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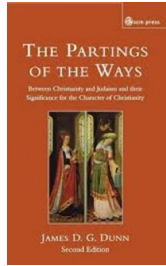
From the Editor: Firstfruits:

The Feast of Pentecost is near.

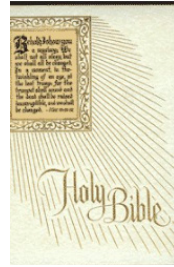
**Parting From the
Way: Was there
one way? If so,**

**Study the Bible
Course, : What is the
Baptism by Fire?**

BIBLE NEWS PROPHECY



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About the Front Cover: Artwork developed for the Continuing Church of God.

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Firstfruits

The biblical holy day of Pentecost will be observed from sunset 23 May to sunset 24 May in 2026.

The Day of Pentecost has several names, and because of that, some have been confused about it. Its other names in the Bible include, the Feast of Harvest, the Feast of Weeks and the day of firstfruits.

Jews realize a firstfruits name and connection. The Temple Institute wrote (May 18, 2018 Newsletter):

Shavuot is also the Festival of the First Fruits (bikurim in Hebrew), on which all Israel brings the first of the season's fruits to the Temple altar ... Shavuot, (which will begin Saturday evening), also known as Chag HaBikurim - the festival of the First-Fruits ...

The use of the term "firstfruits" suggests a second harvest. And actually, this too is pointed out in the Old Testament:

16 ... the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. (Exodus 23:16)

22 And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. (Exodus 34:22)

26 Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to the LORD at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. (Numbers 28:26)

While some Protestant commentators (e.g. Radmacher E.D. ed. *The Nelson Study Bible*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1997, p. 213) refer to the wave sheaf offering as the feast of firstfruits, this is a misnomer. While "a sheaf of firstfruits" was offered then (Leviticus 23:10), as shown above, the Bible

refers to the Feast of Weeks as the time of firstfruits (not simply one sheaf).

And, as shown below, it refers to the time of counting fifty as being associated with firstfruits, which is what the term Pentecost (which means 50th) refers to:

16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. 17 You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD. (Leviticus 23:16-17)

How does the term firstfruits help us understand this day?

The Feast of Pentecost or Feast of Firstfruits (Exodus 34:22) reminds us that God is now calling only a small "firstfruits" spiritual harvest, with the Last Great Day picturing a greater harvest later.

The New Testament Helps Explain the Old Testament

The New Testament also discusses some concepts associated with firstfruits. Paul wrote the following:

23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit. (Romans 8:23)

Recall that it was the Holy Spirit that was first given on the Day of Pentecost. And that was a type of the firstfruits of the Spirit.

Who are the firstfruits?

4 These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. 5 These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. (Revelation 14:4-5)

12 Here is the patience of the saints; here are

those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. (Revelation 14:12)

The firstfruits keep God's commandments.

In the Old Testament, God said:

10 "I found Israel Like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers As the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal Peor...". (Hosea 9:10)

So originally, physical Israel was like the firstfruits on the branches of a fig tree, but they were unfaithful. In the New Testament, Paul alludes to this and Christians when he wrote:

16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. (Romans 11:16-21)

So while physical Israel was intended to be firstfruits, it was replaced by Christians as the firstfruits. And those firstfruits began on Pentecost.

But what about Jesus? Wasn't He a type of firstfruits?

Yes, He certainly was. Paul notes:

20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

Christ is the fulfillment of the wave sheaf offering in Leviticus 23:10. He is the sheaf of firstfruits. He also fulfilled that role when He ascended into heaven on the Sunday (the wave sheaf offering was on a Sunday) after He was resurrected (John 20:1,17). But neither He nor His true followers observed what is now called Easter.

Also, James notes that Jesus brought us forth to also be a type of firstfruit:

18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. (James 1:18)

So while Jesus was the original firstfruit to represent the wave sheaf offering, true Christians are a kind of firstfruits, represented by the Day of Pentecost. "Firstfruits" mean that only a few will make it in this age--but they also imply that there will be a greater harvest — a time where all who never had an opportunity for salvation will later have an opportunity. (For more details, see the free eBook, available at www.ccog.org titled Universal OFFER of Salvation, Apokatastasis: Can God save the lost in an age to come? Hundreds of scriptures reveal God's plan of salvation).

Christians will be the harvested firstfruits at the resurrection of the dead. The Apostle Paul wrote:

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed — 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)

Notice something that Peter stated on Pentecost:

29 "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing

that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, 31 he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. (Acts 2:29-33)

Notice that Peter, on Pentecost, referred to Jesus as fruit and that He was raised. Pentecost shows that God blesses this small harvest by granting His Holy Spirit so that we can overcome, do His work and grow spiritually even though living in “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4).

Now Jesus was not only the first of the firstfruits, He was also the firstborn among many brethren:

29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29)

5 Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead. (Revelation 1:5)

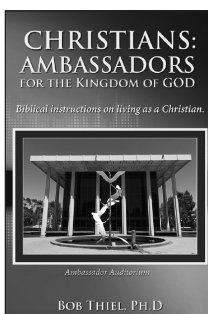
Since Jesus is the firstborn, this certainly implies that there will become others who are to be like Him. Thus, becoming like Jesus Christ is also part of the message of Pentecost. Of course, the idea of becoming like Christ is taught throughout the Bible and is not limited to Pentecost.

Notice what John wrote:

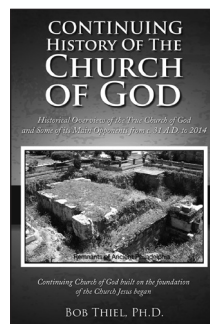
32 ... we shall be like Him. (1 John 3:2)

The Feast of Pentecost helps portray that — so keep it!

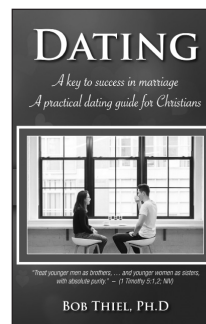
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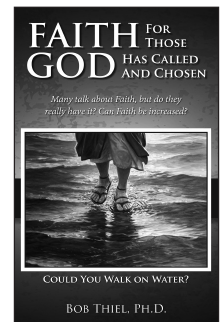
Christians: AMBASSADORS



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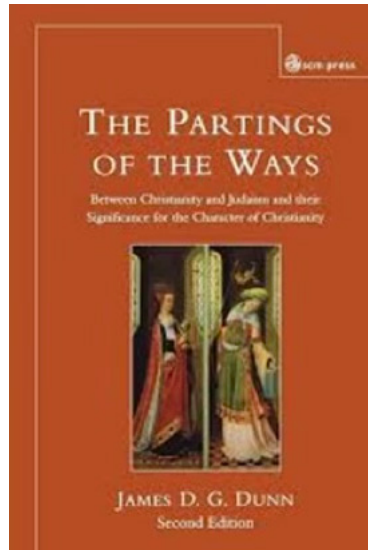
Dating: A Key to Success in Marriage



Faith for Those God has Called and Chosen

Parting From THE Way

By: Bob Thiel



Partially to explain church history, many Protestant scholars teach that there was a parting of the ways.

What really was the parting of the ways?

It was the separating between original Christianity and what became the Greco-Roman confederation, mainly in the second and later centuries.

While Protestant scholars do not normally word it that way, many like to claim that there was a separation between what they tend to call Jewish and Gentile Christianity.

The Protestant scholar Dr. James D.G. Dunn wrote:

In the first edition of Partings I made bold to draw the conclusion that a final 'parting' can be discerned in the second century — with the second Jewish revolt against Rome, and certainly by the end of the second century. Further study soon made it clearer to me that these were but further partings. (Dunn JDG. The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character

of Christianity, 2nd ed. Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2006, pp. XVIII-XIX)

There is a strong consensus that Judaism and Christianity effectively became separate religious systems in the early second century. (Dunn, p. 341)

Well, although there was what would be called the Christian religion in the FIRST century, there was a definite parting of the ways between those who held to the original faith and a compromised one after the second Jewish revolt. That revolt is known as the Bar Kochba Revolt. and a definite parting took place in Jerusalem c. 134-135 A.D.

Yet in his book, Dr. Dunn does not give specifics of, for example, what happened in Jerusalem at that time between the two main professing Christian groups. Instead, we see statements such as:

Nor can we speak of a single breach, or, to resume our principal metaphor, of a single parting of the ways. ... When the parting of the ways between mainstream Christianity and Jewish Christianity took place is an even more obscure issue ...

Christianity remained Jewish Christianity. As we move into the second century not only certain Christian sects can be described as 'Jewish-Christian', but Christianity as a whole can still properly be described as 'Jewish Christianity' in a justifiable sense. (Dunn, pp. 301, 305-306, 307)

Notice that we also see, like some other theological scholars, Dr. Dunn realizes that the early church was more 'Jewish' than what happened in and after the second century to many who professed Christianity.

How did a parting begin?

In the first century, according to the New Testament, some people introduced heresies (2 Timothy 2:16-18; Galatians 1:6-7; Jude 4; Revelation 2:2).

The Apostles Paul and John wrote of those who separated from them:

15 This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. (2 Timothy 1:15)

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:19)

The basic cause of this parting of the ways was refusal to accept hierarchical church governance by those who departed. That still is an issue to this day.

And there were other issues as well, as various people did not want to stick to the original biblical doctrines.

Yet, the Apostle John wrote:

24 Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that He has promised us — eternal life. 26 These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. (1 John 2:24-26)

19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. (1 John 5:19)

John warned not to be deceived by those who say you do not have to accept original Christianity, that "you heard from the beginning." But many have departed from that and have been under the sway of the wicked one.

The late Roman Catholic French Cardinal Jean-Guenole-Marie Danielou wrote that church history has generally been mistaught by downplaying the fact that the Romans considered Christianity a Jewish sect, and not a new religion. Cardinal Danielou specifically wrote that not properly teaching the truth about the 'Jewishness' of early Christianity has led to a "false picture of Christian history" (Daniélou J, Cardinal. The Theology of Jewish Christianity. Translated by John A. Baker. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1964, p. 2).

Now, in the second century, related to those that became less 'Jewish,' Polycarp of Smyrna said that they held to "the vanity of many" (Polycarp. Letter to the Philippians, Chapter VII). Whereas Serapion of Antioch later referred to them as part of a "lying confederacy" that he saw taking shape (Serapion. From the epistle to Caricus and Ponticus. The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325. Roberts & Donaldson).

Dr. Dunn was of the view that there was a 'Jewish Christianity' split from the other version in the second century (Dunn, p. 341). He also noted that there were other separations:

It is no surprise that the disappearance of 'Jewish Christianity' more or less coincides with a final 'parting' between Christianity and Judaism in the latter half of the fourth century. (Dunn, p. XXI)

Nearly two-and-a-half centuries after the parting of the ways, the continuing attraction of Judaism to many Christians in Asia Minor in particular is well indicated by the council of Laodicea (c. 363 CE), which prohibited Christians from practising their religion with Jews, in

particular, 'celebrating festivals with them', 'keeping the sabbath', 'eating unleavened bread' during the Passover; Christians should work on the sabbath and read the Gospels as well as the Jewish scriptures on Saturday (Canons 16, 29, 37, 38). (Dunn, pp. 345-346)

Dr. Dunn also wrote:

Whether Jewish Christianity could or should have been retained within the spectrum of catholic Christianity is an important question which it may now be impossible to answer. (Dunn, p. 313)

Well, that question is not impossible to answer — IF ONE BELIEVES THE BIBLE! The original faith, which Dr. Dunn calls Jewish Christianity, should have been retained by those who claim to be Christian!

Nor did original Christianity disappear.

The fact there would be problems from early times was known by the Apostle Paul who warned:

8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

20 ... Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge — 21 by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. (1 Timothy 6:20-21)

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. (2 Thessalonians 2:7)

Paul was warning about philosophies of the world's educated, what is claimed to be knowledge, and traditions of men that opposed the truth of the Bible.

One who looks to have been involved in such lawless mysteries of iniquity was Simon Magus (Acts 8:23), who was mentioned in Acts 8:5-25. Later reports confirm that he parted from the way as he pushed his anti-scriptural philosophies.

In the late first century, Hegisippus mentions that one influenced by Simon Magus, named Thebuthis, began to corrupt the Church of God in Jerusalem and was among those "who divided the unity of the Church by corrupt doctrines uttered against God and against his Christ" (Eusebius. Church History, Book IV, Chapter 22, verses 1, 4-5).

In early 2nd century Jerusalem, an apostate known as Marcus of Jerusalem gained influence and power. The 4th century Greco-Roman Bishop and historian, Eusebius, wrote the following related to Jerusalem and him:

2. ... until the siege of the Jews, which took place under Adrian, there were fifteen bishops in succession there, all of whom are said to have been of Hebrew descent, and to have received the knowledge of Christ in purity, so that they were approved by those who were able to judge of such matters, and were deemed worthy of the episcopate. (Eusebius. The History of the Church, Book IV, Chapter V. Translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert. Digireads, 2005, p. 71)

3. The war raged most fiercely in the eighteenth year of Adrian ...

4. And thus, when the city had been emptied of the Jewish nation and had suffered the total destruction of its ancient inhabitants, it was colonized by a different race, and the Roman city which subsequently arose changed its name and was called Ælia, in honor of the emperor Ælius Adrian. And as the church there was now composed of Gentiles, the first one to assume the government of it after the bishops of the circumcision was Marcus. (Chapter VI, pp. 71,72)

So, we see that someone who was not of the Jewish nation 'assumed governance' in the newly renamed city of Ælia Capitolina— it stopped being officially called Jerusalem right after Hadrian's troops conquered it — and had others who followed after him.

Notice also:

During the nineteenth year of Hadrian's reign (a.d. 117-138) the first uncircumcised Greek Gentile Bishop of Ælia Capitolina was Marcus,

c. a.d. 135. (Dowling TE. The orthodox Greek patriarchate of Jerusalem, 3rd ed. Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1913, p. 48)

Notice what the Roman Catholic monk and historian Jean Briand reported what happened after in 135 A.D.:

135. The direction of the Church in Jerusalem was then entrusted to bishops of pagan origin. (Briand J. The Judeo-Christian Church of Nazareth Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, 1982, p. 13)

Those “bishops of pagan origin,” beginning with Marcus, were apostates who compromised with pagans.

How did this happen?

Some years after Thebuthis began to corrupt things and the Jews rebelled against Emperor Hadrian, let’s look at a version of what occurred according to the noted historian E. Gibbon:

The first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem were all circumcised Jews; and the congregation over which they presided united the law of Moses with the doctrine of Christ. It was natural that the primitive tradition of a church which was founded only forty days after the death of Christ, and was governed almost as many years under the immediate inspection of his apostle, should be received as **the standard of orthodoxy**. The distant churches very frequently appealed to the authority of their venerable Parent, and relieved her distresses by a liberal contribution of alms ...

The Nazarenes retired from the ruins of Jerusalem to the little town of Pella beyond the Jordan, where that ancient church languished above sixty years in solitude and obscurity. They still enjoyed the comfort of making frequent and devout visits to the Holy City, and the hope of being one day restored to those seats which both nature and religion taught them to love as well as to revere. But at length, under the reign of Hadrian, the desperate fanaticism of the Jews filled up the measure of their calamities;

and the Romans, exasperated by their repeated rebellions, exercised the rights of victory with unusual rigour.

The emperor founded, under the name of Alia Capitolina, a new city on Mount Sion, to which he gave the privileges of a colony; and denouncing the severest penalties against any of the Jewish people who should dare to approach its precincts, he fixed a vigilant garrison of a Roman cohort to enforce the execution of his orders. The Nazarenes had only one way left to escape the common proscription, and the force of truth was on this occasion assisted by the influence of temporal advantages.

They elected Marcus for their bishop, a prelate of the race of the Gentiles, and most probably a native either of Italy or of some of the Latin provinces. **At his persuasion the most considerable part of the congregation renounced the Mosaic law, in the practice of which they had persevered above a century. By this sacrifice of their habits and prejudices they purchased a free admission into the colony of Hadrian ...**

When the name and honours of the church of Jerusalem had been restored to Mount Sion, the crimes of heresy and schism were imputed to the obscure remnant of the Nazarenes which refused to accompany their Latin bishop. They still preserved their former habitation of Pella, spread themselves into the villages adjacent to Damascus, and formed an inconsiderable church in the city of Bercea, or, as it is now called, of Aleppo, in Syria. (Gibbon E. Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Volume I, Chapter XV, Section I. ca. 1776-1788)

Notice that it is understood that the early Jewish bishops of Jerusalem had the STANDARD OF ORTHODOXY. That should not have been changed by any who accept Jude’s admonition to contend earnestly for the original faith (Jude 3); see also the free eBook: Beliefs of the Original Catholic Church: Could a remnant group have continuing apostolic succession?

We see that name calling against the faithful was done by the real apostates — that still happens today.

Because of the Jewish revolt, Emperor Hadrian outlawed many practices considered to be Jewish. The 20th century historian Salo W. Barron wrote:

Hadrian . . . According to rabbinic sources, he prohibited public gatherings for instruction in Jewish law, forbade the proper observance of the Sabbath and holidays and outlawed many important rituals. (Barron SW. Social and Religious History of the Jews, Volume 2: Christian Era: the First Five Centuries. Columbia University Press, 1952, p. 107)

The Christians in Judea were forced to make a decision. They either could continue to keep the Sabbath and the rest of God's law and flee, or they could compromise and support a religious leader (Marcus) who would not keep the Sabbath, etc.

Sadly, many who claimed Christ made the wrong choice and followed the direction of Marcus — the broad way which allowed them to stay in Jerusalem.

Yet, remember that Jesus taught:

23 When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Matthew 10:23)

The faithful understood that as they chose to flee instead of accepting the persecution to compromise to remain in Jerusalem. Around the same time, news of Hadrian's anti-Jewish sentiment became known and also affected many in Rome and elsewhere. Due to cowardice, some who professed Christianity began to compromise on things such as the Sabbath and the date of Passover.

There is an old Arabic Islamic manuscript that reports about those considered to be Judeo-Christians that seems to provide some additional details of what happened c. 134-135 A.D. It was published in English in 1966 by Shlomo Pines as The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source. It was originally written by an Arabic Muslim around the tenth century named Abd al-

Jabbar and called Tathbit Dala'il Nubuwwat Sayyidina Mahammad.

Here is the translation of one section of it that shows a separation between those called Christians and those who strove to maintain the original faith:

(71a) 'After him', his disciples (axhab) were with the Jews and the Children of Israel in the latter's synagogues and observed the prayers and the feasts of (the Jews) in the same place as the latter. (However) there was a disagreement between them and the Jews with regard to Christ.

The Romans (al-Rum) reigned over them. The Christians (used to) complain to the Romans about the Jews, showed them their own weakness and appealed to their pity. And the Romans did pity them. This (used) to happen frequently. And the Romans said to the Christians: **"Between us and the Jews there is a pact which (obliges us) not to change their religious laws (adyan). But if you would abandon their laws and separate yourselves from them, praying as we do (while facing) the East, eating (the things) we eat, and regarding as permissible that which we consider as such, we should help you** and make you powerful, and the Jews would find no way (to harm you). On the contrary, you would be more powerful than they."

The Christians answered: "We will do this."

(And the Romans) said: "Go, fetch your companions, and bring your Book (kitab)." (The Christians) went to their companions, informed them of (what had taken place) between them and the Romans and said to them: "Bring the Gospel (al-injil), and stand up so that we should go to them."

But these (companions) said to them: "You have done ill. We are not permitted (to let) the Romans pollute the Gospel. In giving a favourable answer to the Romans, you have accordingly departed from the religion. We are (therefore) no longer permitted to associate

with you; on the contrary, we are obliged to declare that there is nothing in common between us and you;” and they prevented their (taking possession of) the Gospel or gaining access to it. In consequence a violent quarrel (broke out) between (the two groups). Those (mentioned in the first place) went back to the Romans and said to them: “Help us against these companions of ours before (helping us) against the Jews, and take away from them on our behalf our Book (kitab).” **Thereupon (the companions of whom they had spoken) fled the country. And the Romans wrote concerning them to their governors in the districts of Mosul and in the Jazirat al-‘Arab.** Accordingly, a search was made for them; some (qawm) were caught and burned, others (qawm) were killed.

(As for) those who had given a favorable answer to the Romans they came together and took counsel as to how to replace the Gospel, seeing it was lost to them. (Thus) the opinion that a Gospel should be composed (yunshi`u) was established among them ... a certain number of Gospels were written. (Pines S. The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source. Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Volume II, No.13; 1966. Jerusalem, pp. 14-15)

The above would seem to have taken place in the second century (which is consistent with Shlomo Pines’ beliefs) around 130 (the start) and 135 A.D. (the end). It is interesting for a number of reasons. It shows that there were two group that professed Christ then. One called “Christians” above, and the other (the faithful ones) called “companions.” Notice that the compromisers agreed to eat like the Romans, which meant that they would eat biblical unclean animals. The fact that the companions would no longer associate with the compromisers, and had to flee, showed that in whatever area the above occurred in, there were definitely two groups.

One group that departed from the truth to compromise with the Roman government so they would not have to move, with the other keeping to the original faith and fleeing like Jesus said to do (Matthew 10:23). The compromisers also pushed a different, false, gospel.

As far as the parting goes, Protestant scholars often push a false and unbiblical view on the parting of the ways as the following from a Protestant scholar realized:

The “Parting of the Ways” is typically depicted as an inexorable development ... the inevitable separation of Christianity (in all its varieties) from its theological, social, and cultural ties to Judaism ... the narratives told in modern research echo proto-orthodox/orthodox Christian historiography in asserting that “Jewish-Christian” forms of belief and worship should have never survived — let alone thrived — long beyond the apostolic age. Accordingly, scholars largely follow the lead of the heresiologists, by minimizing, marginalizing, and explaining away the evidence to the contrary. (Reed AY. ‘Jewish Christianity’ after the ‘Parting of the Ways’: Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementine Literature. In: The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003, 189-231)

Basically, many “parting of the ways” theologians twist the meaning of the Apostle Paul’s writings, consistent with what the Apostle Peter warned about in 2 Peter 3:15-16. They also tend to rely on mistranslations of the writings of Ignatius (see Another Look at the Didache, Ignatius, and the Sabbath), and often rely on arguments of men who were not truly Christian.

The fact is that “Jewish-Christian” forms of belief and worship did survive and thrive after the apostles. The so-called “inevitable separation” from scriptural practices considered ‘Jewish’ by many Protestant scholars and nearly all Protestants is not what the Bible calls for. Those who believe the true faith was to change are clinging to a lie (cf. Revelation 22:15) — and sadly, that lie is what Greco-Roman-Protestants tend to accept.

It was around this time in the 2nd century, that according to the late SDA scholar Samuel Bacchiocchi, that the keeping of Sunday started to be adopted in Rome as well as Jerusalem.

Furthermore, it is not just a “Parting of the Ways”

that is a problem for the Greco-Roman Catholics and Protestants, it is a departing from what the Book of Acts often refers to as THE WAY per Acts 9:2,19:9,19:23,24:22 — the Greek definite article for “the” proceeds the Greek word for “way” in all those verses. That is THE WAY which Protestants have not chosen. Outside of THE WAY, the other ways are false (Matthew 7:13; 1 John 2:19).

The Apostle Paul encountered such and departed from them:

8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples. (Acts 19:8-9)

The Apostle Peter warned about such would not follow the right way of truth:

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. ...

15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. (2 Peter 2:1-3,15)

The Apostle Paul added:

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:10)

The wages of unrighteousness/love of money is one of the reasons that some departed from the way of truth.

God’s prophet Samuel stated:

23 ... I will teach you the good and the right way.

(1 Samuel 12:23)

There is ONE RIGHT WAY:

38 They shall be My people, and I will be their God; 39 then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. 40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. (Jeremiah 32:38-40)

6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)

In the second century, the Greek philosopher, later known as Justin Martyr, arose. He not only endorsed human philosophies, he taught that there were Christians in Asia Minor who had Jewish practices like the Holy Days and the Ten Commandments, but that he did not care to associate with them (Justin. Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter 47). Justin also seemed to accept the false Gospel of Peter (Justin. First Apology, Chapter 36, verse 6) which the true Christians never did.

Twice the Book of Proverbs warns:

12 There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25)

It also warns:

15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise. (Proverbs 12:15)

2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the hearts. (Proverbs 21:2)

Sadly, people who choose something other than THE WAY normally do not consider themselves fools — many think that they are educated and have knowledge (cf. 1 Timothy 6:20) and hence they also do not believe that the negative aspects of various scriptures apply to them.

While many think they believe the Bible, the reality is that because they have accepted a deceitful and

different way, a way that departed from the original faith (Colossians 2:8), they do not.

Consider numerous Roman Catholic, Aramaic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox translations of one verse in the Bible:

3 Dearly beloved, taking all care to write unto you concerning your common salvation, I was under a necessity to write unto you: to beseech you to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. (Jude 3, DRB)

3 My dear friends, at a time when I was eagerly looking forward to writing to you about the salvation that we all share, I felt that I must write to you encouraging you to fight hard for the faith which has been once and for all entrusted to God's holy people. (Jude 3, NJB)

3 My beloved, I write to you with all diligence concerning our common salvation, and it is needful that I should write and exhort you also to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. (Jude 1-3, Lamsa Bible)

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write to you about our common life, it was necessary for me to write to you, as I am to persuade you to compete for the faith, which was once delivered to The Holy Ones. (Jude 3, Aramaic Bible in Plain English)

3 I write to you and encourage you to continue your fight for the Christian faith that was entrusted to God's holy people once for all time. (Jude 3, God's Word Translation)

3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3 NKJV/OSB)

3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I felt it needful to write to you in order to encourage you to fight hard for the faith which was once

for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3 EOB)

If those translations convey what God intended, then it should be clear that Christians are to hold to the original faith of the first century and not the changed faith of the second century that many have followed.

The Apostle Paul twice exhorted Christians to "continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22; Colossians 1:23), not change it. He also wrote to "continue in faith" (1 Timothy 2:15), "the doctrine. Continue" (1 Timothy 4:16), and "continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them" (2 Timothy 3:14). Paul also praised Timothy because he "carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life" (2 Timothy 3:10).

Faithful Christians were not to depart from the faith. They were to be separate from pagans:

15 Can Christ agree with the devil? Can a believer share life with an unbeliever?

16 Can God's temple contain false gods? Clearly, we are the temple of the living God. As God said, "I will live and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

17 The Lord says, "Get away from unbelievers. Separate yourselves from them. Have nothing to do with anything unclean. Then I will welcome you." (2 Corinthians 6:15-17, GWT)

That is basically what the faithful did in the second century when the pagan-influenced group changed, and even embraced unclean animal consumption. Consider that Paul also warned about ones who should know better:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ... 24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness ... (Romans 1:18-19,24)

Under Marcus of Jerusalem, many there began to consume unclean animals as the Romans urged. It should also be noted that Eleutherius, Bishop of Rome (also spelled Eleutheris) was, according to Roman Catholic sources, the one who proclaimed Roman Catholics could eat biblically-unclean animals,

about a century and a half after Jesus was resurrected.

But after the parting in the second century, the pagan-influenced group departed even further from original Christianity after the instigations of Roman Emperor Constantine.

Do we have records of Christian leaders dealing with the departed?

Yes.

Let's first consider the background of Polycarp.

Irenaeus, considered to be a saint by Church of Rome and Eastern Orthodox, claimed to have met Polycarp and recorded this about Polycarp (c. 180 A.D.):

But **Polycarp** also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but **was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna ... always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles**, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time ... There is also a very powerful Epistle of Polycarp written to the Philippians, from which those who choose to do so, and are anxious about their salvation, can learn the character of his faith, and the preaching of the truth. (Irenaeus. *Adversus Haereses*. Book III, Chapter 3, Verse 4)

Notice that Irenaeus is claiming that Polycarp was appointed bishop (pastor/overseer) of the Church in Smyrna by the apostles in Asia (which would most likely have been John and Philip and perhaps some others) and that his Letter to the Philippians taught the true faith. Notice also that Irenaeus is claiming that there was a list of men who have succeeded Polycarp until the late 2nd century and that they held to the teaching of the apostles. There is simply no reliable record of such transfer occurring in Rome or the other so-called "sees" of the Eastern Orthodox. Thus the only documented (and essentially universally accepted) apostle to "bishop" transfer of leadership

for the 1st and 2nd centuries that continued until at least the end of the 2nd century was through Polycarp of Smyrna.

Consider that we have from this early Roman Catholic source that Polycarp and his successors in Asia Minor (at least until the time that Irenaeus wrote this, around 180 A.D.) practiced the true teachings that they learned from the apostles (it should be noted that these churches had several doctrines that significantly differ from those currently held by the Roman Church.

This is also later (maybe 20 years later) essentially confirmed by Tertullian:

Anyhow the heresies are at best novelties, and have no continuity with the teaching of Christ. Perhaps some heretics may claim Apostolic antiquity: we reply: Let them publish the origins of their churches and unroll the catalogue of their bishops till now from the Apostles or from some bishop appointed by the Apostles, as the Smyrnaeans count from Polycarp and John, and the Romans from Clement and Peter; let heretics invent something to match this. (Tertullian. *Liber de praescriptione haereticorum*. Circa 200 A.D. as cited in Chapman J. Transcribed by Lucy Tobin. Tertullian. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume XIV. Copyright © 1912 by Robert Appleton Company. Online Edition Copyright © 2003 by K. Knight. Nihil Obstat, July 1, 1912. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York)

It is probable that Tertullian was aware of bishops of Rome prior to Clement (as Irenaeus wrote prior to him), as well as bishops of Smyrna prior to Polycarp, but that **Tertullian felt that the apostolic succession could only have gone through Polycarp (who he listed first) or Clement**. It must be understood that Tertullian's writing above, according *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, is one of the most important writings regarding the Roman Catholic Church.

Specifically, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* teaches:

Among the writings of the Fathers, the following are the principal works which bear on the doctrine of the Church: ST. IRENÆUS, Adv. Hereses in P.G., VII; TERTULLIAN, De Prescriptionibus in P. L... (Joyce G.H. Transcribed by Douglas J. Potter. The Church. The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume III. Copyright © 1908 by Robert Appleton Company. Online Edition Copyright © 2003 by K. Knight. Nihil Obstat, November 1, 1908. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York)

Thus Roman Catholics themselves must recognize the importance of these statements by Tertullian (as well as Irenaeus) — there were two churches with proper apostolic claims as far as he was concerned. And not just Rome — but one in Asia Minor that had been led by the Apostle John through Polycarp and his descendants.

Protestant Charles Merritt Nielsen wrote:

Polycarp would not tolerate any deviation from the traditions of Christianity as he understood them, and he seemed forever asking his readers to turn back to the faith delivered to us from the beginning. (Nielsen CM. "Polycarp: Model for Seminarians" Theology Today 30, no. 2 (1973): 178-180 as cited in Polycarp Versus The Progressives. HeidelBlog.net, Copyright © 2020 R. Scott Clark)

Polycarp ... he was not only unoriginal, he seemed content and determined to be so. For instance, most of his letter is made up of quotations from Christian writings". (Nielsen CM. "Polycarp: Model for Seminarians" Theology Today 30, no. 2 (1973): 178-180; as cited in Brown JM. Life of Polycarp. Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, March 1, 2013, p. 6)

Yes, Polycarp stuck to scripture, taught the Bible, and did not act like it should be changed.

The old Radio Church of God taught:

At Patmos the apostle John was finally released. Again at Ephesus he trained Polycarp who later carried forward the work of John and Philip.

Polycarp and Polycrates are the last leaders of the Church in this part of the world of which we have any record. (Lesson 49 – I Will Build My Church. Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course, 1967)

The late Pastor General of the old Worldwide/Radio Church of God wrote:

Jesus prophesied, "I will build my church." That Church, foretold Jesus, would never be extinguished. ... The true Church continued, a tiny "little flock," almost unnoticed by the world ...

It is significant that after his release John trained Polycarp elder of Smyrna, a city near Ephesus in the province of Asia. ... At neighboring Smyrna, Polycarp presided over the Church of God for half a century after John's death. Polycarp stood up boldly for the truth while many fell away and began having fellowship with the Catholic bishops of Rome. History relates that following the example of Peter, Paul and John, Polycarp wrote many letters to congregations and individuals, though all these have perished, save one in an edited version. (Armstrong HW. The Church They Couldn't Destroy. Good News, December 1981)

The ... CHURCH OF GOD ... is in direct continuous succession from the apostolic Church founded by Christ A.D. 31. (Armstrong HW. Why The Church? Good News, August 14, 1978)

The old Worldwide Church of God also published the following related to Polycarp:

After the death of the apostle John about A.D. 100, leadership of the churches in Asia Minor was in the hands of Polycarp. That was not an easy time in history. The Roman government had begun to persecute the Christian Church in the days of Nero. Other emperors followed suit over the next several centuries.

In the A.D. 150s the Romans severely persecuted Christians in Asia Minor. Polycarp, then an old man ..., still provided the spiritual leadership for the oppressed Christians.

The Roman senate had declared it atheism not to believe in the Roman gods. To be a declared follower of Jesus Christ, whom Pontius Pilate had crucified in A.D. 31, was forbidden.

Christians were sometimes called before magistrates and told to renounce their beliefs.

Those who didn't were often tortured or cast into the arenas to fight wild beasts.

Such was the scene in A.D. 156 in the city of Smyrna where Polycarp resided.

A recent plague and an earthquake had convinced the superstitious townspeople that Christians were to blame for the disasters. "The Roman gods must be displeased," they reasoned.

In the middle of one cold night in February, Roman soldiers placed Polycarp under arrest. The next day as the Roman games were coming to a conclusion, he was brought before the magistrates and ordered to renounce Jesus. Polycarp's answer was, as quoted by the early church historian Eusebius: "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong; and how can I now blaspheme my King that has saved me? ... Hear my free confession. I am a Christian."

The crowd demanded the lions be let loose. But the time for wild beast sports was over. In a rage they heaped broken pieces of wood together and bound Polycarp to a pole to be burned at the stake. A great wind blew the flames away from Polycarp, and an executioner thrust a sword into him — ending the life of one of the great leaders of Christianity. It is this kind of courage and dedication that truly makes a great leader. (Kelly R. Four Great Qualities of Leadership. Plain Truth, September 1984)

Interestingly, although he is not in the list of Bishops of Rome (since he was not Roman, that is logical), Polycarp is mentioned in the article titled Hierarchy of the Early Church in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

A. Mention of Bishops by Polycrates

In a synodal letter written by Polycrates of Ephesus about the year 190 this bishop, sixty-five years of age, speaks of seven of his relatives who had been bishops before him. Besides these he mentions Polycarp and Papius of Smyrna, Thraseas of Eumeneia, Sagaris of Laodicea and Melito of Sardes. (Eusebius, "Hist. Eccles.", v, 24, 2 sq.) (Borkowski S. De Dunin. Transcribed by Douglas J. Potter. Hierarchy of the Early Church. The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VII. Copyright © 1910 by Robert Appleton Company. Online Edition Copyright © 2003 by K. Knight. Nihil Obstat, June 1, 1910. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York)

Polycarp denounced heretics:

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, **having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time — **a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics. He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles — that, namely, which is handed down by the Church.** There are also those who heard from him that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, "Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within." And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said, "Dost thou know me?" "I do know thee, the first-born of Satan."**

(Irenaeus. Adversus Haereses. Book III, Chapter 3, Verse 4. Excerpted from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. American Edition, 1885)

Valentinus, Cerinthus, and Marcion are considered by Greco-Roman Catholic and other scholars to have been Gnostic heretics, while Hyginus, Pius, and Anicetus were claimed bishops of Rome. Thus, these quotes from Irenaeus show that the supposed Roman bishops did not have a higher leadership role than Polycarp of Smyrna had, because it apparently took the stature of the visiting Polycarp to turn many Romans away from the Gnostic heretics. The other reality is that according to Tertullian, it took the Church of Rome decades before they got rid of those heretics (Tertullian. The Prescription against Heretics, Chapter 30. Translated by Peter Holmes), thus suggesting that Rome tolerated heresies much more than Polycarp did.

Cerinthus taught allegorizing of scripture, taught that non-biblical tradition was more important than scripture, blended Gnostic teachings with the Bible, implemented improper festivals, claimed to be an apostle, and claimed that angels gave him messages. Although the Apostle John denounced him, many of his teachings eventually found their way into the Church of Rome.

Marcion was an early heretic to attempt to do away with the Sabbath and was claimed to be the successor of Simon Magus (Irenaeus. Adversus Haereses, Book 1, Chapter 27:1-2). Valentinus, who Polycarp denounced in Rome, is believed to have been the first affiliated with Christianity to teach the Trinitarian concept of three hypostasis or make any clear statement of 'equality' regarding three alleged persons of God — Valentinus also promoted the 'eighth day' ogdoad — a Gnostic concept (Sunday is considered the 8th day by Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars).

Please understand that the Church of Rome tolerated Marcion and Valentinus for decades after Polycarp denounced them. It should also be noted that even Roman Catholic recognized sources allege that Marcion and descendants of Valentinus had ties to the famous Simon Magus, who was mentioned in Acts 8:5-25.

Dr. Baggati noted that in the 2nd century, at least three bishops of Rome (Pius I, Eleutheris, and Victor I) also pushed back against attempts to return to original Judeo-Christians practices (Bagatti, Bellarmino. Translated by Eugene Hoade. The Church from the Circumcision. Nihil obstat: Marcus Adinolfi. Imprimi potest: Herminius Roncari. Imprimatur: +Albertus Gori, die 26 Junii 1970. Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, p. 25).

Hence, true succession of doctrine was not coming from them.

In the early 3rd century, Serapion of Antioch, after visiting what he thought was part of the faithful church, wrote:

3. For we, brethren, receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ; but we reject intelligently the writings falsely ascribed to them, knowing that such were not handed down to us.

4. When I visited you I supposed that all of you held the true faith, and as I had not read the Gospel which they put forward under the name of Peter, I said, If this is the only thing which occasions dispute among you, let it be read. But now having learned, from what has been told me, that their mind was involved in some heresy, I will hasten to come to you again. Therefore, brethren, expect me shortly.

5. But you will learn, brethren, from what has been written to you, that we perceived the nature of the heresy of Marcianus, and that, not understanding what he was saying, he contradicted himself.

6. For having obtained this Gospel from others who had studied it diligently, namely, from the successors of those who first used it, whom we call Docetæ; (for most of their opinions are connected with the teaching of that school) we have been able to read it through, and we find many things in accordance with the true doctrine of the Saviour, but some things added to that doctrine, which we have pointed out for you farther on. So much in regard to Serapion.

(Serapion of Antioch. Translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890)

Serapion condemned the so-called Gospel of Peter which is the first known writing that claimed that the Lord's Day was Sunday as he apparently accidentally visited a church that he thought was supposed to be faithful, but instead found that they were in the "other group" — hence he parted ways from them.

Notice an explanation for why there was the adoption of Greek philosophy and paganism related to the 3rd century Gregory the Wonder Worker, given by the late Roman Catholic Cardinal Newman:

Confiding then in the power of Christianity to resist the infection of evil, and to transmute the very instruments and appendages of demon-worship to evangelical use, ... the rulers of the Church from early times were prepared, should the occasion arise, to adopt, to imitate, or to sanctify the existing rites and customs of the population, as well as the philosophy of the educated class.

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus supplies the first instance of this economy. ... The bodies of the Martyrs were distributed in different places, and the people assembled and made merry, as the year came round, holding festival in their honour. This indeed was a proof of his great wisdom ... for, perceiving that the childish and untrained populace were retained in their idolatrous error by creature comforts, in order that what was of first importance should at any rate be secured to them, viz. that they should look to God in place of their vain rites, he allowed them to be merry, jovial, and gay at the monuments of the holy Martyrs, as if their behaviour would in time undergo a spontaneous change into greater seriousness and strictness, since faith would lead them to it; which has actually been the happy issue in that population, all carnal gratification having turned into a spiritual form of rejoicing."

There is no reason to suppose that the licence here spoken of passed the limits of harmless though rude festivity; for it is observable that the same reason, the need of holydays for the multitude, is assigned by Origen, St. Gregory's master, to explain the establishment of the Lord's Day also, and the Paschal and the Pentecostal festivals, which have never been viewed as unlawful compliances; and, moreover, the people were in fact eventually reclaimed from their gross habits by his indulgent policy, a successful issue which could not have followed an accommodation to what was sinful. (Newman JH, Cardinal. An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine. J. Toovey, 1845, p. 358)

Cardinal Newman explained pagan items were considered to be an evangelical tool (ibid, p. 358) and that was another reason that the Greco-Roman Catholic churches parted from the way. Please understand that the appeal to "the philosophy of the educated class" means that pagan philosophy (as taught by the ancient Greeks and Romans and expanded by people like Clement and Origen) was to be accepted — and despite claiming sola Scriptura, most Protestants have accepted pagan philosophies and doctrines in their faith.

Notice what a former Roman Catholic priest wrote about Emperor Constantine of the 4th century:

Constantine ... No one was ever more devoted to than he to the sun god, Sol ... Emperor Constantine never relinquished his title of Pontifex Maximus, head of the pagan state cult ... Twice married, he murdered Crispus his son by his first wife, in 326. He had his second wife drowned in the bath; killed his eleven year old nephew, then his brother-in-law, after giving him assurances of safe conduct under oath ...

Constantine was a soldier at a time when shedding blood was unacceptable to the church ... When Constantine called bishops his beloved brethren and styled himself 'Bishop of Bishops', which popes later appropriated, he was not a Christian, not even a catechumen. Yet no one remotely approached his stature

and authority. Even the Bishop of Rome ... was in comparison, a non-entity ... All bishops agreed that he was 'the inspired oracle, the apostle of Church wisdom' ...

It is another paradox of history that it was Constantine, a pagan, who invented the idea of a council of all Christian communities ... At Nicaea the Founding Father of Ecumenical Councils gathered 300 hundred bishops, having laid on free transport ... Maybe he simply wanted to show that he was in charge. He proposed what came to be called 'the orthodox view' of God's Son being 'of one substance' with the Father. All dissident bishops caved in, except for two whom Constantine promptly deposed and sent packing ... His cynical use of Christ, in which everyone including the Roman Bishop acquiesced, meant a profound falsification of the Gospel message and the injection of standards alien to it. (De Rosa, pp. 35,36,43,44)

A committed sun god/Mithras devotee came up with the Council of Nicaea.

It was about one year after conquering the Eastern Empire (thus resurrecting the combined Roman Empire) the sun-worshiping Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea. That Council declared:

- 1) The Roman Sun-day or day of the Sun was to be the Christian Sabbath.
- 2) Rules regarding seasonal prayers, penance, and indulgences.
- 3) That the Greco-Romans believed that Jesus was one substance with God the Father.
- 4) Passover would be on Sunday and not the biblical date of Nisan 14.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that this Council did not prohibit pagan sun-worship, but instead decreed that true Christians should not keep the seventh-day Sabbath nor should they be allowed to keep Passover on the 14th.

That was a clear departure from the faith. Notice the following warnings from the Apostle Paul from two Protestant translations of scripture:

12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of

you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-1, NKJV)

1 We may fear, then, lest a promise being left of entering into His rest, anyone of you may seem to have come short, 2 for we also are having good news proclaimed, even as they, but the word heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard,

3 for we enter into the rest — we who believed, as He said, "So I swore in My anger, They will [not] enter into My rest"; and yet the works were done from the foundation of the world, 4 for He spoke in a certain place concerning the seventh [day] thus: "And God rested in the seventh day from all His works"; 5 and in this [place] again, "They will [not] enter into My rest"; 6 since then, it remains for some to enter into it, and those who first heard good news did not enter in because of unbelief —

7 again He limits a certain day, "Today," in David saying, after so long a time, as it has been said, "Today, if you may hear His voice, you may not harden your hearts,"

8 for if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken after these things concerning another day; 9 **there remains, then, a Sabbath rest to the people of God, 10 for he who entered into His rest, he also rested from his works, as God from His own. 11 May we be diligent, then, to enter into that rest, that no one may fall in the same example of the unbelief.** (Hebrews 4:1-11, Literal Standard Version)

Those who push against the 7th day Sabbath and accepted the changed date for Passover have departed from the faith — they parted from THE WAY.

Is obedience necessary for THE WAY? Yes, the Apostles said:

29. ... Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We are obligated to obey God rather than men.

... 32. And we are His witnesses of these things, as is also the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those who obey Him.” (Acts 5:29, 32, AFV)

That being said, here is some of what the Greco-Roman Catholic historian Epiphanius wrote on Passover in the mid-4th Century:

... the emperor ... convened a council of 318 bishops ... in the city of Nicea ... They passed certain ecclesiastical canons at the council besides, and at the same time decreed in regard to the Passover that there must be one unanimous concord on the celebration of God’s holy and supremely excellent day. For it was variously observed by people ...

Eventually, those in parts of Europe (e.g. Britain and Germany) changed the name from Passover to Easter (Ostern in German). Easter and Ostern are other names for the Babylonian goddess Ishtar (which can be pronounced as Easter), the so-called queen of heaven (also called Ashtaroth in the Bible in 1 Samuel 12:10). The “Queen of Heaven” is also a title that has been associated with Europa, for whom the continent of Europe is named.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church goes so far as to claim:

1170 At the Council of Nicea in 325, all the Churches agreed that Easter, the Christian Passover, should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon (14 Nisan) after the vernal equinox.

This simply is not really true, and it should not be taught in the modern Catechism. Passover was still kept on the correct day by the scattered faithful church and always has been, since the time of Christ. The fact that the Emperor got an agreement from those he summoned did not change the Bible (or its truly faithful followers).

It should be noted that it is understood, even by some Roman Catholic scholars, that “Judeo-Christian” churches were not represented at that Council. Notice what priest Bellarmino Bagatti wrote:

... the inhabitants of Syria, of Cilicia and of Mesopotamia were still celebrating Easter {Passover} with the Jews ...

The importance of the matters to be discussed and the great division that existed had led Constantine to bring together a big number of bishops, including confessors of the faith, in order to give the impression that the whole of Christendom was represented.

In fact ... the churches of Jewish stock had had no representation ... From this we can conclude that no Judaeo-Christian bishop participated in the Council. Either they were not invited or they declined to attend. And so the capitulars had a free hand to establish norms for certain practices without meeting opposition or hearing other view points. Once the road was open future Councils would continue on these lines, thus deepening the breach between the Christians of two-stocks. **The point of view of the Judaeo-Christians, devoid of Greek philosophical formation, was that of keeping steadfast to the Testimonia, and therefore not to admit any word foreign to the Bible,** including Homoousion. (Bagatti, Bellarmino. Translated by Eugene Hoade. *The Church from the Gentiles in Palestine*. Nihil obstat: Ignatius Mancini, 1 Februari 1970. Imprimi potest: Herminius Roncari, 26 Februari 1970. Imprimatur: +Albertus Gori, die 28 Februarii 1970. Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, 1971, pp. 47-48)

So, there were Christians who believed in basing doctrine only on the Bible and they did not attend Nicea or any of the later Councils. Mainly, if not only, those who seemed to accept aspects of “Greek philosophical formation” attended. Thus, no true Christian should consider that these Councils were called of God. The faithful did NOT accept the word Homoousion, which Emperor Constantine came up with, to describe the nature of God — that is Homoousion concept is now embraced by the bulk of trinitarians (the original Christian faith was the binitarian way from the beginning).

Constantine’s church historian, Eusebius, recorded the following details about Constantine convening

that Council:

But before this time another most virulent disorder had existed, and long afflicted the Church; I mean the difference respecting the salutary feast of Easter {Passover}. For while one party asserted that the Jewish custom should be adhered to, the other affirmed that the exact recurrence of the period should be observed, without following the authority of those ...

Then as if to bring a divine array against this enemy, he convoked a general council, and invited the speedy attendance of bishops from all quarters, in letters expressive of the honorable estimation in which he held them. Nor was this merely the issuing of a bare command but the emperor's good will contributed much to its being carried into effect: for he allowed some the use of the public means of conveyance, while he afforded to others an ample supply of horses for their transport. The place, too, selected for the synod, the city Nicæa in Bithynia ... In effect, the most distinguished of God's ministers from all the churches which abounded in Europe, Lybia, and Asia were here assembled ... Constantine is the first prince of any age who bound together such a garland as this with the bond of peace, and presented it to his Saviour as a thank-offering for the victories he had obtained over every foe, thus exhibiting in our own times a similitude of the apostolic company ...

The result was that they were not only united as concerning the faith, but that the time for the celebration of the salutary feast of Easter was agreed on by all ...

What was the justification for this, or for Eusebius calling those who kept biblical practices "this enemy"?

Well, although the word Pascha (which means Passover) is mistranslated as Easter above and below, Constantine clearly felt that the Jews were detestable and that he did not want his church to follow practices like theirs. Notice what Constantine declared:

At this meeting the question concerning

the most holy day of Easter {Passover} was discussed, and it was resolved by the united judgment of all present, that this feast ought to be kept by all and in every place on one and the same day. For what can be more becoming or honorable to us than that this feast from which we date our hopes of immortality, should be observed unfailingly by all alike, according to one ascertained order and arrangement? And first of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this ordinance to future ages, by a truer order, which we have preserved from the very day of the passion until the present time. **Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Saviour a different way.** A course at once legitimate and honorable lies open to our most holy religion. Beloved brethren, let us with one consent adopt this course, and withdraw ourselves from all participation in their baseness.

It perhaps should be noted that Jesus kept Passover on the 14th. Calling the "Jewish crowd" detestable is not appropriate for real Christians. Jesus did not implement Sunday Passover as a "different way." This is further evidence that those who are following Constantine's decrees are not following those made by a true Christian.

Scholars usually recognize the anti-Judaic motivation for the repudiation of the Jewish reckoning of Passover and adoption of Easter-Sunday instead. Joachim Jeremias attributes such a development to "the inclination to break away from Judaism." In a similar vein, J.B. Lightfoot explains that Rome and Alexandria adopted Easter-Sunday to avoid "even the semblance of Judaism" (Bacchiocchi S. God's Festival in Scripture and History. Biblical Perspectives. Befriend Springs (MI), 1995, pp. 101,102,103)

In the 4th century, the Greco-Roman Catholic

Epiphanius, himself, actually admitted that the church used to observe the 14th for Passover when he wrote:

Audians ... **they choose to celebrate the Passover** with the Jews — that is they contentiously celebrate the Passover **at the same time as the Jews are holding their Festival of Unleavened Bread**. And indeed that **this used to be the church's custom**.

Thus, Epiphanius seemed to realize that Passover on the 14th was the original Passover date, even for the early Greco-Romans, since he wrote **“this used to be the church's custom.”**

So, the unity that came from the pagan emperor's Council of Nicea was against the original faith and practices of Christians.

Here is a report from a Roman Catholic scholar about matters in Jerusalem that Emperor Constantine commanded the death penalty for Christians who would not eat pork:

That there existed strife between the different branches of the faithful can easily be gathered from the expression of the anonymous pilgrim of Bordeaux in 333, who says that the three basilicas were erected by the gentile Christians “at the command of Constantine”, that is by force, and from the late account of Euty chius (PG 111,1012-1013) that, just at this time, the faithful while they were leaving the church on Easter day, were forced to eat pork under the pain of death. We know how the Judaeo-Christians refused this in order not to transgress the Mosaic law to which they held there were bound (Bagatti, Bellarmino. Translated by Eugene Hoade. The Church from the Circumcision. Nihil obstat: Marcus Adinolfi, 13 Maii 1970. Imprimi potest: Herminius Roncari, 14 Junii 1970. Imprimatur: +Albertus Gori, die 26 Junii 1970. Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, 1971, pp. 13-14)

A 10th-11th century Islamic Arab document professes to have a Judeo-Christian perspective of the Council of Nicea. Here is some of what Shlomo Pines summarized from that Arabic report of that Council and one that preceded it:

Constantine called a gathering of Christian monks with a view to the formulation of obligatory religious beliefs ... However, some of them disagreed with this text ... There was a scission and the symbol of faith which had been formulated was not regarded as valid.

Thereupon, three hundred and eighteen men gathered in Nicaea and formulated a symbol of faith, which was accepted and made obligatory by Constantine. People who dissented from it were killed and professions of faith differing from it suppressed.

In this way people who professed the religion of Christ came to do all that is reprehensible; they worshipped the cross, observed the Roman religious rites and ate pork. Those who did not eat it were killed. (Pines, pp. 32,43)

So, according to an Islamic reporter, there were Christians who were upset by the changes that Emperor Constantine enforced, such as crosses and Roman religious rites. Furthermore, the same reporter stated that the “Jewish Christians” denounced the use of incense in Christian churches as “an adaptation of a Pagan custom” and that they had to become a clandestine group.

Regarding this early time period, the theological historian Bart Ehrman noted:

By the early fourth century, Christianity had almost completely separated from Judaism, the religion of Jesus and his apostles ... By early fourth century, non-Jewish Christianity had become a major world religion. (Ehrman B. From Jesus to Constantine: A History of Early Christianity, Part 2. The Teaching Company, Chantilly (VA), 2004, p. 47)

There was clearly a separation. But it was the separation between the faithful and the larger group of unfaithful.

Jesus warned:

24 “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, (Luke 13:24)

13 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate

and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

And with various partings of THE way, we have seen that prophesy fulfilled.

Consider also something that happened later in the 4th century.

Since Constantine's declarations did not stop everyone from properly observing Passover, a later Roman Emperor named Theodosius, after he became a baptized "Christian," decreed the death penalty:

Edicts of Theodosius against the heretics, A.D. 380-394 ... Theodosius ... decreed that ... by the death of the offender; and the same capital punishment was inflicted on the Audians, or Quartodecimans, who should dare to perpetrate the atrocious crime of celebrating on an improper day the festival. (Gibbon E. Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Volume III, Chapter XXVII. ca. 1776-1788)

The various enactments against heretics are contained in the Code of Theodosius (16. tit. 5. s. 6-23; and the commentary of Gothofredus): the Eunomians, whose guilt consisted in denying any resemblance between the two substances, and who were accordingly Anomoeans, were also deprived of the power of testamentary disposition, and of taking by testamentary gift: they seem, in fact, to have been deprived of all the rights of citizens. The Manichaeen heresy was punishable with death; and the same penalty threatened the Audians or the Quartodecimans, who celebrated the festival of Easter on the wrong day. **To the reign of Theodosius belonged the glory or the infamy of establishing Inquisitors of Faith, who seem to have been specially enjoined to look after the crime of the Quartodecimans.** (Smith W. A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology: Oarses-Zygia. J. Murray, 1890 Item notes: v. 3, p. 1064)

Theodosius was a persecuting Greco-Roman Catholic, was endorsed by the Greco-Roman churches, called the faithful heretics, and killed people for following Polycarp's (as well as others') example of keeping Passover on the 14th of Nisan.

Is Theodosius' order to kill those that followed the example of Jesus and John to observe the Passover on the 14th instead of Sunday a sign of a true Christian leader or more of a sign of a supporter of antichrist? Notice that the office of the "Inquisitors" was actually first formed to deal with people who kept Passover on the original biblical date — did you know that the date of Passover was considered to be that important?

Centuries after many compromisers switched to Sunday, the name of what was supposed to be the observance of Passover was changed in some Teutonic languages (English, German) to Easter.

Easter/Eostre was the name of a Babylonian sex goddess (often spelled Ishtar but pronounced about the same as Easter). Ishtar was the "queen of heaven" who was celebrated each Spring by the pagans. Various non-biblical trappings were part of the Ishtar celebration that are similar to many that who observe Easter today.

That the term Easter comes from paganism is confirmed by *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

The English term, according to the Ven. Bede (De temporum ratione, I, v), relates to Estre, a Teutonic goddess of the rising light of day and spring, which deity ... Anglo-Saxon, eâster, eâstron; Old High German, ôstra, ôstrara, ôstrarûn; German, Ostern. April was called easter-monadh. (Holweck, Easter)

As the above indicates, instead of Ishtar, some believe "Easter" was derived from the pagan-German goddess Eostre/Ostara (who also had ties to Ishtar). She was the "bringer of light" or the "goddess of the dawn," and is sometimes called "the queen of heaven." She was celebrated each Spring. She looks to be a direct tie to Easter sunrise services (since the Bible instead, has Passover right after sunset) as well as rabbits. Her favourite flower was the rose which is also the flower

that the Roman Catholics associate with their version of 'Mary' (Philips G. The Virgin Mary Conspiracy: The True Father of Christ and the Tomb of the Virgin. Bear & Company, 2005, pp. 218-219).

Various researchers, such as the 19th century scholar L.L.C. Hamilton, have taught that Ishtar was both the "Astarthe" (1 Kings 11:33 DRB) or "Astarte" (1 Kings 11:33 NJB/NABRE) or "Ashtoreth" (3 Kingdoms 11:30, OSB) condemned in the Old Testament AND the Eostre of the Germans (Hamilton LLC. Ishtar and Izdubar, the epic of Babylon; or, The Babylonian goddess of love and the hero and warrior king, restored in mod. verse by L.L.C. Hamilton. 1884, pp. 207-208).

Whether originally from a Babylonian goddess, a later German one, or a combination of both, 'Easter' is a term, not for our Saviour, but of a pagan goddess. Items such as "hot cross buns" would not have been used by early Christians for many reasons, including the fact that they kept the Days of Unleavened Bread, which comes right after Passover. And that the Bible warns against making similar cakes to the queen of heaven (Jeremiah 7:18, 44:16-29).

Original Christians did not refer to any of their annual biblical observations with the names of pagan gods and goddesses — nor do we in the Continuing Church of God do so today.

We also still keep Passover on the original date like the early faithful Christian leaders did — who followed the practices and the WAY of Jesus and His apostles.

Even a Protestant scholar has realized that 4th century faith many adopted was very different from the original Christian faith:

The student of history cannot fail to note the wide difference between the Christianity of the New Testament period and that of the fourth century. The religion which Christ taught was a direct outgrowth of Judaism. His mission was "not to destroy but to fulfil." This He did by giving a higher conception and a broader view of all which Judaism had held hitherto. He gave a new meaning to the fatherhood of God. He explained and enforced the moral precepts of the Old

Testament, developing their deeper spiritual sense, and giving them a new application to the inner life of men. He enlarged Judaism without destroying it. He clarified and intensified the ten commandments. He discarded the outward formalities of the Jews, and "reached the heart of things" by His interpretation of the ancient Scriptures, by His new precepts, and by His example. He developed Christianity within the Jewish Church, making it the efflorescence of all that was best in the ancient dispensation.

Christ presented love for God, for truth, and for man, as the mainspring of action in all religious living. Under His teachings Christianity arose as a new life, springing from the law of God, written in the hearts of men. New Testament Christianity was a life born of love, and finding expression in loving obedience. It was a system of right living, as in the divine presence, and by the help of the divine Spirit. (Lewis AH. PAGANISM SURVIVING IN CHRISTIANITY. G.P. Putnam, 1882, p. 31)

The true faith did not compromise with paganism.

The true faith has more 'Jewish' characteristics than many who claim to be Christian have accepted.

Sadly, most who profess Christianity have departed from the true way.

Look at these admissions from the Protestant scholar and theologian H. Brown:

It is impossible to document what we now call orthodoxy in the first two centuries of Christianity. ... but we can document orthodoxy for all the centuries since then — in other words for close to seventeen centuries of the church's existence. (Brown HOJ. Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church. Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody (MA), 1988, pp. 5)

Early Protestant "orthodoxy" cannot be documented. Why is it IMPOSSIBLE? Well, because much of it was never part of the original Christian faith.

Dr. Brown also wrote:

Although classical theology is certainly not without its problems, historically it is almost always the case that **the appeal to the Bible alone ... leads to the reemergence of ancient heresies** ... The Reformation began with the slogan “To the sources!” and sought to deal a fatal blow to the place of church tradition in shaping life and faith ... Despite their efforts not to be influenced by the authority of tradition, each of the major Reformation churches found itself borrowing from the past and building up a traditionalism of its own ... **when the Anabaptists and other radicals discovered Scripture to be teaching things the Lutherans found detestable, Lutherans learned the usefulness of tradition** ... (ibid, pp. 335,350-351)

So, Protestant scholars actually claim that relying on the Bible alone leads to the emergence of early Christian views that they consider to be heretical. “Tradition” is NOT useful against scripture! How can appealing to the Bible be heresy?

THIS IS A PARTING FROM THE WAY!

The historical reality is that when early Protestants did not like biblical teachings, they latched onto traditions of men. Jesus condemned supposedly ‘Bible believing’ people for doing that:

9 ... “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. ... 13 making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.” (Mark 7:9-13)

Do you follow the Jesus of the Bible or do you prefer traditions accepted by Protestants and others?

Consider the following:

1 “Woe to the rebellious children,” says the LORD, “Who take counsel, but not of Me, And

who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, That they may add sin to sin; ... 8 Now go, write it before them on a tablet, And note it on a scroll, That it may be for time to come, Forever and ever: 9 That this is a rebellious people, Lying children, Children who will not hear the law of the LORD ... (Isaiah 30:1,8-9)

Because of the acceptance of traditions, some of which came from councils of men and pagan Greek philosophies, most Protestants will not hear, at least parts of, the law of the Lord and His word.

Many do not want to actually do what the God of the Bible wants related to His law. The Apostle Paul gave the following warnings and teaching:

3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia — remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. 5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, 6 from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, 7 desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm. (1 Timothy 1:3-7)

Notice that the purpose of the law is love, yet there are those that strayed and used idle talk to turn people away. This was perhaps the core reason that there was a parting of the ways between the faithful and the bulk of those who claim to follow Jesus.

Jesus came to magnify the law, basically by showing it had to do with love, not just outward show or acts.

And His magnifying the law was prophesied:

21 YHWH has delight for the sake of His righteousness, “” He magnifies law, and makes honorable. (Isaiah 42:21, LSV)

21 The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable. (Isaiah 42:21, NKJV)

Yet, many do not accept or understand that, hence they parted from the way

The reality is that those who will look into the Bible and the records of history can find the original "orthodox" faith, which promoted the law, if they really want to know the truth.

Jesus said:

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.
8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

However, since Jesus also warned that few would find the way, that brings to mind the following from the Book of Proverbs:

16 The lazy man is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can answer sensibly. (Proverbs 26:16)

Are you one who has asked and sought to find the truth?

Of have you followed the lazy and broad way?

A writer of the Psalms wrote:

30 I have chosen the way of truth; (Psalm 119:30)

Have YOU? Really?

If you are not part of THE WAY, the time to change to God's way is now.

That said, notice what will happen after Jesus returns:

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9)

20 ... your teachers will not be moved into a

corner anymore, But your eyes shall see your teachers. 21 Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it,"

Whenever you turn to the right hand Or whenever you turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:20-21)

Yes, there is one RIGHT way.

10 ...Paul said, 14 "**... I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a cult. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the prophets.** (Acts 24:10,14, NLT)

After Jesus returns, more will realize that was the ONLY WAY as He laid out the following:

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:21-23)

Jesus will make it clear who has departed from the WAY.

Yet, you can know that way now.

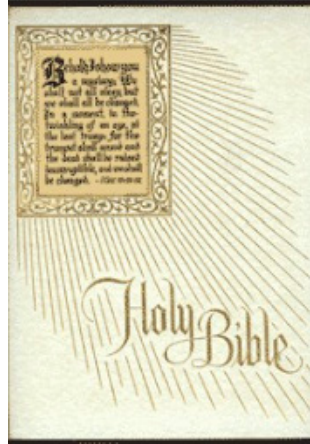
The teachings and the practices of the faithful Christian church, which are grounded in scriptures, is the way.

Since the true Church of God has continued from the time of the original apostles, the name Continuing Church of God helps convey that, particularly because we have "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

Do not be one who has parted from it.

them many hypocritical, unrepentant Pharisees

STUDY THE BIBLE COURSE



The “Baptism With FIRE” 26d

Bob Thiel, Editor-in-Chief

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Preface: This course is highly based upon the personal correspondence course developed in 1954 that began under the direction of the late C. Paul Meredith in the old Radio Church of God. Various portions have been updated for the 21st century (though much of the original writing has been retained). It also has more scriptural references, as well as information and questions not in the original course. Unless otherwise noted, scriptural references are to the NKJV, copyright Thomas Nelson Publishing, used by permission. The KJV, sometimes referred to as the Authorized Version is also often used. Additionally, Roman Catholic-approved translations such as the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) are sometimes used as are other translations.

Hebrews 6 tells of baptismS — plural:

1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

So, there is a baptism by water, so what is the other one?

Should a Christian seek it? What did John the Baptist prophesy and teach concerning it?

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, 9 and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our

father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 10 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matthew 3:7-12)

The populace came in great crowds to see John — mostly out of curiosity. But John was speaking in particular to the unrepentant religionists, as well as those who did repent. Notice carefully that some of those to whom John spoke — the repentant — were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit later. But the others present — among

and Sadducees — were going to be baptized with fire — immersed in the lake of fire — unless they repented. They would be burned up as chaff (Matthew 3:12). (Sedliacik R. MINISTUDY: The BAPTISMS of the Bible. Good News magazine, April 1979)

People just don't understand what they're asking for when they seek "the baptism with fire"! (Matthew 3:11, KJV), as certain Pentecostals do.

Let's understand what John meant!

1. Just what did John the Baptist prophesy concerning "baptism with fire"? Matthew 3:11.

2. To whom was John speaking? Matthew 3:5-6. Are we to assume from this that all Jerusalem and all Judea, and all this region was righteous, or at least repentant and seeking salvation?

COMMENT: Not at all! The whole population came in great crowds to see John — mostly out of CURIOSITY!

3. Did John baptize ALL of this group who came to him? Matthew 3:7-8. What is to be the ultimate fate of the "tree" — one who has not truly repented and shown forth the "fruits" — proof in the life he leads — of true repentance? Verse 10 and last word of verse 11.

COMMENT: John was speaking to the UNREPENTANT hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees whom he REFUSED to baptize, as well as those who did repent and whom he BAPTIZED. So, notice carefully that SOME of those there to whom John spoke — the repentant — were to be BAPTIZED with the HOLY SPIRIT later. But that the others there — the unrepentant — were awaiting the wrath to come, which shall burn them with — baptize them into — a fiery death! (Verse 11, last word.) This fire is the ultimate fate of the wicked, who shall be cast into the lake of fire — this earth's surface burning up — which is the second and final death (Revelation 21:8).

That settles it!

John the Baptist was speaking to both those ultimately to receive salvation and to the unrepentant sinners.

When he said, "Christ shall baptize 'you,'" the "you" included BOTH groups. The repentant are those He would baptize with His Spirit — the others with all-consuming fire at the time of the final judgment! You don't want the "baptism with fire," do you?

4. Did John also compare the evil to chaff? How did he say Christ would separate them from the good, so they could be burned? Matthew 3:12, KJV.

COMMENT: At the final judgment, Christ's fan is to be in His hand. With it He will purge His floor. Of what? Of chaff which He will FAN AWAY — remove. Christ will have gathered His wheat into the garner — the Kingdom of God. Then He will later remove — destroy — the chaff by FIRE. That is the fate of the chaff — unquenchable fire!

5. Did Jesus also compare the evil to tares — weeds which are a menace to the good? What are Jesus' own words concerning His gathering of His wheat — the good — and the burning of the tares — the evil? Matthew 13:30. Also scan quickly the rest of this parable, beginning with verse 24. Did Jesus elaborate on what the symbol" of this parable represent? Matthew 13:36-42.

COMMENT: "His (God's) floor" in Matthew 3:12 is the same as "His field" of Matthew 13:24 — both are this earth.

That fire of Matthew 13:40-42 is the ultimate fate of all the incorrigible wicked as the following scriptures confirm:

14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14-15)

8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Revelation 21:8)

1 "For behold, the day is coming,
Burning like an oven,
And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will

be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the Lord of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch.

2 But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves.

3 You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this," Says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 4:1-3).

Surely no one will seek the baptism with fire once he or she understands what it really is!

"Baptism for the DEAD"

Another doctrine being taught today is that of "Baptism for the Dead." Its history, like that of infant baptism, clearly descends from paganism. It is widely practiced and taught by one large denomination whose members have themselves "baptized" for dead relatives and friends who died unbaptized. This custom is based on their misrepresentation of 1 Corinthians 15:29.

First notice how this custom crept into the professing Christian world.

History shows that the heretic Marcion, about 150 A.D., introduced an idea of his own — the practice of baptizing the living for the dead. John Chrysostom describes the procedure as follows:

"When a catechumen (one receiving training in doctrine before church membership) dies, they conceal a living person under the bed of the departed. Then they stand before the dead, and ask the dead person whether or not he is willing to be baptized. Instead of the dead, who is unable to answer, the person under the bed replies in the affirmative. Whereupon they baptize him instead of the deceased, and thus make quite a farce of the whole matter. Such power has Satan over the minds of foolish men. And if you complain of this transaction, they appeal to the words of the Apostle Paul, who speaks of being 'Baptized for the dead.'" (Hoary.

xl in Homily 40 on First Corinthians by John Chrysostom)

Now let's learn the truth about 1 Corinthians 15:29.

1. Can the dead possibly be aware of someone being baptized on their behalf? Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10.

COMMENT: Those who are baptized FOR the dead actually believe they're being baptized for (on the behalf of) the flitting "immortal souls" of their dead unconverted friends or relatives! Such baptism is supposed to automatically SAVE those "souls" and send them straight to Heaven!

How foolish this doctrine of men really is! We have already proved by scripture that the doctrines of the "immortal soul" and that of men going to heaven are of Satanically inspired, pagan origin. With this knowledge alone, the MAN-MADE doctrine of vicarious baptism crumbles!

Baptism obviously is for the LIVING, NOT the DEAD! Only the LIVING can REPENT, and repentance is a PRIOR CONDITION to baptism. The dead are dead — they "know nothing"!

2. Would Christians have any HOPE of a future resurrection if Christ had not been resurrected? 1 Corinthians 15:16-19, 32. But don't verses 3-8, 20 prove Christ was resurrected and that we therefore can have HOPE of being RESURRECTED too?

COMMENT: The subject of the entire 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians is the CHRISTIAN'S HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION.

3. Exactly what does Paul say about "baptism for the dead"? 1 Corinthians 15:29.

COMMENT: This verse is not correctly translated from the original inspired Greek. Paul is NOT talking about being baptized "in the place of" the dead, or "in behalf of" the dead, or "for" the dead. The inspired Greek word translated "for" is "huper". "Huper" is a vague word having many meanings to choose from, hence the context is important to determine the actual meaning of the word as Paul intended. This chapter of the Bible focuses on the resurrection.

As one proof of the resurrection, Paul cites in verse 29 the example of those who were baptized, symbolizing their HOPE in the RESURRECTION. He is actually asking the question, “why be baptized IF the dead rise not?” Therefore, since Paul is speaking of the HOPE of the resurrection in the context of chapter 15, verse 29, KJV should properly read: “Else what shall they do which are baptized for (THE HOPE OF) the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for (THE HOPE OF) the dead?”

What is the hope of the dead? The resurrection! In verse 29 Paul is writing about baptism, which pictures, among other things, the HOPE of the RESURRECTION! Arising out of the watery “grave” of baptism is a symbol of the hope of the DEAD — the hope of a FUTURE RESURRECTION which they had when they were alive.

To surrender one’s life to Christ now, to crucify the self now, to be baptized — all this is foolish unless there is hope thereby of a resurrection!

This verse has absolutely nothing to do with the false doctrine of baptism in place of or “for” the unbaptized dead! The Holy Spirit-inspired New Testament Church did NOT practice this totally unscriptural custom! And the apostle Paul DID NOT teach it!

Consider further that before a person may be baptized, one must first REPENT (Acts 2:38) and BELIEVE (Mark 16:16).

Notice:

38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38-39)

16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:16)

The dead cannot believe:

5 For the living know that they will die; But the

dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

No, a living person’s baptism does not cover someone who is dead.

So, where did the idea of being baptism for the dead come from? Well, an incorrect understanding of 1 Corinthians 15:29. Let’s see it in context:

27 For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. 29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? (1 Corinthians 15:27-29)

So we see Jesus came to destroy death. People are to be baptized for the hope of the dead, not for others.

People must work out their own salvation:

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Others cannot do it for you:

20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. (Ezekiel 18:20)

Even pious believers cannot save you:

12 The word of the Lord came again to me, saying: 13 “Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. 14 Even if these three men, Noah,

Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,” says the Lord God. 15 “If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they empty it, and make it so desolate that no man may pass through because of the beasts, 16 even though these three men were in it, as I live,” says the Lord God, “they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; only they would be delivered, and the land would be desolate. 17 “Or if I bring a sword on that land, and say, ‘Sword, go through the land,’ and I cut off man and beast from it, 18 even though these three men were in it, as I live,” says the Lord God, “they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but only they themselves would be delivered. 19 “Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast, 20 even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,” says the Lord God, “they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.” (Ezekiel 14:12-20)

1 Corinthians 15:29 needs to be understood in light of other scriptures, like we have seen, that do not allow for someone to be baptized for the salvation of others. It also should be understood in the context of 1 Corinthians 15 where Jesus is shown to be the one to destroy death and that the Christian hope of the dead is the resurrection, not someone being baptized in their place.

The truth is that some being baptized for someone who is dead will not make that dead person a believer who will be part of the first resurrection.

Who Has AUTHORITY to Baptize?

Finally, who is AUTHORIZED to administer baptism? Must it be done by an ordained minister?

1. Are those who are sent forth by Christ — by His Church — the ones He commands and gives authority to do baptizing? Matthew 28:18-19. Did Christ authorize His disciples to baptize for Him? John 4:1-2.

COMMENT: Jesus commissioned His disciples to baptize for Him — by His authority.

2. Did Jesus commission the Apostle Paul to baptize repentant believers, or to preach the gospel? 1 Corinthians 1:13-17, KJV.

COMMENT: Paul baptized very few! He had others do it for Christ. He was the called minister by whom Christ carried the gospel to the Gentiles — through whom Christ, as head of the Church, ruled the churches which had been raised up by the preaching of Paul and the YOUNG MEN he had taught and sent out under his direction. Paul did not consider it important or essential that he, personally, baptize all those being converted under the ministry God carried on through his supervision. “Christ sent me not to baptize,” Paul said.

The principle to remember is that it is really CHRIST who baptizes you! The man who puts you under the water is merely performing this physical act FOR Christ, in His stead — BY HIS AUTHORITY.

Consider that it is CHRIST who is baptizing you by a HUMAN INSTRUMENT who has been COMMISSIONED BY HIS TRUE CHURCH! And even if His human instrument turns out to be imperfect, remember all humans are imperfect, and that the baptism was DONE FOR, and IN THE NAME OF the only One who ever was perfect. And since it was in reality done by Christ, it should never be done again if one has understood and complied with God’s conditions for salvation.

Once someone is baptized the clergy (or one properly authorized) beseeches the Father to give the person His Holy Spirit via prayer and the laying on of hands. The Holy Spirit is given by the Father, if the Father answers that prayer, which is mainly dependent upon the sincerity/repentance of the person being baptized. Therefore, even if the specific person who performed the ceremony has issues or falls away from the truth, the procedure is still valid. The Holy Spirit comes from God, not one’s hands.

The person doing the laying on of hands should be an ordained minister or one commissioned by one to do this (cf. John 4:2; 1 Corinthians 1:14-17; Acts 8:14-23). One should not baptize oneself.

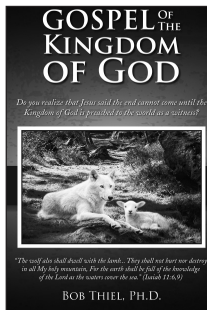
Your Next Step

If you have TRULY REPENTED of your sins and realize the vital necessity of this personal contact and guidance by the true servants of Jesus Christ regarding baptism and other spiritual matters, contact a Continuing Church of God leader near you (who may not be physically very

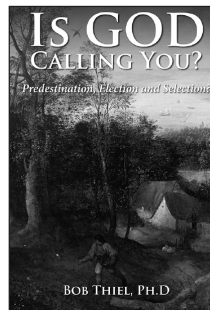
near). Information on contacting Continuing Church of God leaders can be found at ccog.org.

Those who have come to realize the importance of being baptized NOW should NOT PUT IT OFF! Next week, next month, or next year might be TOO LATE!

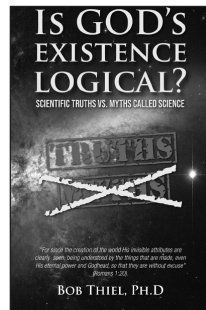
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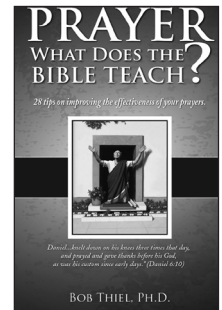
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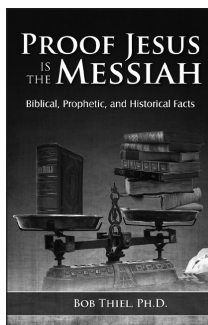
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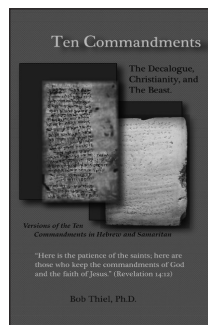
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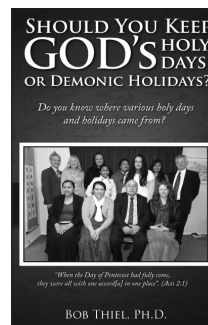
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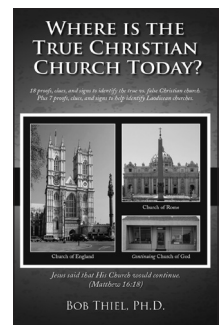
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The Decalogue, Christianity, and the Beast



Should You Keep God's Holy Days or Demonic Holidays?



Where Is the True Christian Church Today?

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Questions and Answers

By Bob Thiel



Q: Did anyone with Sabbatarian and/or Church of God ties ever confront any Bishop of Rome?

A. Yes.

Actually, in the 2nd century, Polycarp of Smyrna went to Rome and confronted one of the first (if not the actual first) Bishop of Rome named Anicetus. Polycarp objected to the anti-Sabbatarian Marcion of Synope and the trinitarian Valentinus the Gnostic, both of whom were in communion with the Church of Rome at that time. Furthermore, he told Anicetus that Passover was to be kept on the 14th of the first month of the biblical calendar, and not on Sunday, that Anicetus had been doing.

Probably about two decades afterwards, it appears that the faithful in the vicinity of Rome challenged Bishop Eleutherius who reportedly decreed that Christians could eat biblically unclean animals.

Towards the end of the 2nd century, Polycrates of Ephesus told Bishop of Rome Victor that the original apostles and various faithful ones kept Passover on the 14th of the first month of the Hebrew calendar and that he and others would obey God rather than men on that matter.

Roman Catholic priest Malachi Martin lived and worked in Vatican City for years. He was deeply involved in researching and writing about Church history, theology, and the inner workings of the Roman Catholic Church. In a book he wrote, Malachi Martin reported a meeting between Jewish Christians and Bishop of Rome Sylvester I, but gave no source (so, perhaps, it may have come from the archives in the Vatican library?):

Jewish Christians ... occupied the oldest Christian

churches in the Middle East and whose leaders were always from the family of Jesus himself. ... they shunned all worldly power ... their first bishop was James, first cousin {actually half-brother-ed.} of Jesus. ...

A meeting between Silvester and the Jewish Christian leaders took place in 318. ... The vital interview was not, as far as we know, recorded, but the issues were very well known, and it is probable the Joses, the oldest of the Christian Jews, spoke on behalf of the desposyni and the rest.

That most hallowed name, desposyni, had been respected by all believers in the first century and a half of Christian history. The word literally meant, in Greek, "belonging to the Lord." ...

Silvester knew their history well. Jewish Christians had composed the only church ever in Jerusalem until the year 135. ... Jewish Christian churches were set up all over Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia ... and always in quarrel with Greek Christians who refused to ... observe the Torah ...

They therefore asked Silvester to revoke his confirmation of Greek Christian bishops at Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Ephesus, and in Alexandria, and to name instead desposynos bishops to take their place. ...

Silvester curtly and decisively dismissed the claims of the Jewish Christians. He told them that the mother church was now in Rome, with the bones of the Apostle Peter, and he insisted that they accept the Greek bishops to lead them.

It was the last known discussion between the Jewish Christians of the old mother church and the non-Jewish Christians of the new mother church. By his adaption, Silvester, backed by Constantine ... The Jewish Christians had no place in such a church structure. ...

A few ... pass into the anonymity of the ... Eastern rites—Syriac, Assyrian, Greek, Armenians. (Martin M. The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church. Bantam edition, 1983, pp. 30-32)

So if this meeting happened, then some who are long-descended nephews of Jesus did attempt to see if the Church of Rome would accept various aspects the original faith, but they were denied.

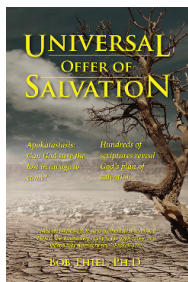
Sylvester, who was a contemporary to Emperor

Constantine — a man who detested Jews as well as Christians with practices he considered to be Jewish — refused to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), even when he was reminded of aspects of it.

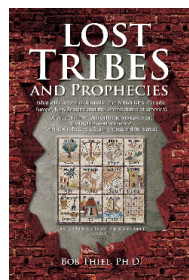
The Cathari believed that the 4th century Bishop Sylvester (they were not called popes then) was a/ the antichrist and all successors were apostates (Robertson JC. History of the Christian Church: A.D. 64-1517, Volume 3. J. Murray, 1866, p. 194).

That said, yes, directly and indirectly Sabbatarians voiced opposition to the Bishops of Rome. Those bishops took on the pagan title of Pontifex Maximus in the late 4th century and typically are now referred to as popes.

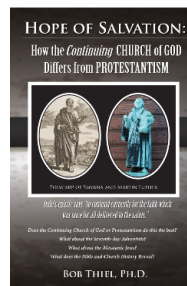
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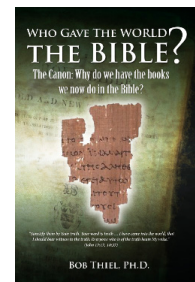
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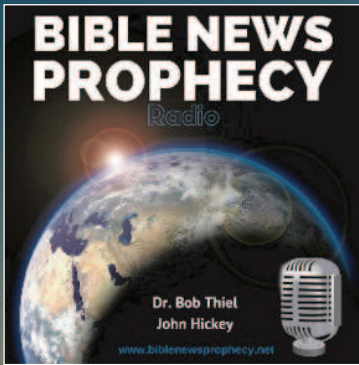
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