, Bible lessons, articles, short-answer Q&As, magazines and broadcasts, with distribution programs—were put into place.

An enormous inventory of literature was produced at a staggering speed for such a young organization. Although the courts banned the reproduction of Mr. Armstrong’s literature, the Work has not slowed down. Plans to *rewrite* all of the booklets, until *all* of the truth would once again be in place, were implemented. This goal was quickly realized, as booklets and articles appeared—unlike anything that the Church of God has *ever* seen!—on *all* the doctrines necessary to bring new members into the truth, and the Church, and to provide the doctrinal foundation to solidify them in the faith.

This Church had to remain devoted to God’s way of life and dedicated to the First Commission—reaching the world with Christ’s gospel—teaching the right way, much different from the world’s selfish, grasping *get* way.

The Work of God in the 21st Century —Continuing Until the Age Ends!

Like the first-century Church, this organization has neither millions of members nor any political or religious power or clout.

Yet, we understand the need to spread God’s message—to reach out to a struggling, suffering world. While the legacy began with the original apostles, the Worldwide Church of God followed in their footsteps, and The Restored Church of God continues this today. We often refer to the picture presented to the Church from the time of Mr. Armstrong’s leadership as “The Grand Pattern.” The message and goal are the same—only the methods may differ.

Mr. Armstrong utilized the technological innovation of radio (coupled with the printed word), and later television, at the optimum time to carry the gospel to the world. To a lesser extent, certain early Sardis ministers utilized the printing press to spread the gospel. Add to this equation the new technological invention of computers coupled with the Internet. Alongside the worldwide distribution program of our flagship magazine *The Real Truth*[™], extensive Internet and some newspaper advertising—as we rapidly approach the most crucial juncture in history—technology opened the potential for The Restored Church of God, as sole custodians of the full truth, to do a significant Work. Following in Mr. Armstrong’s footsteps (as his successor should have done) and also holding the office of apostle, Mr. Pack is leading God’s people back into the whole truth—he is leading the organization being used to complete the Work that Mr. Armstrong began.

While God’s faithful servants of ages past had few or no tools to help deceived and confused brethren of their time, who were dealing with false teachers and outright apostasy, this is not the case today. The Restored Church of God is reaching out around the world with powerful capability. The Philadelphian Work and faithful remnant, being gathered together at this time, just before this age ends, is still alive and well!

Rcg.org: The Restored Church of God has the largest biblically-based website on Earth, carrying a vast and ever-expanding array of published tools to guide people seeking to live God’s way of life.

The power of the Internet is astonishing, allowing us to now reach every country and territory of the world, with none left to reach, except in greater force and impact. The potential number of people we can—and *will*—reach is truly staggering. This has been of great encouragement to those who support this Work.

The World to Come™ Program: Broadcast via the Internet, this program answers questions such as: *Where* is the world going? *Why* is it filled with problems, troubles, evils and ills, causing unhappiness and misery of every kind? *What* lies ahead? In an age of fear, confusion and hopelessness, *The World to Come* is a voice of truth, providing answers, and proclaiming hope for humanity!

In 1934, when *The WORLD TOMORROW* program was first broadcast, it could only begin on a single small station. Today, *The World to Come* (in high definition video) is instantly available around the world!

The Real Truth™ Magazine: We also publish a magazine that continues the message of *The Plain Truth*. *The Real Truth* magazine carries articles explaining the cause of war, what's wrong with the weather, can science eradicate pollution, the meaning of events in Europe, why earthquakes are increasing, the complete failure of science to bring the utopian world that all long for, how racial bigotry will eventually disappear, where the world economy is going, what lies ahead for the nations of the world, the value of right ethics—and the definition of true character, the real cause of the moral crisis in the West, what's wrong with modern education and academia, why so many seek escape and pleasure, and the understanding of true success.

The magazine explains the world's lack of great leaders and what will replace today's governments, and how peace will come in our time, how to build strong families—rearing happy productive children—how to end your financial worries, why new diseases are appearing and older ones are re-appearing—worse than before—and whether the United Nations is really mankind's ultimate answer.

The Real Truth also explains why there are thousands of differing—and *disagreeing*—forms of Christianity, why religion has not solved the world's great problems, how to understand real faith, how to identify the *real* Christ of the Bible, the way of “give” vs. “get,” the law of cause and effect, the origin of human nature, principles of healthful living, and a great many other subjects.

This magazine brings plain understanding of the insoluble problems now overwhelming mankind, and points to the lasting peace of the world to come, just over the horizon.

Much More

There have been many other advancements in the Church and Work of God, and all of them continue progressing at rapid speed.

Headquarters Campus: The Church is developing—and this has been ongoing—a very carefully planned campus to house its new world Headquarters building. Sufficient acreage is available for additional buildings, all set in a beautiful environment befitting the God of quality.

Training Center: The campus will eventually be designed similarly to a small college—but is already a multi-faceted training center that opened in the fall of 2008. The Church has a never-ending need for more faithful ministers, and they are being prepared to serve God’s flock around the world on a full-time basis. The training center is vital in this regard because this is the most difficult time in the history of the Church of God to protect and feed God’s people. Very specialized training is required before this can be done properly.

Youth Services: No church (of any kind) anywhere in the world does more for its youth than does The Restored Church of God. We have extensive Bible lesson courses for children of all ages, plus seven volumes of Bible story books, as well as what is simply the finest magazine for teenagers in existence. There is also an extensive Bible study course available for teenagers. All of this is on top of a multitude of books and booklets available regarding marriage, the family and child-rearing.

In addition, the Church has an annual summer camp of the very highest quality as another of the many programs for its youth that it has brought back to life. This camp lays the groundwork of training for young people so that they can be better ready to enter its training center should God wish to use them either in support functions at Headquarters or in the field ministry.

With all of these tools and programs, and more, The Restored Church of God is helping people now drowning in a sea of problems. Many are finding ANSWERS, and they are learning to make their lives happy and productive.

How Is It All Supported?

The Restored Church of God never solicits the general public for financial support.

We are dedicated to this mission of LOVE—of outgoing concern for all people worldwide. All of our activities are supported by dedicated, giving people. Following Christ’s instruction, “Freely you have received, freely give,” we offer everything *free of charge*. Unlike most other religious organizations, there is nothing to buy or pay for. With the

exception, as did Mr. Armstrong, of books made available in bookstores for an audience that could find them no other way, it is all free of charge.

The Restored Church of God receives financial support from the voluntary tithes paid by its members. God's people recognize the abundant blessings promised by God to all who obey His law of tithing. One side benefit of practicing just this single extraordinary law is that it helps people more carefully manage their personal finances. In the end, both the Church and its people prosper from practicing this proven law from God's Word. (There are others who contribute regularly as co-workers and donors; these also wish to share with others what they have received.)

Where Do We Fit in the World?

Christ did not come pleading with the masses to become converted or to "give their hearts to the Lord," but rather with the *announcement* described earlier. He taught a way of life that the world had long before rejected and forgotten. He did not come to save the world of His day. He came to announce a *future* time when the world would be saved. We follow His example.

Christ's example, and that of the apostles, shows that Christians do not proselytize. The Restored Church of God also follows this principle. We are not trying to convert or fix this world, but rather continuing Christ's announcement message. The Restored Church of God explains what is wrong with this world without preaching "at" people or condemning them. We offer hope, showing how mankind's worst problems and woes will be solved. We bring urgency and vitality to the topics on people's minds today—explaining the reason for the explosion of problems around the globe. Again, we teach "cause and effect," not band-aids masking the problems.

Many are amazed that the problems and challenges they have in their lives—some seemingly unsolvable—*can* be solved by following God's Way. By putting God first in everything, lives can be straightened out and become fulfilling.

The Restored Church of God offers no political opinions. Again, it does not involve itself with any political movement or agenda. Rather, it teaches LOVE—outgoing concern—for *all* peoples of the world.

While the Christian's first priority is always to the government and instruction of God, the Bible teaches the need to properly submit to the governments of men, until they are replaced by Christ's rule with the saints over all nations. God's Church strongly adheres to this teaching in every sense.

Astonishing Growth

The original apostles were a tiny group who eventually had a profound impact on the world of their time. The Worldwide Church of God also started small and, within half a century, had enormous impact on the nations of the world. Called an Ambassador for World Peace, Herbert W. Armstrong eventually went on to personally visit *one-third* of the heads of state—kings, queens, presidents and prime ministers—of his time.

While also beginning small, and still not large by men's standards, The Restored Church of God is also experiencing rapid growth and constantly increasing impact—with real power!—around the world. And with the same pattern of growth that the Worldwide Church of God experienced, time has already demonstrated that the Church will continue to grow and to continually reach farther, helping more people with vital spiritual knowledge, and affecting positive change in the lives of ever greater numbers.

Jesus commanded His disciples to go forth into the *entire* world. We are doing exactly that! Bringing the message of God's way of life even to far-flung countries like Zimbabwe, Iceland, China, Chile, New Zealand, Egypt, India and all over Europe. This commission has not stopped—and we are now consistently reaching *all* nations and territories on Earth!

Many thousands (the number is constantly increasing) visit our website daily. People are being taught sound, true principles of a productive way of life. They are now armed with knowledge that can help them grow to become better examples—and better citizens—in their local communities.

The Restored Church of God is offering hope to a dying world.

Impact and Change

The original apostles strove to make a difference. The Worldwide Church of God made a difference in millions of lives. The Restored Church of God is fired with that same drive—that same determination—to set a positive example and thereby have a positive impact on the world. It is also making a real difference.

Vast multitudes were exposed to the sound teachings of the Church of God under Herbert W. Armstrong. This same message continues today—and the fruits of the Work of God are evident!

Almost no one understands what Christianity really is. Most have no idea that it can bring them supreme happiness, beyond imagination.

They have no concept that it represents fullness, richness, pleasures and overflowing with plenty, both physically and spiritually.

Jesus said, “I am come that they might have *life*, and that they might have it more *abundantly*” (John 10:10).

The excitement, joy, thrill and enormous contentment that flow from true understanding dwarfs every trial, difficulty, hurdle, obstacle and problem one could face. Truly grasping this leads to *why* Jesus said that HIS WAY represents a life more wonderful—more *abundant*—than most could dream possible!

Many are experiencing lives filled with zeal, vigor, enthusiasm and drive—and led by hope and faith—as though final success depends on their conduct *every day*.

Lives are changing—people are being affected in positive ways. They are learning how to raise children in a world that has lost such basic knowledge. They are also learning of laws that produce real, lasting success. The power of God’s Spirit is replacing discouragement with energy and hope. It is bringing zeal to accomplish, and removing confusion and indifference. It is taking shattered dreams and shriveled feelings, and expanding them to marvelous new horizons—and inspiring an *expectation* of success. It is taking stress and turning it into productivity and fulfilling ACCOMPLISHMENT.

This Church is bringing people the most precious knowledge they could ever hope to receive—the knowledge of why they were born—that they were put on Earth to build holy, righteous, perfect character.

These are just a small number of the fruits growing in the lives of people striving to live by *every* word of God (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4).

Members of The Restored Church of God are dedicated to letting their light shine in a “modern” world that so desperately needs light! In a world yearning for peace, whose inhabitants dream of a prosperous life, we offer hope to all who listen—a deep inner confidence, derived from understanding that genuinely radiant, happy lives can be a reality, and that a WONDERFUL WORLD is soon to come.

A colossal question looms...

Are You Being Called?

This book has presented you with knowledge available nowhere else. It has been said that knowledge—in this case, knowledge special beyond description—is of no value unless it is put to use. There can be no greater question for you than the title of this chapter.

Many wonder if they are being called of God. How can you know? Are feelings sufficient on such a vital matter? What *is* a calling? What does God's Word say? In light of the knowledge received in this book, you need to know.

Most believe that God is trying to save the world now! This thinking goes something like this: God and the devil are at war over the fate of mankind. This is seen as a desperate struggle between good and evil—God and Satan.

Let's put this another way: Is today the only opportunity for all human beings to choose or to reject Christianity? Must all people "decide now" to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior? Is this what the Bible teaches? The answer is an emphatic NO! If it were *yes*, then God is failing miserably in His battle with the devil for control over the fate of all men. In other words, God is "calling" all of mankind, but almost all are NOT ANSWERING!

Consider! In 1920, when my father was born, there were about 2 billion people on Earth. There are now about over 7 billion—and

more every day. Approximately 2.2 billion, or one-third, believe—to one degree or another—in the name of Jesus Christ. This represents a total that includes every conceivable brand of the over 2,000 *different forms* of professing Christianity. Approximately another one-third of mankind has *heard* of Christ but has not accepted Him and does not *claim* to follow Him. Finally, the last one-third of all people on Earth know nothing about Christ. Many in India, Africa, Japan, China and parts of South America and Southeast Asia have never even heard of Him. Are they condemned to be lost, having never had an opportunity to understand what they missed or why—having no opportunity to be “called” into the true Church?

When speaking of Christ’s name, the Bible plainly says, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is *none other name under heaven* given among men, whereby we must be *saved*” (Acts 4:12). Further, Romans 10:13 states that men must call on *this name* to be saved. Understand! It is obvious that all who have not yielded to the God of the Bible and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior are certainly *not* saved! Countless billions have died in this condition. Most have assumed that the only other option for these is that they were lost to salvation and that God long ago planned this for the vast majority who have ever lived.

If the war to “win souls for Christ” is as most supposed Christian ministers depict, then the devil is much stronger, and much more effective, in his effort than God is. This is the only other possibility—unless there is a third category containing the vast majority of people. But it must be a category that has not been recognized. There is such a category!—God is simply not calling the masses of humanity today.

But He *is* calling a select few!

Called and Chosen of God

The Bible plainly speaks of those who have been called by God. Notice what Paul said to the Thessalonian brethren: “Faithful is He [God] that *calls* you...” (I Thes. 5:24). As a warning to the Galatian congregation, who were losing sight of the true gospel, he said this: “I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that *called* you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (1:6), and later added, “This persuasion comes not of Him that *calls* you” (5:7-8). To the Corinthian congregation he wrote, “For you see your *calling* brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are *called*” (I Cor. 1:26).

Jesus Himself spoke on many occasions about the Christian calling. You may be familiar with His statement, “For many are *called*, but few are *chosen*,” found in both Matthew 22:14 and 20:16. Later, adding meaning to the second part of this phrase, He explained this to His disciples: “You have not chosen Me but I have *chosen* you” (John 15:16), and then “But I have *chosen* you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (vs. 19).

When placed together, these passages explain that God is calling a few people—actually a *very* few—out of the world for His supreme purpose. Those who respond to His calling are then “chosen,” going on to repentance, baptism and conversion.

What About You?

After reading some of the literature from The Restored Church of God, many come to recognize that they have been brought into contact with extraordinary understanding. They find themselves learning things that they have never heard before. They notice that the Bible makes sense—that it is not as hard to understand as they had previously thought. Then, feeling a growing need to *act* on what they are learning, many wonder, “Am I being called by God?”

Sometimes this question takes the form of “Am I undergoing ‘conversion’?” or “Should I get baptized?” or even “Have I come in contact with the true Church?” At best, most are unsure of how to *answer* these basic questions, and many have absolutely no idea whatsoever how to even properly *address* them.

This chapter will make plain, from God’s Word, how to know if God is calling you. It has been written in basic, simple form, virtually impossible to misunderstand. After all, this question is one of the most important you will ever face. Properly understanding its answer is of PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE to your life!

I first began learning God’s truth when I was 17 years old. Before God called me, I had not known a single one of the true doctrines of the Bible. I mentioned that this process began for me when I heard the voice of Herbert W. Armstrong broadcasting from Pasadena, California. This was 1966, and it was immediately evident that I was hearing things from this man that I had NEVER heard before—and with plain SCRIPTURAL PROOFS to back them up. I remember being astonished at how clear the Bible became—and how much fun it was to study. Prior to this—throughout the time I attended the well-known, respected denomination of my youth—I had always found the Bible boring and hard to understand.

Actually, people of all ages and backgrounds puzzle over just what a “calling” is. Many reduce it to little more than a particular *feeling* that comes over them, which they attribute to God. Millions in the world feel “called”—in some cases to the “church,” in other cases to the “ministry,” or “missionary work,” in still other cases to work with children, and in yet others to serve in the medical profession or even in the military. Ignorant of what God says, so many people are left to rely on mere *feelings*, assuming that their lives—and the paths they choose—are divinely inspired. They attribute this “inspiration” to being called of God. Sadly, most never learn that these “callings” have nothing to do with following the true God of the Bible.

A true calling from God is far more than a kind of abstract *feeling* that human reasoning concludes is from God!

Defining a True Calling

In John’s gospel account, Jesus stated, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me *draw* him...” (6:44). Twenty-one verses later, He repeated to His audience, “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were *given* unto him of My Father” (vs. 65). In the next verse, John records that “From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.”

Many who heard Christ simply could not understand that God has to “draw” people and that a calling is something that is “given” to them. While many today appear to understand that they must in some fashion be called, they do not seek to understand—from the Bible—how to know for certain that it is God who is calling—drawing—giving to them whatever it is they are to receive.

Let’s consider a few scriptures that make plain what it is that Christians are “given” when they are called. We must clear up all possible confusion.

In Matthew, Jesus’ disciples asked, “Why speak you unto them [the multitudes who heard Him] in parables?” (13:10). His answer summarizes how and with what God calls: “He answered and said unto them, Because it is *given* unto you to *know the mysteries of the kingdom* of heaven [or Kingdom of God], but to them it is *not given*” (vs. 11). The next several verses amplify what He meant, explaining how many in the world can hear the truths of God (the “mysteries of the kingdom”) but not grasp them. Since the overwhelming majority of mankind is not being drawn by the power of God’s Spirit, they have not been given the ability to comprehend God’s Word.

The apostle Paul added important, helpful description to the subject. Notice: “But the natural [carnal-minded] man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14). This is very plain Bible teaching. And yet even it cannot be understood by one not called of God, by one whose mind has not been opened and drawn to God. Before continuing, we might ask, did all of the scriptures just quoted make sense to you?

How does all of this apply to you? The answer—also your answer to the above question—helps explain how to know if God is calling you: A calling, in the simplest terms, is understanding the truths of God when you see, read or hear them.

Ask yourself: “Do I understand Bible teachings and truths when I hear them? Do the scriptures about the gospel of the Kingdom of God; the plan of salvation and the purpose of human existence; climactic, soon-coming prophesied events; God’s warning message to His people; His Law (including the Sabbath command); the Holy Days; tithing; clean and unclean meats; the one true Church—and many other teachings—make sense to me?”

When you read or hear these things in our magazines, books, booklets, articles and *The World to Come* programs, do they have meaning to you? Are you grasping them? Are they PLAIN to your understanding? Do you see them as SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE others do not have? Do you feel tempted to pinch yourself in disbelief that you could be shown things of which the masses have no idea?

If the answers to these questions are “yes,” then God *is* calling—“drawing”—you! The mysteries of the Kingdom of God *are* being given to YOU!

Responsible for Knowledge Given

Babies are born knowing nothing. They do not know even the basics of right and wrong. They have to be taught virtually *everything*. Similarly, the world does not know the things of God—*spiritual* right from *spiritual* wrong. But with the knowledge of these things comes the responsibility to act on *them*.

Two Bible passages demonstrate that God holds people accountable for what they understand. Notice James 4:17: “Therefore to him that KNOWS TO DO GOOD, and does it not, to him it is sin.” Now read Hebrews 10:26: “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH, there remains no more sacrifice for sins.”

Let's understand. Each time you learn more of God's truth (what is "good"), and it makes sense to you—you at least generally understand it—you are being *given* extraordinary spiritual *knowledge* for which God holds you accountable.

This is part of the calling process—and is actually central to it. Further, it makes understanding how God calls a person much more serious than most have believed. Recognize that God will only call each human being *once*. Therefore, you are responsible *now* for the knowledge you are being given. If one does *not* act on what he is learning, God will take that understanding away (Rom. 2:13; Psa. 111:10), and such a person falls into a grave spiritual condition.

The Greatest Freedom

God's truth is most exciting to understand. It is the path to all the wonderful, good things in life—things God wants you to have. It is also the path to the greatest *freedom* that there is! Christ told certain Jews professing to believe on Him: "If you continue in My word [the truth – John 17:17], then are you My disciples indeed; and you shall *know the truth*, and THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE" (John 8:31-32). You must be willing to "continue" in your studies of God's Word, learning ever more of His truth, which Christ explains will "set you free" from a world cut off from God and held captive by Satan. Even *this* understanding is precious knowledge.

Your associates in the world probably understand none of these things. Neither do your relatives. Without God's calling, they have no possible way of enjoying *now* what is being offered to YOU—if you are understanding *and* acting upon God's truth.

It is also vital that you make certain in your mind the things you are learning. You should find yourself wanting to *PROVE* the doctrines of God. Paul also told the Thessalonians to "PROVE all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thes. 5:21). If you know God is calling you, take time to *prove* that He exists. Then prove that the Bible is truly His inspired Word for mankind.

Finally, and this should be obvious to the reader by now, *prove* the identity of God's Church. Remove all doubt, leaving no room for confusion. You have seen there are many counterfeit churches—many spiritual "look-alikes" in the world. Do not be fooled by any of them. Determine to know for certain if you have come in contact with the Church Christ built.

At the same time you are proving these things, pray fervently about what you are learning. When you are unclear on a matter, remember

that Jesus taught, “*Ask*, and it shall be given you; *seek*, and you shall find; *knock*, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt. 7:7).

John 14:17 explains how those coming toward conversion begin to find that they can see clearly the things of God. Notice what Christ said when speaking to His disciples about the Holy Spirit they were soon to receive: “Even the Spirit of truth; [which] the world cannot receive, because it sees [it] not, neither knows [it]; but you know [it]; for [it] dwells *with* you, and shall be *in* you.”

At this point, the disciples were much like many today—perhaps like you, too. They were seeing many spiritual truths in part, but did not yet *fully* grasp the enormous importance of learning God’s Plan and way of life. Through the Holy Spirit working *with* them, God was revealing certain things that they would only understand in a greater way once it was *in* them, beginning at conversion.

Ultimately, to fully understand all of the things of God—all the mysteries of the Kingdom of God—one must be begotten of the Holy Spirit. This occurs when it enters directly into the mind! Lacking baptism and the vital receiving of God’s Spirit, it is completely impossible for *anyone* to truly understand even a single biblical truth!

Before discussing how this happens, let’s look at the big picture.

God’s Master Plan

There is a great reason that God is calling only a few now.

The core of God’s Plan encompasses 7,000 years. Few have understood this. God has allotted 6,000 years, or six millennial days of a “seven-day week,” to man’s rule, prior to the seventh 1,000-year “day.” The sixth “day” is about to draw to a close. Satan is soon to be banished from Earth into a place figuratively called a “wilderness,” unable to sway mankind (Lev. 16:10).

However, he has *not yet* been exiled. When Christ, having overcome sin, qualified to replace him (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) as the “god of this world,” He assured that Satan will soon no longer be present to deceive and confuse mankind (I Cor. 14:33). But, once again, we must understand that Satan has not *yet* been banished and he seeks to do everything, within the power that he does possess, continually striving to thwart God’s plan. He has certainly deceived his ministers (II Cor. 11:13-15) into believing that God has failed terribly in His plan to save the vast majority of a mankind that He is not yet calling to salvation. But it is only by God’s permission that Satan holds sway over this “present evil world” (Gal. 1:4).

God is not losing any supposed wrestling match over which He would clearly have complete control. He knows exactly what He is doing, and the beauty of His plan *can* be known. Be assured that no true God would ever choose to condemn the vast majority who have ever lived without giving them a *full opportunity* for salvation. Such a God would not be worth following. He would be an unjust monster whose primary purpose is the business of *condemnation!*

We must understand! The Bible says, “But, beloved, *be not ignorant* of this one thing, that *one day* is with the Lord *as a thousand years*, and a thousand years as one day” (II Pet. 3:8). Of course, most people *are* “ignorant” of not just this “one thing,” but almost everything that the Bible teaches.

Yet, this is a fascinating verse.

Let’s take this further. Man has been given six days, or 6,000 years, to try his own ways, governments, religions, philosophies, value systems and forms of education. Under the sway of Satan, he has practiced sin—DISOBEDIENCE to God’s commands—for nearly 6,000 years. Man has then tried to treat all of the ill *effects* instead of treating the *cause* of having broken God’s laws. This includes the invention of many religions that merely teach the hollow *ideas of men* in place of the wonderful TRUTHS OF GOD.

God is allowing all human beings to learn bitter lessons. The vast majority, who have never known the precious truth of God, are having to learn their own ways do not work! Just before humanity is about to erase itself from the Earth, through a combination of weapons of mass destruction and the irreversible pollution of a planet that has limits to what it can withstand, Jesus Christ will intervene and save mankind from itself!

Now continue with II Peter. Notice verse 9: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise...but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance.” Did you notice that God wants to save *everyone*? Speaking of God, Scripture states, “Who will have *all* men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4). That is the plain truth of this scripture. God is not, and never has been, in the “mass condemnation” business.

But God is calling and training a tiny select few who will rule with Christ after His Return, and the setting up of the Kingdom. (Also read our absolutely vital book *The Awesome Potential of Man.*)

Remember. Satan has proliferated many forms of false religion all across the Earth. He counterfeits the truth in endless ways, and God’s calling process is no exception. He is a MASTER DECEIVER and the fruits of his efforts lie everywhere.

Your Path to Conversion

Your Bible states, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God *they* are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). Verse 9 sets up this passage, “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” These two verses reveal just what a Christian is—one who has and is led by the Holy Spirit of God. This Spirit is received upon repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38).

If the truth is becoming clear—really PLAIN!—to you, set the goal of repentance, baptism, and the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit—the beginning of TRUE CONVERSION!

While you are preparing for conversion, focus on examining all the wrong habits and attitudes that you can. There are certain *physical* changes you can make before baptism. Some examples would be keeping God’s financial laws and biblical dietary laws.

Understand. Conversion is entirely about changing, growing, overcoming—and developing the *character of God*. This involves getting into the habit of regular prayer, Bible study, meditation and even periodic fasting.

Then take time to study all of our books, booklets and articles dealing with faith, conversion, baptism, your human potential, and the proofs of God’s existence, His Word and His Church.

Much—actually everything—is at stake for you if God is calling you now.

Take each step carefully. Follow the timing that is right for you. Yet, do not unnecessarily delay, merely because you have not asked fervently or often enough for the “gift” of repentance (II Tim. 2:25; Acts 11:18). Be careful that you do not follow the pattern of the world, falling into waiting for a magical *feeling* that “now is the time.”

The Parable of the Sower, in Matthew 13:1-23, warns of three categories of people who hear “the word”—the truth—but who fail to act on it. Take the time to read this extensive passage to be sure you fall into the one good category Jesus identified.

The Bible teaches that “repentance is toward God” and that “faith is toward...Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). Conversion is a personal private matter between the Father and Christ, and each individual. If God is truly calling you, make certain of your calling (II Pet. 1:10). It is most precious!

This is the only way to approach the marvelous gift you are being given!

Christ Built His Church

The world is built on the FOUNDATION of Satan's way. As "god of this world," he has constructed his own governments, cultures, educational systems, and other institutions—and he has also built his own "churches" (II Cor. 11:13-15). All of these together also form a "building," and with a vast superstructure, but one that is founded upon "sand," instead of the "rock" (I Cor. 10:4) that is Jesus Christ! I repeat: the all-powerful, living Christ is not trying to build or to rebuild—repair!—the governments, institutions or churches of Satan's world. Soon these will all be swept away by the "rain, wind and floods," He described in Matthew 7:24-27.

But we saw Jesus also calls *His Church* "a building"—one that is "fitly framed together" (Eph. 2:21), and built with HIMSELF as the foundation. He is literally "building a building" consisting of brethren whom He calls "lively [living] stones" (I Pet. 2:5). Psalm 127:1 declares, "Except the LORD *build the house*, they labor in vain that build it." Christ is continuing His building of the Church today, and you are seeing it.

The true Church is depicted as a type of Jerusalem and as the Mother of all the brethren in the Church (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22-23). Like any Mother, she cares for and feeds her children. God's Church is pictured as a bride prophesied to marry Jesus Christ (Rev. 19:7-9). She is described as having "made herself ready" for this marvelous, wonderful, GLORIOUS event!

Will you be one who strives to "make *yourself* ready"?

Finally, we have not yet addressed in the context of this chapter the meaning of the Greek word translated "church" in the New Testament. (And it has everything to do with the title of this chapter.) Most have supposed "church" means a building or an organization. It means neither.

The word "church" is *ekklesia*, meaning "a calling out," especially as a religious congregation. Christians are indeed called *out* of this world (John 15:19; 17:14)—its ways—its customs—its practices—its traditions—its false knowledge and false doctrines—and *into* the true Church, and fellowship with God and Christ (I John 1:3).

God thunders this to all His people: "Wherefore COME OUT from among them [the world], and be you *separate*...and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:17-18).

May God help you to come out of the Babylon of this world, that you may QUALIFY to rule with Christ in the wonderful, utopian new world that lies ahead!

One Church

In conclusion, it should now be clear that there is only *one* true Church. You should have established in your mind how this Church is identified. I repeat: you have been given much knowledge in this book, having been shown the identity of the only Church that Jesus built, as well as its history.

Churches of the world are based on men's ideas. And although some of these tithe, keep the Sabbath, or do not keep pagan customs such as birthdays, Christmas and Easter, this does not mean these organizations are led by God. Churches of men teach a mixture of a little truth and much error, rejecting the great majority of truths found in God's Word. (Recall Christ's direct indictments in Matthew 15:9 and Mark 7:9—and God's instruction from the beginning in Genesis 2:17.)

The Church of God is different. It is *God's* Church and not only carries His name, the "Church of God," it teaches His doctrines. God's Church is the only place this is done and is the only organization that carries out God's Work. Those in this Church diligently strive to keep God's Law, support the gospel being preached, and believe the many other doctrines of God restored to the Church.

Interested readers will want to know that God's Church has ministers who are available to answer any questions you might have about the Bible or the truth you are learning. But His ministers (true ministers) will never call on you unless you request it.

God does not pressure, persuade, beg or force anyone to convert to Christianity. He has made all human beings free moral agents. The loving, all-knowing, all-wise Creator has given us the choice, and ability, to decide for ourselves. He leaves it up to us to act on the knowledge we are given. Thus, we do not pressure people into "joining" us.

One final point must still be made. The last chapter of the history of the Church of God is yet to be completed. It still contains a few blank pages.

Your name could one day be included within them!

Recalling this chapter's title, a second colossal question also looms. What will you do with the precious knowledge received through this book?

The Following Literature Expands on Topics Discussed in This Book:

- A World in Captivity
- Are *These* the Last Days?
- Did God Create Human Nature?
- Does God Exist?
- Revelation Explained at Last!
- What Do You *Mean* “Water Baptism”?
- Who Is the Devil?

Other Books by David C. Pack

- America and Britain in Prophecy
- Dating and Courtship – God’s Way
- Herbert W. Armstrong – His Life in Proper Perspective
- Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?
- Sex – Its Unknown Dimension
- The Bible’s Difficult Scriptures Explained!
- The Bible’s Greatest Prophecies Unlocked! – A Voice Cries Out
- The Awesome Potential of Man
- The Ten Commandments – “Nailed to the Cross”
or Required for Salvation?
- The Trinity – Is God Three-In-One?
- The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity
- Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!
- Train Your Children God’s Way

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