

April – June 2013

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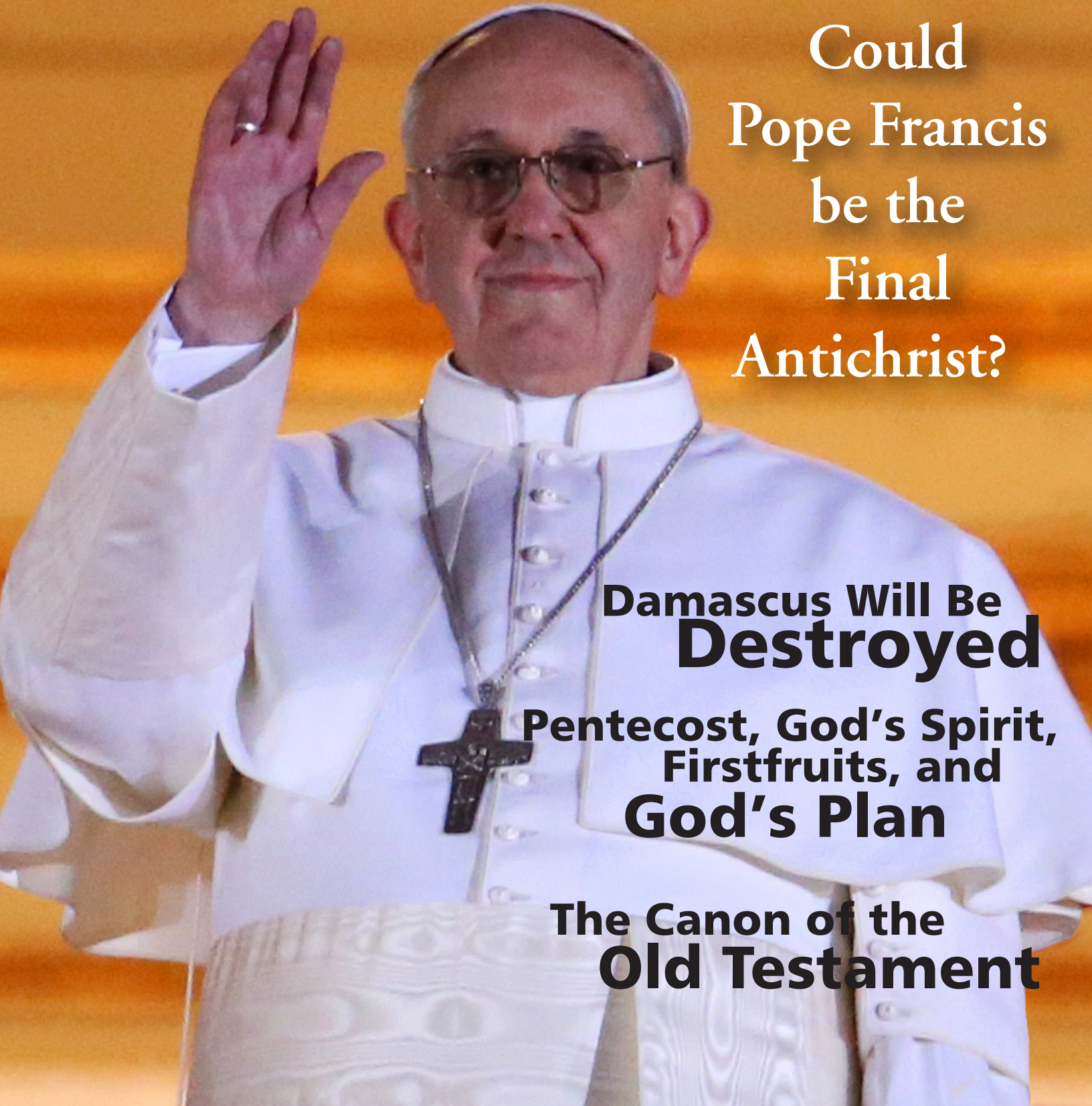
# BIBLE NEWS PROPHECY

Could  
Pope Francis  
be the  
Final  
Antichrist?

Damascus Will Be  
**Destroyed**

Pentecost, God's Spirit,  
Firstfruits, and  
**God's Plan**

The Canon of the  
**Old Testament**



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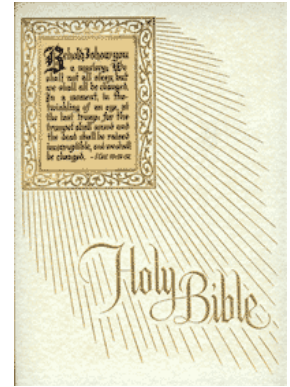
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**About the Front Cover:** Catholic prophecy suggests that the pontiff after Pope Benedict XVI was to be the last one. Could this be Pope Francis. This photo of Pope Francis is reproduced under license.

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## DAMASCUS WILL BE DESTROYED

Syria is in the news on a regular basis. The conflict began on March 15, 2011 with nationwide demonstrations which seem to have partially inspired by the so-called “Arab Spring.” This escalated into violence. Since the opposition to its President Bashar al-Assad arose in, tens of thousands have been killed.

Western leaders have consulted amongst themselves and with Russia on how to try to resolve this matter. Some Western nations have helped arm the opposition to President Assad with a goal of a stable and truly peaceful Syria in mind.

While a stable and peaceful Syria would be a major improvement, even if that is temporarily attained, it will not remain that way.

### **Bible Prophecy Warns that Syria’s Capital Will Be Destroyed**

Both biblical and Islamic prophecy foretell of the destruction of at least parts of Syria, such as Damascus. Here is some of what Bible prophecies teach:

7 thus says the Lord God: “It shall not stand, Nor shall it come to pass. 8 For the head of Syria is Damascus (Isaiah 7:7-8).

3 Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron. (Amos 1:3)

1 The burden against Damascus. “Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, And it will be a ruinous heap. (Isaiah 17:1)

23 Against Damascus. “Hamath and Arpad are shamed, For they have heard bad news. They are fainthearted; There is trouble on the sea; It cannot be quiet. 24 Damascus has grown feeble; She turns to flee, And fear has seized her. Anguish and sorrows have taken her

like a woman in labor. 25 Why is the city of praise not deserted, the city of My joy? 26 Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, And all the men of war shall be cut off in that day,” says the Lord of hosts. 27 “I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, And it shall consume the palaces of Ben-Hadad.” (Jeremiah 49:23-27)

Damascus has been claimed to be the “oldest continuously inhabited city” in the world. And while some have questioned that, the reality is that Damascus has not been destroyed to the point of becoming the “ruinous heap” since God inspired Isaiah to record that.

This destruction could come as the result of the current civil war. And if the Assad regime uses chemical weapons and/or becomes engaged in a conflict with Israel, that could also fulfill the above.

Furthermore, because the Bible suggests that Syria will be involved in a confederation of North African and Middle Eastern nations (Ezekiel 30:1-9; Psalm 83:4-8) who will support a leader that the Bible refers to as the final King of the South (Daniel 11:40-43), this likely means that the Assad regime will have to at least change, if not completely fall, and that whatever regime replaces it, it will most likely agree to be in this prophesied confederation. A confederation that is also prophesied to fail (which is something that all in the Middle East and North Africa will be better off realizing).

The Muslim Brotherhood has long pushed for the type of confederation that the Bible warns will involve many Arabic nations and end in the destruction of this confederation (Daniel 11:40-43; Ezekiel 30:1-9).

### **Islamic Prophecy**

Interestingly, there are various Islamic views on an Muslim leader, sometimes called the Imam Mahdi rising up (who could be the King of the South of Daniel 11:40-43) in a time related to Syria. Here is one that suggests this Islamic leader does so after Syria has problems:

Traditions have been reported mentioning the signs for the time of the appearance of the Imam who will arise (qa’im), peace be on him, and the events which

will take place before his appearance, together with the indications and features of it. Among them are: The Sufyani will come out in revolt; the Hasanid will be killed; the Abbasids will dispute over worldly kingdom... the people of Egypt will kill their ruler and destroy Syria; and three standards will dispute over it (Syria)...

The Abbasids will dispute; a voice will call from the sky; one of the villages of Syria called al-Jabiyya will be swallowed up; the Turks will occupy the region of al-Jazira; the Byzantines will attack al-Ramla; at that time there will be much conflict throughout the land until Syria is destroyed. (Kitab al Irshad Chapter: The Twelfth Imam (Peace be on him) Page (s): 541 – 548 Published by Tehrike Tersile Qura'n. Contributed by Br. Ali Abbas, [abbas@seas.gwu.edu](mailto:abbas@seas.gwu.edu) <http://www.al-islam.org/masoom/bios/12thimam.html> viewed 7/22/12)

So, there are biblical and Islamic prophecies suggesting destruction to at least parts of Syria and the rise of a leader in the region of the Middle East and North Africa. And while I am relying on biblical prophecy, it may be that some in the Islamic world may decide that Islamic prophecy is encouraging them to change the situation currently in Syria.

Perhaps partially because of the internal civil war in Syria, Syria's President Assad may decide that attacking Israel, probably in conjunction with support from Iran, is his best carnal option (which could include supporting Iran if it attacks Israel or Israel attacks it). Attacking Israel, however, will not be his best option (he should repent and probably leave office), though he may do that. Since the Bible suggests that Syria will support the coming final King of the South it will come to pass.

More trouble is coming to Damascus as it will be destroyed (Isaiah 17:1). An Islamic confederation that will include the land of Syria is coming (Daniel 11:40-43; Ezekiel 30:1-8; Psalm 83:4-8) is coming.

"And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:37).

## COULD POPE FRANCIS BE THE FINAL ANTICHRIST?



*Former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio*

By Bob Thiel

On March 13, 2013 Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, became the Bishop of Rome. He took the name Pope Francis. He is the first pope from Latin America as well as the first Jesuit to become Bishop of Rome.

Because of the timing of his papal election, Pope Francis could possibly fulfill biblical prophecies about the False Prophet of Revelation 16, the final Antichrist.

If Pope Francis is the final pontiff and antichrist, he would have to have certain characteristics (including some that are not immediately apparent) for that role. And his age may argue against him being the one who will fulfill that. He does place a priority on Marian worship and seems to have a tendency towards being ecumenical. But so have other pontiffs.

On the Marian side, however, Pope Francis has started out by praying to "the Virgin" and entrusting his whole pontificate to her so that she would bless it and help him (). Since the Bible warns about end time influences of a "virgin" that does sorceries and enchantments (Isaiah 47), this is one reason to watch the current pontiff.

As far as ecumenical tendencies, the Bible shows that the False Prophet, who supports the Beast of the Sea (Revelation 13:1-10) and final King of the North (Daniel 11:28-45), will

be successful in getting people in the world to worship (Revelation 13:4,8) in a different way (cf. Daniel 11:36-38). Yet, according to biblical and Catholic prophecies, he will betray the city of seven hills (Rome).

## Catholic Prophecies

While no one should ever rely on Catholic prophecies that conflict with the Bible (and that is also the official position of the Vatican), it may be of interest to note that according a prediction by Catholic bishop Malachy of Ireland, there were supposed to be 112 popes from around 1143 until the end of time. For most of them, other than the last one, he wrote two-three words about each in Latin.

Since according to most observers, Pope Benedict XVI was number 111 on that list, this would make Pope Francis number 112, the last pope on the list. Some of considered the Malachy list to be a forgery from the late 1500s and do not see connections, but I will simply state that the list did not come from God and apparently has had demonic influence.

In 1966, Peter Bander produced a book titled *The Prophecies of St. Malachy* which provides information in English about the list, including those popes/antipopes who he/others felt met the criteria of the Latin statements.

Here is what was the 109th prediction in the Malachy list with a translation supplied by Peter Bander:

*DE MEDIETATE LUNAE*  
Of the half moon

Interestingly, Pope John Paul I became pontiff on August 26, 1978 near a half moon (August 25, 1978) and died a month later on September 28, 1978 slightly after the half moon (September 24, 1978). Some have suggested that this means his pontificate may have somewhat fulfilled this Malachy prediction.

Here is what was the 110th prediction in the Malachy list:

*DE LABORE SOLIS*

Here is the translation and a comment from Peter Bander about the above Malachy writing, beginning with two translations:

- (a) From the toil of the sun
- (b) Of the eclipse of the sun

The election of this Pope will probably take place within the next two decades.

Since Pope John-Paul II was born on the day of a large partial solar eclipse (May 18, 1920) and was buried on the day of a solar eclipse (April 8, 2005), he definitely had something in common with the number 110 predicted pontiff. He became pontiff on October 16, 1978.

Here is what was the 111th prediction in the Malachy list with a translation by Peter Bander:

*GLORIA OLIVEA*  
The glory of the olive

Notice what was written decades prior to Joseph Ratzinger becoming Pope Benedict XVI by Peter Bander:

The Order of St. Benedict has claimed by tradition that this pope will come from within the Order...The Order of St. Benedict is known as the OLIVETANS...

Although Joseph Ratzinger did not come from the Benedictine order, the choice of the name "Benedict" could be seen to be consistent with the Malachy prediction about pope number 111.

Many have been impressed by the overall accuracy of the Malachy predictions.

Yet, his list, however, is only "accurate" if one includes some that the Catholics refer to as antipopes.

## Peter the Roman

The most famous name on the Malachy list is probably the last one (#112). Commonly referred to in English as "Peter the Roman." Some have also called him Peter II.

Malachy's list was written in Latin. Here is what he wrote about the last pope on his list:

*In persecutione extrema SRE sedebit. Petrus Romanus, quipascet oves in multis tribulationibus: quibus transactis civitas septicollis diruetur, et iudex tremendus iudicabit populum suum. Finis.*

Here is an English translation of it from *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

"In the final persecution of the Holy Roman Church there will reign Peter the Roman, who will feed his flock amid many tribulations, after which the seven-hilled city will be destroyed and the dreadful Judge will judge the people. The End."

Notice that the final Pope is involved with the city of seven hills, obviously the same one that Babylon the Great sits on in Revelation 17:9, that God says will be destroyed in Revelation 17:14-18.

If the Malachy list is accurate at the end and Pope Francis is the last Bishop of Rome, then the end will come before he dies.

Yet, it very well may be that Pope Francis will not live long enough to fulfill various prophecies associated with the False Prophet and final Antichrist that the Bible warns about.

It may be that Satan influenced this papal election so that people would later overlook the Malachy prophecy, as well as biblical prophecies about the final Antichrist, so when the next pope comes to office that he will be a less obvious numerical candidate to be the Petrus Romanus of the Malachy prophecy.

Also, since the Bible does not specify when the final Antichrist will begin his reign, it is not yet clear if Pope Francis is that individual. And if not, which successor to him would be the final Antichrist. Yet, because of God's plan for humanity, the reign of the final Antichrist is expected in this century.

## **Satan Influenced the Papal Election**

It would seem that one reason that the Malachy list has a certain accuracy is that Satan and/or his demons have influenced papal elections.

The Bible refers to Satan as "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4, KJV) and "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). Thus, Satanic influence with the Church of Rome is something that should be expected.

Whether Satan influenced this election to put the final Antichrist in power now or to set the stage up for him to come into power later is not clear as I write this. But I do believe that Satan influenced this last papal election.

## **The 6,000 Years is Almost Up**

There has long been a teaching that God had a 7,000 year plan with two parts. One part was that humans being were being given 6,000 years to live on their own, with their own governments, and basically cut off from God. The other part, that lasts 1,000 years, has to do with the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His Kingdom. This "7,000 year" teaching was based upon various scriptures

and was also discussed in early writings among those who professed Christ, as well as in more modern sources. ""

Since the 6,000 years for humans to rule before Jesus returns is almost up, this is a reason why Pope Francis could be the last pope.

Truly understanding what the Bible teaches about this may be helpful to all in these latter days, and not only to those who base their beliefs on it.

## **Have People Long Believed in Six Thousand Years of Human Rule?**

There is an old tradition that the prophet Elijah taught that there would be six thousand years for humans to rule under Satan's kingdom, followed by one thousand years of abundance in the kingdom of God. In the late 18th century, the historian Edward Gibbon documented certain facts regarding the first century Christians:

The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ. As the works of the creation had been finished in six days, their duration in their present state, according to a tradition which was attributed to the prophet Elijah, was fixed to six thousand years. By the same analogy it was inferred that this long period of labor and contention, which was now almost elapsed, would be succeeded by a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years; and that Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints and the elect who had escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon earth till the time appointed for the last and general resurrection.

While traditions should never supersede scripture, the above is certainly an interesting and ancient tradition, as it shows that the idea of a six-thousand-year plan, followed by Christ establishing His kingdom on the Earth was a common teaching among those who professed Christ in the early days.

Here are specific Jewish traditions related to the millennium from the Talmud, Sanhedrin 97a:

R. Kattina said: Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day {Isaiah 2:11}.

Abaye said: it will be desolate two [thousand], as it is said, After two days will he revive us: in the third day, he

will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight {Hosea 6:2}. It has been taught in accordance with R. Kattina: Just as the seventh year is one year of release in seven, so is the world: one thousand years out of seven shall be fallow, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day,' and it is further said, A Psalm and song for the Sabbath day {Psalm 92:1}, meaning the day that is altogether Sabbath — and it is also said, For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past {Psalm 90:4}.

The Tanna debe Eliyyahu teaches: The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era.

Note: I inserted the scriptures quoted or alluded to above within { }, as they are in the footnotes associated with the above.

And while there are some errors in that Talmudic understanding, it supports the idea that there is a six-thousand-year plan, that the current two thousand years essentially represents the Church/Messianic era, and that a one thousand year period remains. Apparently, according to at least one of those Jewish scholars, the 6,000 years would likely be over in the next decade or so, if Jesus was the Messiah (and, of course, He was).

Furthermore, notice the following understanding from a modern Jewish source:

According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a), history will last only 6,000 years from the time of creation. The Messiah must come prior to the 6,000-years, and bring us to the next higher spiritual reality millennium.

Notice what the respected Protestant historian Johann Karl Ludwig Gieseler observed about the second century Christians:

Jewish Christians...the Nazarenes... the millenarianism of the Jewish Christians...for which the reputation of John (Apoc. xx. 4-6; xxi.) and his peculiar followers, afforded a warrant—this millenarianism became the general belief of the time, and met with almost no other opposition than that given by the Gnostics...The thousand years' reign was represented as the great Sabbath which should begin very soon, or as others supposed, after the lapse of the six thousand years of the world's age, with the first resurrection, and should

afford great joys to the righteous. Till then the souls of the departed were kept in the underworld, and the opinion that they should be taken up to heaven immediately after death, was considered a gnostic heresy. ""

It is known that the belief the "Nazarene" Christians held (like those who are part of the Continuing Church of God) held on the millennium and six-thousand-year plan was adopted by all Christians in the second century and that view was only challenged at that time by false "Christians," called Gnostics.

Some believe that since God made/recreated the world in six days and rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3), that humans will have 6,000 years to live on the Earth under Satan's influence, but will have a 1,000 years to be under Christ's reign. The 6,000 plus 1,000 years equals God's seven thousand year plan.

Many have noted that a thousand years seems to be as one day to God. This is a concept from both the Old and New Testaments:

4 For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past (Psalm 90:4).

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8).

Based upon certain calculations, it seems that this 6,000 years will be over this century, and most likely within the next decade or so.

## The False Prophet and Antichrist

The final Antichrist (1 John 4:1-3) also known as the False Prophet (Revelation 16:13) will rise up and contribute to deception and destruction.

According to Bible prophecy:

- A false religious leader/final Antichrist will arise (Revelation 13:11-17; 1 John 4:1-3).
- This false leader will encourage an ecumenical faith (Revelation 13:11-17).
- The vast majority of humankind will accept this improper faith Revelation 13:4,8).
- A false religious leader will perform signs and lying wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12).
- Nearly all humankind will be deceived by signs and

lying wonders (Revelation 13:4,8).

- The final Antichrist will promote the final “Beast/King of the North” that the Bible warns against (Daniel 11; Revelation 13).
- The “Beast/King of the North,” that the Antichrist supports will destroy the Anglo-descended nations (Daniel 11:39).
- The “Beast/King of the North,” will destroy an Arabic confederation (Daniel 11:40-43).
- A few years after the start of the Great Tribulation, Rome will be destroyed (Revelation 17:16-18).
- Jesus will come after Rome is destroyed and will eliminate the False Prophet and the Beast (Revelation 19).

The timing of the election of Pope Francis is consistent with the time period for the end of the age and the rise of the final Antichrist. Although the final reign of Antichrist with the Beast will not start for at least a few years, the Antichrist leader could be in place now.

Since becoming pontiff, Francis has taken steps and not taken steps that have offended some Catholics. He prefers to sign his name as “Francis” without adding the word “Pope” in front of it, he has not worn certain Catholic pontifical attire, has not “genuflected” at times when certain Catholics would have expected him to, and even washed an Islamic woman’s feet in a traditional foot-washing ceremony that has always been limited to males in the Church of Rome. He also has taken other steps to try to endear the Eastern Orthodox Church to him. He seems ecumenical and may or may not truly believe the Roman Catholic faith.

However, since Pope Francis has not performed the types of signs and wonders that Revelation 13:13-16 requires (to cite one example) it is not clear at this moment that he is the last pope. But, because of the time we are now in, Pope Francis’ devotion to “Mary,” his being a Jesuit, and other factors, if this pontiff lives long enough (and he may very well not), he very well could be.

We are living in the last days, and the last pope will take steps that will lead to the destruction of the world as we know it.

But the good news is that Jesus will return and establish the Kingdom of God—and ultimately there will be a time with no more pain, sorrow, or suffering (Revelation 21:1-4). Until then, the Bible teaches that we can expect to face many tribulations (cf. Acts 14:22), some of which will be brought about by the last pope, who may or may not be Francis.

Pope Francis and the Vatican remain something to watch as we get closer to the time of the end.

## PENTECOST, GOD’S SPIRIT, FIRSTFRUITS, AND GOD’S PLAN

By Bob Thiel



*Artist Depiction of Pentecost with Holy Spirit Descending like Tongues of Fire (Photo by Cadetgray)*

After Christ’s death, the original apostles met and observed Pentecost (Acts 2) and the Holy Spirit was given to them. That is considered by almost all Christian-professing groups to be the beginning of the Christian Church.

This article will look at what the Bible, early and later Catholic sources, and also Church of God sources to discover what is taught about the Day of Pentecost.

### The Bible

Towards the start of His ministry, Jesus spoke on the “day of the sabbaths” (Luke 4:16), often then called the Feast of Weeks, that we tend to now call Pentecost. That can be confirmed by looking at the actual Greek term, often simply mistranslated there as “Sabbath” singular. The actual word (not the Strong’s grouping of like words), σαββάτων, is plural. The passage is literally translated as follows:

16 And He came into Nazareth where He was

brought up. And according to His custom, He went in on the days of the sabbaths, into the synagogue, and stood up to read. (Green JP, Sr. Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, third edition. Baker Books, 2002 printing, p. 187)

So, this helps to show that one could keep Pentecost, as Jesus did, in a location other than Jerusalem (He also seemed to keep another holy day in Galilee in Luke 6:1; see Green, p. 194).

Just before Jesus died, He warned His disciples to wait in Jerusalem to receive the power of the Holy Spirit:

4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4-5)

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. 13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. (Acts 1:12-14)

26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:26)

Notice what else the Bible teaches:

1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place (Acts 2:1).

Notice that the emphasis is on “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come.” The Bible is making it clear that the events that follow were directly related to the fact that the Day of Pentecost had fully come. And, it happened to the disciples because they were all observing it together.

Here is what happened next:

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. 7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs — we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?”

13 Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.”

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. 15 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. 18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. 21 And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved.’

22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know — 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and

put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. 25 For David says concerning Him:

‘I foresaw the Lord always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. 26 Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. 27 For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’

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. 34 “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, 35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’”

36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

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.”

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through

the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:2-47).

They received some of the power of Holy Spirit. And this is considered to be the start of the Christian church by the Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, most Protestant, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Church of God groups. But, note, that the Holy Spirit was given at a certain time, the same time that many of the Jews observed Pentecost, and that Jesus’ disciples were still observing it.

## **Spiritual Gifts to Do God’s Work are Associated with the Holy Spirit**

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are part of what is needed to do the work of God.

Jesus taught:

17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” 19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen. (Mark 16:17-20)

Christians really need to pray fervently for God to help us and teach us the lessons we need to learn, and then God may give more of the “accompanying signs” of which Jesus spoke. The Bible also says that we are told to earnestly desire the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

6 There are different types of work to do, but the same God produces every gift in every person. 7 The evidence of the Spirit’s presence is given to each person for the common good of everyone. 8 The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom. The same Spirit gives another person the ability to speak with knowledge. 9 To another person the same Spirit gives [courageous] faith. To another person the same Spirit gives the ability to heal. 10 Another can work miracles.

Another can speak what God has revealed. Another can tell the difference between spirits. Another can speak in different kinds of languages. Another can interpret languages. 11 There is only one Spirit who does all these things by giving what God wants to give to each person.

12 For example, the body is one unit and yet has many parts. As all the parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether we are Jewish or Greek, slave or free, God gave all of us one Spirit to drink.

14 As you know, the human body is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. 15 Suppose a foot says, "I'm not a hand, so I'm not part of the body!" Would that mean it's no longer part of the body? 16 Or suppose an ear says, "I'm not an eye, so I'm not a part of the body!" Would that mean it's no longer part of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how could it smell? 18 So God put each and every part of the body together as he wanted it...

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:6-11, 27-31, God's Word Translation)

We in the Continuing Church of God do believe that God will again grant more of the gifts of the Spirit. However, we do not believe that what is commonly reported amongst those in the so-called "Pentecostal movement" are following the pattern set forth in the New Testament.

## The Old Testament

Since the Holy Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost, based upon the date and practices that God gave the children of Israel in the Old Testament, it is logical to conclude that the Old Testament can give us some insight into its meaning.

First of all the term Pentecost is a Greek term meaning 50th. That term is derived from the following Hebrew description of calculating the date:

15 And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.

16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath (Leviticus 23:15-16).

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:

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

...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)

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:

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.

This later harvest is pictured by later Holy Days, that most who profess Christ no longer observe.

Those who keep all the Holy Days, including Pentecost, generally have a better understanding of what they mean and what God intended by them, than those that do not.

Strangely, even though the Roman Catholic Church observes some version of Pentecost, and knows it has to do with firstfruits, it actually endorses other days for the celebration of firstfruits, and at least one of those days is of pagan origin. Notice the following:

In English-speaking countries in the Northern Hemisphere, August 1 is Lammas Day (loaf-mass day), the festival of the first wheat harvest of the year. On this day it was customary to bring to church a loaf made from the new crop. In many parts of England, tenants were bound to present freshly harvested wheat to their landlords on or before the first day of August. In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, where it is referred to regularly, it is called "the feast of first fruits". The blessing of new fruits was performed annually in both the Eastern and Western Churches on the first, or the sixth, of August. The Sacramentary of Pope Gregory I (d. 604) specifies the sixth. ( Lammas Day. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lammas>).

Lughnasadh (pronounced loo'nass'ah) comes at the beginning of August. It is one of the Pagan festivals of Celtic origin which split the year into four.

Celts held the festival of the Irish god Lugh at this time and later, the Anglo-Saxons marked the festival of hlaefmass - loaf mass or Lammas - at this time.

For these agricultural communities this was the first day of the harvest, when the fields would be glowing with corn and reaping would begin. The harvest period would continue until Samhain when the last stores for the winter months would be put away.

Although farming is not an important part of modern life, Lughnasadh is still seen as a harvest festival by Pagans and symbols connected with the reaping of corn predominate in its rites (Lughnasadh (Lammas). BBC. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/holydays/lughnasadh.shtml>).

Samhain is a pagan holiday now normally called Halloween. It would be better if the Roman Church and others would simply observe God's Holy Days His way and not mix with pagan practices. By observing other times as the feast of firstfruits and not truly understanding Pentecost's true meaning, the Greco-Roman churches and many others simply do not understand God's plan of salvation.

## The New Testament Helps Explain the Old Testament

The New Testament also does discuss some concepts associated with firstfruits.

Paul also 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).

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.

Notice again some of what 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).

## **Pentecost was Observed Later in the New Testament**

The Feast of Pentecost was kept by Christians after the initial one, but with no mention of speaking in tongues.

The Apostle Paul continued to keep Pentecost decades after the Pentecost mentioned in the second chapter of the Book of Acts. Notice what he wrote, about 56 A.D.:

8 For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits. But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Corinthians 16:8).

This shows that Paul knew when Pentecost was, that he felt that the Corinthians must know when Pentecost was, and that the Ephesians would have known when Pentecost was. Thus, it apparently was being observed by Paul and the Gentiles in Ephesus and Corinth.

In another year, the Apostle Paul also wished to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, around 60 A.D.:

16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16).

Thus, Christians in Jerusalem were still observing Pentecost and Paul was observing it too. Otherwise, there would be no obvious reason why Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

This was clearly understood by second century writers such as Irenaeus who wrote (circa 180):

Paul taught with simplicity what he knew, not only to those who were [employed] with him, but to those that heard him, he does himself make manifest. For when the bishops and presbyters who came from Ephesus and the other cities adjoining had assembled in Miletus, since he was himself hastening to Jerusalem to observe Pentecost (Irenaeus. *Adversus haereses*, Book III, Chapter 14, Verse 2). Excerpted from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. American Edition, 1885. Online Edition Copyright © 2004 by K. Knight).

There is a partially questionable book called *The Life of Polycarp*. This book, which seems to somewhat be based on some historical truths in the second century, was changed--at least slightly--in the fourth century. *The Life of Polycarp* contains some possibly helpful information about Paul, Polycarp, and observing Pentecost:

In the days of unleavened bread Paul, coming down from Galatia, arrived in Asia, considering the repose among the faithful in Smyrna to be a great refreshment in Christ Jesus after his severe toil, and intending afterwards to depart to Jerusalem. So in Smyrna he went to visit Strataeas, who had been his hearer in Pamphylia, being a son of Eunice the daughter of Lois. These are they of whom he makes mention when writing to Timothy, saying; Of the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and in thy mother Eunice; whence we find that Strataeas was a brother of Timothy. Paul then, entering his house and gathering together the faithful there, speaks to them concerning the Passover and the Pentecost, reminding them of the New Covenant of the offering of bread and the cup; how that they ought most assuredly to celebrate it during the days of unleavened bread, but to hold fast the new mystery of the Passion and Resurrection. For here the Apostle plainly teaches that we ought neither to keep it outside the season of unleavened bread, as the heretics do, especially the Phrygians...but named the days of unleavened bread, the Passover, and the Pentecost, thus ratifying the Gospel (Pionius. *Life of Polycarp*, Chapter 2. Translated by J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 3.2, 1889, pp. 488-506).

Polycarp, himself, was a faithful church leader who was apparently a Gentile.

## Catholic Teachings

The ancient Catholic writer Irenaeus knew that Pentecost in the Book of Acts was about firstfruits, as he wrote (circa 180):

This Spirit did David ask for the human race, saying, "And stablish me with Thine all-governing Spirit;" who also, as Luke says, descended at the day of Pentecost upon the disciples after the Lord's ascension, having power to admit all nations to the entrance of life, and to the opening of the new covenant; from whence also, with one accord in all languages, they uttered praise to God, the Spirit bringing distant tribes to unity, and offering to the Father the first-fruits of all nations (Irenaeus. *Adversus haereses*, Book III, Chapter 17, Verse 2. Excerpted from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. American Edition, 1885. Online Edition Copyright © 2004 by K. Knight).

The Catholic Encyclopedia states this about Pentecost:

Pentecost...The term, adopted from the Greek-speaking Jews (Tob. 2:1; II Mac. 12:32; Josephus, "Ant.", III, x, 6; etc.) alludes to the fact that the feast, known in the Old Testament as "the feast of harvest of the firstfruits" (Exodus 23:16), "the feast of weeks" (Exodus 24:22; Deuteronomy 16:10; II Paralipomenon 8:13), the "day of firstfruits" (Numbers 28:26), and called by later Jews 'asereth or 'asartha (solemn assembly, and probably "closing festival", Pentecost being the closing festival of the harvest and of the Paschal season) (Souvay C.L. Transcribed by Mark E. Maier. Pentecost (Jewish Feast) *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume XI. Copyright © 1911 by Robert Appleton Company. Online Edition Copyright © 2003 by Kevin Knight. Nihil Obstat, February 1, 1911. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York).

Pentecost (Whitsunday) A feast of the universal Church which commemorates the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ, on the ancient Jewish festival called the "feast of weeks" or Pentecost (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10). Whitsunday is so called from the white garments which were worn by those who were baptised during the vigil; Pentecost ("Pfingsten" in German), is the Greek for "the fiftieth"...

Whitsunday, as a Christian feast, dates back to the first century...That Whitsunday belongs to the Apostolic times is stated in the seventh of the (interpolated) fragments attributed to St. Irenæus. In Tertullian

(De bapt., xix) the festival appears as already well established (Holweck F.G. Transcribed by Wm Stuart French, Jr. Pentecost (Whitsunday). The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XV. Copyright © 1912 by Robert Appleton Company. Online Edition Copyright © 2003 by Kevin Knight. Nihil Obstat, October 1, 1912. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York).

Tertullian in the late second century/early third century wrote:

Pentecost is a most joyous space for conferring baptisms; wherein, too, the resurrection of the Lord was repeatedly proved among the disciples, and the hope of the advent of the Lord indirectly pointed to, in that, at that time, when He had been received back into the heavens, the angels told the apostles that "He would so come, as He had withal ascended into the heavens;" at Pentecost, of course. But, moreover, when Jeremiah says, "And I will gather them together from the extremities of the land in the feast-day," he signifies the day of the Passover and of Pentecost, which is properly a "feast-day" (Tertullian. On Baptism, Chapter 19. Translated by the S. Thelwall. Excerpted from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. American Edition, 1885. Online Edition Copyright © 2004 by K. Knight).

In the early third century, the Catholic theologian Origen listed the following as being celebrated:

If it be objected to us on this subject that we ourselves are accustomed to observe certain days, as for example the Lord's day, the Preparation, the Passover, or Pentecost...And, finally, he who can truly say, "We are risen with Christ," and "He has exalted us, and made us to sit with Him in heavenly places in Christ," is always living in the season of Pentecost (Origen. Contra Celsus, Book VIII, Chapter XXII. Excerpted from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 4. Edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. American Edition, 1885. Online Edition Copyright © 2005 by K. Knight).

In the fourth century, Catholic historian and Bishop Eusebius wrote:

All these events occurred during a most important festival, I mean the august and holy solemnity of Pentecost, which is distinguished by a period of seven weeks, and crowned with that one day on which the holy Scriptures attest the reception of our common Saviour into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit among men. In the course of this feast the emperor

received the privileges I have described; and on the last day of all, which one might justly call the feast of feasts (Eusebius of Caesaria. The life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine [with the oration of Constantine to the assembly of saints and the oration of Eusebius in praise of Constantine], Chapter LXIV. 1845. Original from Oxford University. Digitized Aug 23, 2006, p. 227).

Although it was not called Whitsunday then (and should not be now), it is clearly documented that those who professed Christ in the first, second, third, and fourth centuries celebrated the Feast of Pentecost.

Furthermore, notice what the Eastern Orthodox Archbishop of Constantinople John Chrysostom wrote about it in the fourth century:

When, it says, the day of Pentecost was fully come: that is, when at the Pentecost, while about it, in short. For it was essential that the present events likewise should take place during the feast, that those who had witnessed the crucifixion of Christ, might also behold these...And, it says, there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men. The fact of their dwelling there was a sign of piety: that being of so many nations they should have left country, and home, and relations, and be abiding there...for it was Pentecost. (Chrysostom J. The homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople: on the Acts of the Apostles, Volume 1, Homily IV. John Henry Parker, 1851. Original from Harvard University. Digitized, Apr 12, 2008, pp. 53, 55, 56).

So, he admitted that after the resurrection, the faithful needed to be present at what was then considered to be a "Jewish feast."

Notice what else John Chrysostom wrote:

But why did the Holy Ghost come to them, not while Christ was present, nor even immediately after His departure, but, whereas Christ ascended on the fortieth day, the Spirit descended when the day of Pentecost, that is, the fiftieth, was fully come? And how was it, if the Spirit had not yet "come, that He said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost? In order, to render them capable and meet for the reception of Him. (Chrysostom J. The homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople: on the Acts of the Apostles, Volume 1, Homily I. John Henry Parker, 1851. Original from Harvard University. Digitized, Apr 12, 2008, p. 11).

Well, a better and more obvious answer to why then, is that the Holy Days are part of God's plan of salvation, the apostles followed Jesus' example to keep them, and Pentecost was the time God planned to pour out His Spirit. The disciples obviously did not feel that the Holy Days were done away with after Jesus' resurrection or they would not have been gathered together observing it.

To some degree, the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant churches all celebrate Passover (though most refer to it as Easter and consider it a resurrection holiday) and Pentecost, which were originally Holy Days that the children of Israel observed (and which were still observed by the early true Christian church). But they do not seem to feel that it is a continuation of the Holy Days in Leviticus 23, they seem to act like it has nothing to do with them (other than the date).

Although he does not tie the following statement into a discussion of Pentecost, notice what Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (who is now "Pope Emeritus") wrote:

Man can become God, not by making himself God, but by allowing himself to be made 'Son'.

Since Jesus is the first of the firstfruits, and the Day of Pentecost shows that we are also to become firstfruits, the observance of the biblical Pentecost helps picture that God the Father is calling true Christians to truly be His sons. We are to be in the family of God.

## Observed on Sunday

The reader will notice that the apostles in the New Testament, Roman Catholic Church, and the Continuing Church of God observe Pentecost on a Sunday. This has to do with how the Old Testament says to calculate it--by counting 50:

15 And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.  
16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath (Leviticus 23:15-16).

By counting starting the day after the Saturday Sabbath, fifty days always ends up on a Sunday.

But what about the Jews? Do they not keep Pentecost on Sivan 6 no matter what day of the week it falls? Well, there were two schools of thought on this, and some did keep and advocate Sunday as the Jewish Encyclopedia reports:

"The Morrow After Sabbath." Regarding the Biblical

commandment to offer the 'omer "on the morrow after the Sabbath" = (ib. verse 11), the Rabbis maintained that "Sabbath" here means simply a day of rest and refers to Passover. The Sadducees (Boethusians) disputed this interpretation, contending that "Sabbath" meant "Saturday." Accordingly they would transfer the count of "seven weeks" from the morrow of the first Saturday in Passover, so that Pentecost would always fall on Sunday. The Boethusians advanced the argument "because Moses, as a friend of the Israelites, wished to give them an extended holy day by annexing Pentecost to the Sabbath." Johanan then turned to his disciples and pointed out that the Law purposely fixed the interval of fifty days in order to explain that the seven weeks, nominally, do not necessarily begin from Sunday (Men. 65a, b). (Pentecost. The Jewish Encyclopedia of 1906. ©2002-2011, JewishEncyclopedia.com.)

Sadly, most now follow improper traditions and not the Hebrew scriptures. Not only did Jesus condemn the Jewish leaders of His day for relying more on tradition than the commands of God, Jesus observed Passover on the evening before most Jews did in His day (and do today).

Perhaps it should be mention that throughout history, there have been Jews who have celebrated the biblical Holy Days on the days the Hebrew scriptures specify. A news article confirmed this when it stated:

Israel is now home to most of the world's Karaite Jews, who have been estranged from mainstream Judaism for centuries. Although most people concede that it is difficult to say exactly how many Karaites there are today, estimates put the population in Israel at approximately 20,000 to 25,000, accounting for the overwhelming majority of the approximately 30,000 Karaites in the world...

Although the Karaites accept all 24 books of the Bible as holy, they staunchly reject the divinity of the Oral Law (recorded in the Talmud) as well as the authority of the rabbis, and view many aspects of rabbinic Halacha as contradictory to the pshat, or plain meaning, of the Torah...

"There are three main concepts that Karaite practice is based on," explains Rabbi Moshe Firrouz of the Karaite synagogue in Beersheba. "There is the written word of the Bible, logical interpretation, and tradition."

Firrouz stresses that one is not allowed to make any sort of rule that contradicts the Torah, and if one gives an explanation for one of the passages, that explanation

should not contradict any other part of the Torah either...

Karaites believe themselves to be the descendents of those who have remained the “true practitioners” of the law handed down to Moses at Sinai 3,500 years ago. The word “Karaites” itself comes from the Hebrew phrase *bnei mikra* (“followers of the scripture”)...

Karaites do not accept the rabbinic theology that states that the Oral Torah (recorded in the Talmud) was handed down at Mount Sinai alongside the written Torah (an important tenet of rabbinic Judaism). Nor do they accept that Shavuot marked the historical date of the giving of the Torah. However, they do celebrate the holiday, albeit with a relatively significant difference in timing.

While most Jews will be celebrating the giving of the Torah on May 23 of this year, Karaites will celebrate the holiday on Sunday, May 27. Because they interpret the biblical verse of Leviticus 23:15-16 - which states “And you shall count for you from the morrow after the day of rest [Shabbat]” - to mean the day after Shabbat (Sunday), rather than the day after the first day of Pessah, they always begin counting the Omer on the Sunday that falls during Pessah.

Karaites therefore always celebrate Shavuot on a Sunday, rather than the rabbinic custom of celebrating 49 days from the second day of Pessah (or on the 6th of Sivan). (Laying down the (Oral) law. Jerusalem Post. May 22, 2007. <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1178708657471&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull>)

We in the Continuing Church of God agree that Pentecost fell on Sunday, May 27 in 2007 as well. Perhaps that one of the reasons that Acts 2:1 states that the Day of Pentecost had fully come this was because it was observed on the biblically correct counted date and not have the date that Jews who preferred a date from oral tradition used (Jesus also kept Passover on a different date than most Jews do also).

Anyway, notice that even within Judaism, those who rely on oral tradition above scriptures make many errors.

## Conclusion

In the Old Testament, the Feast of Weeks, involving firstfruits, was kept 50 days after the Sabbath after Passover. Thus, it was kept on a day commonly now referred to as Sunday.

After the death of Christ, the apostles gathered together on that date. And a precise time on that date, the Holy Spirit was poured out to provide Christians access to God as a kind of firstfruits. Jesus was the first of these firstfruits and Christians who are called in this age are also to be firstfruits as He is (those called later are also to be as Jesus is, but simply will not be firstfruits).

One of the important lessons of Pentecost is the concept of “firstfruits”-- that God is only calling out a small number of people—the “firstfruits”—in this age--but that others will be called later. Another is that it takes God’s Spirit to be a real Christian and accomplish what God wants accomplished.

The Day of Pentecost was kept by those in New Testament times, as well as by Christians ever since. But, for those who truly understand the meaning from the Bible, Pentecost pictures more than just the start of the New Testament church. It shows that those now being called are a type of firstfruit, that they are to be like Jesus Christ, that God’s Spirit is needed to do His will, and that this Holy Day shows part of the plan of God to save nearly all of humankind.

# WHAT SHOULD I PRAY ABOUT?



By Lynn Torrance (from *The Good News*, August 1961)

(Note: While most of the specific items related to the work of God he later refers to in this old article no longer exist, there are modern “replacements” for many of them. The broadcast media now being used includes radio interviews, the BibleNewProphecy YouTube channel, the ContinuingCOG YouTube channel, the ccog.org website, and the cogwriter.com website. There is also the daily Church of God News electronic newsletter. Additionally, the printed media publication that is similar to the old Plain Truth magazine would be the Bible News Prophecy magazine.)

**Is it wrong to pray for oneself? about how to make “ends meet”? about how to overcome? Just what should one pray about?**

MANY do not know what to pray about. We are often asked, “What can I pray about?” Some say, “I ask God to forgive, to guide and direct me. I ask God to bless the work, the ministers, and the Church. What else is there to pray about?”

## Acknowledge God

The Bible makes plain that the FIRST STEP in learning what to pray about is to realize WHOM we are praying to.

Did you take time today to get down on your knees and

become acquainted, in prayer, with God? Or are you waiting for the right “feeling”? the right mood? Are you, day after day, “putting off” praying until tomorrow because you do not think of anything to pray about? — because you just don’t feel comfortable praying to God?

Notice what Jesus instructed His disciples to pray about when they asked him to teach them to pray. Jesus said — as quoted in archaic English in the King James Version, “When ye pray, say, OUR FATHER which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name” (Luke 11:1-2).

We must first acknowledge the greatness of our HEAVENLY Father. Our faith increases when we realize that what He has promised He can and will perform! He is the God of Heaven — the Ruler of the whole universe.

Abraham strengthened his faith by giving glory to God. “He grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (Rom. 4:20-21, R.S.V.).

David was a praying man. David constantly gave glory and praise to God. His last public prayer is given in the Bible and is an excellent example of how to give God Glory and Honor — of what to pray about, “BLESSED are thou, LORD God of Israel our FATHER, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD is the GREATNESS, and the POWER, and the GLORY, and the VICTORY, and the MAJESTY; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the KINGDOM, O LORD, and thou art EXALTED as HEAD ABOVE ALL. Both RICHES and HONOR come from thee, and thou RULEST over all ... In thy hand it is to make GREAT and to GIVE STRENGTH to all. And now therefore, our God, we THANK THEE, and PRAISE thy glorious name” (I Chron. 29:10-13).

Do you glorify the majesty, the power, and the wisdom of God in prayer?

After you have praised and honored God and hallowed His Holy name then you pray —

## “Thy Will Be Done”

Notice carefully that Christ next set us the example to pray: “Thy Kingdom come, THY WILL be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mat. 6:10).

What IS God’s Will for this earth? We can know! God makes it clear in His Word what His Will is.

In Mat. 24:14 we read: “This gospel of the Kingdom SHALL be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.” This one verse teaches a great deal about HIS WILL.

HOW is this work of preaching and publishing the Gospel to all the world being done? It is through the "World Tomorrow" broadcast, the PLAIN TRUTH, the GOOD NEWS, the CORRESPONDENCE COURSE, the BOOKLETS, the advertising in READER'S DIGEST, the Letter Answering Department, the evangelistic campaigns, the baptizing tours, the local visiting teams, even through the Ambassador College ENVOY — and especially through EACH and EVERY minister of God.

Are you praying for the success and effectiveness of ALL THESE THINGS? It is GOD'S WILL that you do!

Pray for the "World Tomorrow" broadcast. Pray that each time it goes out over the air new people will be caused to listen to it. Pray that doors to reach each section of the world, not now being reached at this time, will be opened.

Pray that God will train and send out laborers to reap the harvest of interested listeners of the "World Tomorrow" broadcast (Mat. 9:38). Pray that God will send the right students to Ambassador College, men and women who have the ability and talents and the submissiveness that He can use in His Work. Don't forget to pray that the students who are already in Ambassador College may bear more fruit.

Pray for the co-worker letters, that God will lay it on the hearts of the readers to support this WORK with their prayers, their tithes and their offerings.

And how long do you think it would take you to pray for each and every minister, carefully, diligently? Ask God to give them the power of His Holy Spirit, His knowledge, His wisdom, that He might use them as instruments through whom He nourishes the flock He has chosen. Ask God to use them to preach from the scripture the words that are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16).

Don't pray these exact words. Jesus didn't say: "Pray this." He said "Pray thus!" Build upon and expand these suggestions. You can think of many other things to pray about when interceding for God's ministers.

These are but a few examples, a small beginning of things to pray for. You can think of many others.

Praying for each phase of the work is important. In fact, the very existence of the work of God depends upon your prayers.

For example: When we pray that God lay it on the hearts of the people of this country to send tithes and offerings

to support the cost of preaching and publishing this Gospel message to the entire world, it is His WILL to honor that prayer. He goes into action. He directly intervenes in the very lives of the people of this country and MAKES them send in more money than they would have otherwise. Thus, through daily prayer you add to the list in heaven of those you are helping to lead down the path that leads to eternal life. Your reward is certain.

PRAYER is YOUR ministry. Lack of prayer will keep you out of the Kingdom of God! God expects you to do your part. That is His will.

## **"Give Us Our Daily Bread"**

Did you know your DAILY BREAD is dual?

Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger" (John 6:35). Come to God through daily prayer and Bible study and He will supply your DAILY spiritual needs. You have more daily need of spiritual food than even of physical food — but God here promises you both, if you will only ask Him.

Why is it that some who know God wants to supply us daily with all our needs immediately begin to ask God for things that satisfy the lust of the flesh. Their prayers are usually very short and filled with I's, me's and mine's. It's "God give me this" and "God give me that." "Ye ask," retorts James, "and receive NOT, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:2).

## **"Forgive Us"**

Jesus also said to ask God to "forgive us our trespasses [or debts], as we forgive our trespassers [or debtors]" (Mat. 6:12).

Have you asked God to forgive your every sin, your every shortcoming, your every weakness, your every stumbling — and those of others? Do we ALSO forgive our debtors — those who offend us?

We MUST forgive everyone who has stepped on our toes, everyone who has offended us, everyone who has wronged us in any way whatsoever. God forgives us only as we forgive others! Remember that forgiving means forgetting. Yet we know that in some local churches there are people who CANNOT BE FORGIVEN by God because they still REFUSE to forgive their brethren. Brethren, this must not continue!

And finally He said, "Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."

God tempts no man. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:13-14). Watch and pray that you be not drawn away by lusts and enter into temptation (Mat. 26:41). Watch, keep awake. When wrong thoughts begin to come into your mind, FLEE QUICKLY to God in prayer. Put your trust in Him. Or else God will allow you to stumble in temptation till you learn to put your whole life in God's hands.

We are not to pray this sample prayer that Jesus gave — word for word. We are to use it as an outline for our daily prayers. Few realize that Jesus also gave innumerable OTHER DETAILS to pray about in His Word. These all MAGNIFY the main principles mentioned in His outline of prayer. They should all be fitted into the pattern Jesus gave the disciples. We are instructed to pray for those in authority (I Tim. 2:1-3), for our enemies, for those who persecute us (Mat. 5:44); for the brethren (Eph. 6:18); that we may escape the things to come (Luke 21:36); for the sick and afflicted (James 5:14-16); for your own requests (Phil. 4:6); for the ministry (II Thess. 3:1); and for the churches (Eph. 1:16; Col. 1:3; Philemon 4; I Thess. 1:2).

## Pray for Ourselves?

Of course! But not for ourselves only. If your prayers include others and theirs include you, think how many prayers are said ON YOUR BEHALF! But if you are selfish and pray only for yourself — and everyone else did the same — then ONLY YOU would be praying for yourself.

A student at Ambassador College discovered quite by accident the amazing principle that the Law of Love is a Living Law. He had tried to overcome a certain weakness but had failed again and again. He felt miserable and dejected.

A friend revealed that he too was having trouble overcoming the very same temptation. This student felt so miserable himself that he hastened to go and pray EARNESTLY for his friend. He said, "Oh, God, don't let my friend be as weak and rotten as I am. Strengthen him, take this temptation from him."

This student was amazed to discover that after having prayed for his friend, his own overpowering weakness left him! It was suddenly as if this temptation no longer existed.

This student learned that when one has some sin he is unable to overcome, if he will pray for all others who have, or even might have the same weakness, the God of Love rewards him for praying for His OTHER children.

Try it. Pray for all the men and women in the Church who have, or who even might have — the same overpowering temptation you have and see for yourself that God will reward you for showing Love to His OTHER children by strengthening you. He can and will remove your temptation from you.

Remember, if you pray for others, and all the others pray for you and others, think how much more help you have than if you alone prayed for just your problem.

Therefore pray that God will imbue us all with His Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). Ask God for the gift of repentance so all can overcome sin. Ask God for wisdom (James 1:5), power, understanding, and knowledge.

Pray that God will implant in His people the DESIRE to study and pray until all are filled with the Spirit of God, with understanding and a true sense of values.

When you read the Bible and don't understand a verse — that is something to pray about. If you are falling short of obeying His instruction — that is something to pray about. For some of you there are almost as many things to pray about as there are verses in the Bible!

Don't just limit the things you pray about to the points mentioned in this article. Ask God to show you what else HE wants YOU to pray for. HE will show you IN HIS WORD many other things to pray about.

Whatever you do don't let your prayer become a mere ritual, a vain repetition. Be diligent. Be persistent. Prayer and Bible Study must be first in your life, or you are putting something else before God. We receive what we ask of God "because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (I John 3:22).

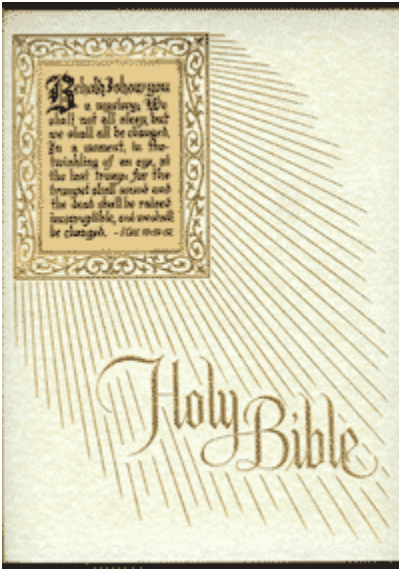
Prayer has to become heartfelt — full of thanksgiving, praise and joy. It should be a spontaneous and natural talking to God. The more you pray, the more you will understand how to pray.

God KNOWS that many of you faithful brethren are praying. He also KNOWS that others have not prayed as they should.

God's ministers have said, "YOU ARE CONVERTED TO THE DEGREE THAT YOU PRAY FOR GOD'S WORK!"

If you have been PUTTING OFF prayer until tomorrow DO something now. Force yourself to begin to study and pray. Don't put off your own salvation!

# THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



By Bob Thiel

Who preserved the books of the Old Testament? What are the books of the Hebrew scriptures? When did Christians know what they were?

This article will look to the Bible and historical records to attempt to answer those questions.

## To the Jews

The Apostle Paul taught:

1 What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God (Romans 3:1-2).

The term in the New Testament for oracle, means inspired writings. And based upon historical records this was so, as the Jews in Palestine preserved what we call the Old Testament.

Jesus, of course, grew up in Palestine, and thus it is reasonable to conclude that He used the same books of the Old Testament as were preserved by the Jews in Palestine.

A modern Catholic scholar has confirmed that it was widely believed in the second century that the preservation of the Old Testament was given to the Jews in Palestine:

The preservation of the texts among the Jews gave occasion to the anonymous author of Exhortations to the Greeks to draw this conclusion (PG 6, 268): "Today also the Jews guard the books that belong to our religion. This was a work of Divine Providence for our advantage, so as not to give rise to suspicion of any falsity to those who wish to speak ill of us, when we bring them from the church; and therefore we wish to bring them to the synagogue of the Jews, so that from these books, guarded also by them, it may be evident that the laws written by holy men for teaching clearly and evidently belong to us". (Bagatti, Bellarmino. Translated by Eugene Hoade. The Church from the Gentiles in Palestine, Part 1, Chapter 1. Nihil obstat: Ignatius Mancini. Imprimi potest: Herminius Roncari. Imprimatur: +Albertus Gori, die 28 Februarii 1970. Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, p. 19).

Priest Bagatti also acknowledged that when Melito of Sardis went to verify the list/canon of Old Testament books, that he went to the Jews in Palestine, not Egypt (Ibid, pp. 18-19). It should be noted that Melito held what we consider to be Church of God doctrines that, although the Church of Rome considers him to be a saint, that the Church of Rome condemns.

Here are some comments from the Jewish Encyclopedia:

"Books." This word, which in Daniel ix, means all the sacred writings, occurs frequently in the Mishna... the Apocrypha...were not included in the libraries of the Temple or the synagogues. (Bible Canon, Chapter 2. Jewish Encyclopedia. 1906. ©2002-2011, JewishEncyclopedia.com)

The Old Testament did not contain extra books that some improperly rely on today.

## Complete or Incomplete?

As far as the Old Testament being complete, the Jewish Encyclopedia claims that all evidence supports that the following from a writer named Zunc is correct:

...long before the destruction of the Temple, and not long after Sirach was translated, the Holy Writings comprised their present cycle. (Chapter 8)

The Jewish Encyclopedia also teaches in the Tosefta (considered a supplement to the Mishnah, the oral traditions), that, "Neither the Ben Sira nor any of the books written thereafter" are canonical (Ibid, Chapter 10).

The simple fact was that in Jesus' day, there still were

scribes (e.g. Matthew 17:12). And these scribes not only copied (transcribed) scripture, they counted each character and cross-checked it to ensure that it was as error free as possible.

It should be added that there was a something called Council of Jamnia, which may have taken place around 90 A.D., which discussed the appropriate books of the Hebrew scriptures. This Jewish council allegedly confirmed the canon authoritatively for nearly all Jews (some scholars have questioned its authenticity). It, if held, really made no changes, and it basically only discussed a few books. But the books that are attributed to this possible council are the same books now used by Protestants and the Continuing Church of God (which is not Protestant).

Yet, The Catholic Encyclopedia claims,

...that there is a smaller, or incomplete, and larger, or complete, Old Testament. Both of these were handed down by the Jews; the former by the Palestinian, the latter by the Alexandrian, Hellenist, Jews. The Jewish Bible of today is composed of three divisions, whose titles combined from the current Hebrew name for the complete Scriptures of Judaism: Hat-Torah, Nebiim, wa-Kéthubim, i.e. The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. This triplication is ancient; it is supposed as long-established in the Mishnah, the Jewish code of unwritten sacred laws, reduced to writing, c. A.D. 200. A grouping closely akin to it occurs in the New Testament in Christ's own words, Luke, xxiv, 44: "All things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me". Going back to the prologue of Ecclesiasticus, prefixed to it about 132 B.C., we find mentioned "the Law, and the Prophets, and others that have followed them" (Reid G. Canon of the Old Testament. Transcribed by Ernie Stefanik. 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).

However, Irenaeus, a Roman supporter, around 180 wrote:

After this fashion also did a presbyter, a disciple of the apostles, reason with respect to the two testaments, proving that both were truly from one and the same God...

For all the apostles taught that there were indeed two testaments among the two peoples; but that it was one and the same God who appointed both for

the advantage of those men (for whose sakes the testaments were given) who were to believe in God (Irenaeus. *Adversus haereses*, Book IV, Chapter 32, Verse 1,2. Excerpted from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. American Edition, 1885. Online Edition Copyright © 2004 by K. Knight).

Hence Irenaeus is clearly claiming that the apostles knew the books of the Old and New Testaments. Thus he believed that the early church did have the entire canon of the Bible. I suspect that the presbyter, a disciple of the apostles Irenaeus is referring to was Polycarp or Melito. And if so, this shows that the church in Asia Minor had the complete biblical canon very early on.

## **Polycarp Was a Disciple of John and Originally Knew the Books**

Polycarp of Smyrna made it clear that those he wrote to that he and they had the correct Bible otherwise he would not have written:

For I trust that ye are well versed in the Sacred Scriptures, and that nothing is hid from you; but to me this privilege is not yet granted. It is declared then in these Scriptures, "Be ye angry, and sin not," and, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." (Polycarp. Letter to the Philippians. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1as edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. American Edition, 1885).

Note that Polycarp quoted a verse that is in the New Testament, when he used the term Scriptures.

Perhaps it also should be mentioned that there is a document known as the Harris Fragments (ca. 2nd or 3rd century) that also discusses Polycarp. Basically it stresses that Polycarp's connection with the Apostle John, indicates he was baptized at age 18, suggests he was appointed bishop of Smyrna by John, and that he died a martyr's death at age 104. Here are some translated quotes from the Harris Fragments, with one addition from me in {}:

There remained [---]ter him a disciple[e ---] name was Polycar[p and] he made him bishop over Smyrna...He was... {an} old man, being one hundred and f[our] of age. He continued to walk [i]n the canons which he had learned from his youth from John the a[p]ostle (Weidman, Frederick W. *Polycarp and John: The Harris Fragments and Their Challenge to Literary Traditions*. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IL), 1999, pp. 43-44)

By mentioning the term “canons” (which seems to be in the singular form in the actual Greek--Weidman, oddly displays what appears to be a combination of upper and lower case Greek characters “ΚαNNωN” as the original source for the translation on p. 25) the Harris Fragments could possibly be suggesting that John passed the knowledge of the proper books of the Bible to Polycarp—and that would seem to be the case. But even if canon(s) meant only the measure of the right way to be a Christian, then all should realize that to be faithful to apostolic Christianity that they should imitate Polycarp and John as they did Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1).

## Melito's List

While it is true that it was the Jews that originally were to maintain what is now called the Old Testament canon, there was one early Church leader who essentially listed it. And that was Melito of Sardis.

It appears that even though those of Asia Minor knew the correct books from the time of the Apostle John and Polycarp, that some questions arose that Melito of Sardis decided would be best to investigate.

The following written by Melito is From the Book of Extracts:

Melito to his brother Onesimus, greeting:--

As you have often, prompted by your regard for the word of God, expressed a wish to have some extracts made from the Law and the Prophets concerning the Saviour, and concerning our faith in general, and have desired, moreover, to obtain an accurate account of the Ancient Books, as regards their number and their arrangement, I have striven to the best of my ability to perform this task: well knowing your zeal for the faith, and your eagerness to become acquainted with the Word, and especially because I am assured that, through your yearning after God, you esteem these things beyond all things else, engaged as you are in a struggle for eternal salvation.

I accordingly proceeded to the East, and went to the very spot where the things in question were preached and took place; and, having made myself accurately acquainted with the books of the Old Testament, I have set them down below, and herewith send you the list. Their names are as follows:--

The five books of Moses--Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the four books of Kings, the two of Chronicles, the book of the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, also called the Book of Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs,

Job, the books of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, of the twelve contained in a single book, Daniel, Ezekiel, Esdras. From these I have made my extracts, dividing them into six books (Melito. From the Book of Extracts. Cited in Eusebius. The History of the Church, Book IV, Chapter XXVI. Digireads.com Publishing, Stilwell (KS), 2005 edition. p. 90).

(The above is the Roberts and Donaldson translation. While some translators believe that the “Wisdom” is a separate book, even The Catholic Encyclopedia concluded that only the “protocanonicals” are in Melito's list.)

These are the books in the Old Testament used by most Jews, Protestants, and those in the COGs (Esther is believed by The Catholic Encyclopedia to have been left out for political reasons as it shows the Jews killing many of their enemies--but it may have been combined with others in that list, because the Jews tended to combine it with Ezra).

It should be noted that Melito claims this was an accurate list. The fact that Melito calls these the books of the Old Testament demonstrates the deuterocanonical books were not accepted and that the Church had to have had a New Testament.

It should also be noted that since the Jews sometimes combined Nehemiah with Ezra, that perhaps Melito actually listed all the Old Testament books. If punctuation, which was not in extensive use when this letter was written, is added differently than some translators have come up with on their own, look at what the last paragraph from Melito above shows:

The five books of Moses--Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the four books of Kings, the two of Chronicles, the book of the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, also called the Book of Wisdom. Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Job, the books of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, of the twelve contained in a single book. Daniel, Ezekiel, Esdras, from these I have made my extracts, dividing them into six books.

Hence if one adds up 5 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 4 + 2 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 12 + 6, one ends up with 39 books. The same number that is in modern Old Testaments (other than those with the later additions, sometimes called the deuterocanonical books, that Melito did not accept).

An Anglican scholar noted about some of the implications of Melito's work:

This fragment is highly significant as the first Christian

Old Testament canon. It is also of interest that Melito traveled to Palestine, and is thus an indication that this is the Old Testament canon known by Palestinian Christians, and perhaps Jews (Stewart-Sykes A. Melito of Sardis On Pascha. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood (NY), 2001, p. 72).

Even The Catholic Encyclopedia notes this about Melito's list,

St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis (c. 170), first drew up a list of the canonical books of the Old Testament. While maintaining the familiar arrangement of the Septuagint, he says that he verified his catalogue by inquiry among Jews; Jewry by that time had everywhere discarded the Alexandrian books, and Melito's Canon consists exclusively of the protocanonicals minus Esther. It should be noticed, however, that the document to which this catalogue was prefixed is capable of being understood as having an anti-Jewish polemical purpose, in which case Melito's restricted canon is explicable on another ground (Reid).

Amazingly then, even though The Catholic Encyclopedia calls Melito a saint and admits that he verified his list with the Jews, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, while understanding possibly why Esther was not listed (Esther talks about Jews avenging themselves on their enemies, but as mention I believe that it was possibly combined together with Nehemiah and Ezra, which was the pattern consistent with what was done by the Jews then), include 10 additional books (or parts of books) in the Old Testament that Melito did not list.

The Catholic Encyclopedia also notes:

St. Jerome, speaking of the canon of Melito, quotes Tertullian's statement that he was esteemed a prophet by many of the faithful. (Hudleston G.R. Transcribed by Kenneth M. Caldwell. St. Melito. The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume X Copyright © 1911 by Robert Appleton Company, NY. Nihil Obstat, October 1, 1911. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York, pp. 166-167)

Interestingly, according to Polycrates, Melito was a Bishop of Smyrna, between Polycarp and Polycrates, and he kept the Passover on Nisan 14 in accordance with the Gospel, and in violation of what was then being done in Rome--see Eusebius. Church History. Book V, Chapter 24.

So, one that the Church of Rome considered was a prophet and saint, yet who basically held Church of God doctrines, verified that the books that we in the Church of God accept

as the Old Testament canon.

Furthermore, a later leader in Asia Minor, Polycrates of Ephesus, claimed that he had the complete Bible (circa 193 A.D.):

I, therefore, brethren, who have lived sixty-five years in the Lord, and have met with the brethren throughout the world, and have gone through every Holy Scripture...I did not bear my gray hairs in vain, but had always governed my life by the Lord Jesus (Eusebius. The History of the Church, Book V, Chapter XXIV, Verses 2-7 . Translated by A. Cushman McGiffert. Digireads.com Publishing, Stilwell (KS), 2005, p. 114).

And Polycrates would have agreed with the earlier list that Melito of Sardis put together.

Some of this evidence may have been part of why some scholars, such as the late James Moffatt, have understood that Asia Minor had the complete canon:

Was not the Apostolic Canon of scripture first formed... in Asia Minor? (Excerpt of James Moffatt's review, p.292. In: Bauer W. Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity, 2nd ed. Sigler Press Edition, Mifflinown (PA), 1996).

The true Church of God was predominant in Asia Minor until the early third century and it had the original and true canon of both the Old and New Testaments.

## Other Books?

In a rather weak attempt to try to justify its use of additional books, The Catholic Encyclopedia states:

St. Justin Martyr is the first to note that the Church has a set of Old Testament Scriptures different from the Jews', and also the earliest to intimate the principle proclaimed by later writers, namely, the self-sufficiency of the Church in establishing the Canon; its independence of the Synagogue in this respect (Reid).

Specifically, Justin claimed, that the Jews ("they") removed scriptures:

And I wish you to observe, that they have altogether taken away many Scriptures from the translations effected by those seventy elders who were with Ptolemy...Trypho remarked, "Whether[or not] the rulers of the people have erased any portion of the Scriptures, as you affirm, God knows; but it seems incredible." "Assuredly," said I, "it does seem incredible" (Justin

Martyr. Dialogue with Trypho, Chapters 71,73).

Justin seemed to teach that Jewish leaders removed passages from the Bible though it is not clear that he taught that books were missing (Ibid. Chapters 71-73).

Justin Martyr, while in Ephesus, admitted that he did not live differently than the Gentiles (in violation of Paul's admonition in Ephesians 4:17), taught God's law was not in force, and did not observe the Sabbaths or the other Holy Days that the early Church did. And, apparently, did not accept quite the same content of the books that the disciples did for the Old Testament (he seemed to teach that the Jews eliminated parts). It may be important to note that Justin wrote BEFORE Melito, and Melito did not include any of the deuterocanonical books in his list.

After Justin Martyr left Ephesus he became influential in Rome. Eusebius noted:

And in Rome ...Anicetus assumed the leadership of the Christians there... But Justin was especially prominent in those days (Eusebius Church History. Book IV, Chapter 11).

So prominent, that Justin's influence was used as justification that ultimately led to the adoption of extra books of in the Old Testament that were not in those scriptures used by Christ and the original apostles. This may have simply happened because others may have noted that since Justin claimed the Jews removed scriptures, that this justified adding books that Justin never referred too!

## The Deuterocanonical Books

The books that the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox tend to call the deuterocanonical books, are normally called the Apocrypha or the apocryphal books associated with the Old Testament (there are also ones associated with the New Testament, but no non-gnostic group accepts them--they are specifically rejected by Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, and those in the Churches of God).

These books were not included in Melito's list of the 2nd century. They were also rejected in the third and fourth centuries by Catholic scholars such as Origen, Athanasius, and Jerome, essentially because they understood that the books were not properly accepted by the Jews and did not agree with certain church teachings:

St. Jerome cast his weighty suffrage on the side unfavourable to the disputed books...Jerome lived long in Palestine, in an environment where everything outside the Jewish Canon was suspect, and that,

moreover, he had an excessive veneration for the Hebrew text, the Hebraica veritas as he called it....the inferior rank to which the deuterocanonicals were relegated by authorities like Origen, Athanasius, and Jerome, was due to too rigid a conception of canonicity, one demanding that a book, to be entitled to this supreme dignity, must be received by all, must have the sanction of Jewish antiquity, and must moreover be adapted not only to edification, but also to the "confirmation of the doctrine of the Church", to borrow Jerome's phrase (Reid, Old Testament Canon).

Jerome did not simply consider these additions were inferior. Notice that he specifically stated that the churches condemned the Septuagint additions to the Book of Daniel:

In reference to Daniel...I also told the reader that the version read in the Christian churches was not that of the Septuagint translators but that of Theodotion. It is true, I said that the Septuagint version was in this book very different from the original, and that it was condemned by the right judgment of the churches of Christ...I repeat what the Jews say against the Story of Susanna and the Hymn of the Three Children, and the fables of Bel and the Dragon, which are not contained in the Hebrew Bible (Jerome. Apology Against Rufinus, Book II, Chapter 33).

The Septuagint version includes a section called Bel and the Dragon--a section that the original does not have, but that has been now accepted by the Roman Catholic Church as part of the deuterocanonical books.

Furthermore, Jerome specifically challenges the validity of the Septuagint and states that the Hebrew Bible was used by Jesus and the Apostles:

The Hebrew Scriptures are used by apostolic men; they are used, as is evident, by the apostles and evangelists. Our Lord and Saviour himself whenever he refers to the Scriptures, takes his quotations from the Hebrew; as in the instance of the words "He that believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," and in the words used on the cross itself, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani," which is by interpretation "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" not, as it is given by the Septuagint, "My God, my God, look upon me, why have you forsaken me?" and many similar cases. I do not say this in order to aim a blow at the seventy translators; but I assert that the Apostles of Christ have an authority superior to theirs. Wherever the Seventy agree with the Hebrew, the apostles took their quotations from that translation; but, where they disagree, they set down in Greek what they had found

in the Hebrew. (Jerome. Apology Against Rufinus, Book II, Chapter 34)

Cyril of Jerusalem also indicated that the Apocryphal books were considered to be of lesser reliability as he wrote:

We speak not from apocryphal books, but from Daniel; for he says, And they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time . A time is the one year in which his coming shall for a while have increase; and the times are the remaining two years of iniquity, making up the sum of the three years; and the half a time is the six months. (Cyril of Jerusalem. Catechetical Lecture 15 On the Clause, And Shall Come in Glory to Judge the Quick and the Dead; Of Whose Kingdom There Shall Be No End, Chapter 16. Translated by Edwin Hamilton Gifford. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310115.htm>>)

And, the Roman Catholic Church knows its leaders had concerns about these books for centuries:

#### THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT DURING THE FOURTH, AND FIRST HALF OF THE FIFTH, CENTURY

In this period the position of the deuterocanonical literature is no longer as secure...Alexandria, with its elastic Scriptures, had from the beginning been a congenial field for apocryphal literature, and St. Athanasius, the vigilant pastor of that flock, to protect it against the pernicious influence, drew up a catalogue of books with the values to be attached to each. First, the strict canon and authoritative source of truth is the Jewish Old Testament, Esther excepted...Following the precedent of Origen and the Alexandrian tradition, the saintly doctor recognized no other formal canon of the Old Testament than the Hebrew one; but also, faithful to the same tradition, he practically admitted the deuterocanonical books to a Scriptural dignity, as is evident from his general usage...

#### THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE FIFTH TO THE CLOSE OF THE SEVENTH CENTURY

This period exhibits a curious exchange of opinions between the West and the East, while ecclesiastical usage remained unchanged, at least in the Latin Church. During this intermediate age the use of St. Jerome's new version of the Old Testament (the Vulgate) became widespread in the Occident. With its text went Jerome's

prefaces disparaging the deuterocanonicals, and under the influence of his authority the West began to distrust these and to show the first symptoms of a current hostile to their canonicity...

## The Latin Church

In the Latin Church, all through the Middle Ages we find evidence of hesitation about the character of the deuterocanonicals. (Reid, Canon of the Old Testament. The Catholic Encyclopedia).

Also notice that even Athanasius in the fourth century really did not consider that the deuterocanonical books were actually scripture, and that Jerome in the fifth century made disparaging comments about them. And even into the Middle Ages, the Church of Rome was not sure if the deuterocanonical books were on a par with scripture!

So when were these books actually adopted?

The Catholic Encyclopedia also states,

The protocanonical books of the Old Testament correspond with those of the Bible of the Hebrews, and the Old Testament as received by Protestants. The deuterocanonical (deuteros, "second") are those whose Scriptural character was contested in some quarters, but which long ago gained a secure footing in the Bible of the Catholic Church, though those of the Old Testament are classed by Protestants as the "Apocrypha". These consist of seven books: Tobias (Tobit), Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, I and II Machabees, and three documents added to protocanonical books, viz., the supplement to Esther, from x, 4, to the end, the Canticle of the Three Youths (Song of the Three Children) in Daniel, iii, and the stories of Susanna and the Elders and Bel and the Dragon, forming the closing chapters of the Catholic version of that book...The ancient Greek Old Testament known as the Septuagint was the vehicle which conveyed these additional Scriptures into the Catholic Church. The Septuagint version was the Bible of the Greek-speaking, or Hellenist, Jews, whose intellectual and literary centre was Alexandria (see SEPTUAGINT). The oldest extant copies date from the fourth and fifth centuries of our era...The most explicit definition of the Catholic Canon is that given by the Council of Trent, Session IV, 1546...The order of books copies that of the Council of Florence, 1442, and in its general plan is that of the Septuagint (Reid, Old Testament Canon).

Thus, it took until 1546 for these books to be completely

adopted by the Roman Catholic Church.

But why then?

Here is the view of one writer:

There is a mistaken belief among some that the Apocrypha books were part of the Bible, and that these were rejected by the Protestant Reformers. On the contrary, the Apocrypha books were never a part of the Old Testament Canon. Thus there is no question of the Reformers dropping out some books from the Canon. Rather, it is the Roman Catholic Church which ADDED these books to the Canon by a proclamation made at the Council of Trent...

With the Protestant Reformation, many of the Reformers challenged the Catholic church to prove their doctrine by supporting these from the Canon. To their dismay the Roman Catholics discovered that many of their doctrines are not derived from the Canon. At the same time they realized that at least some of these erroneous doctrines are supported by the Apocrypha. Thus for their survival it became necessary to add the Apocrypha to the Canon.

In 1545 the Roman Catholic Church convened what is called the Council Of Trent. Here they passed numerous resolutions, including many curses against the Protestant Believers. In April 1545 the Council declared that the Apocrypha are also part of the Bible. Thus for the first time in history the Apocrypha books were ADDED by the Roman Catholic church to the Bible. This was done in order to justify their doctrinal errors (for which support was available only in the Apocrypha), and also to oppose the Protestant believers. The first Vatican Council held 1869-70 reaffirmed the decision of the Roman Catholic Church to add the Apocrypha to the Canon.

Historically and theologically the Apocrypha was never part of the Canon (Philip Johnson C. Reliability Of The Canon. Indus School of Apologetics and Theology Textbook No -004A1, version used in 2006).

The Roman Catholics were not the only ones to adopt those so-called deuterocanonical books. The Eastern Orthodox Church did as well. However, their scholars admit that they are not on the same level as the other books they consider to be scripture:

The Orthodox Church...as...its authoritative text for the Old Testament, it uses the ancient Greek Septuagint. When this differs from the original Hebrew (which happens quite often), Orthodox believe that the changes

in the Septuagint were made under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are to be accepted as part of God's continuing revelation...The Hebrew version of the Old Testament contains thirty-nine books. The Septuagint contains in addition ten further books not present in the Hebrew, which are known in the Orthodox Church as the 'Deutero-Canonical Books'. These were declared by the Councils of Jassy (1641) and Jerusalem (1672) to be 'genuine parts of Scripture'; most Orthodox scholars...consider that the Deutero-Canonical Books, although part of the Bible, stand at a lower footing than the rest of scripture (Ware T. The Orthodox Church, p.200).

This is astounding.

While the Bible clearly teaches, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17), apparently the Orthodox (and Roman Catholic) Church apparently believes that the Hebrew Old Testament needed to be corrected and expanded. And as their own literature admits, the Romans finally listed the ones they accepted in one place in 1546 and the Orthodox apparently did not officially finalize their list until about 100 years later!

And they took what Greek-speaking Jews (as opposed to the Hebrews of Palestine) preferred--even though other writings of these groups admit that it was the Palestinian Christians (those initially based from Jerusalem, and those that would have relied on the canon of the Palestinian Jews) that "kept the faith in purity."

It should be noted that the New Testament makes it clear that the original disciples were Palestinian Hebrews and not from the Hellenists (e.g. Acts 6:1-2). Paul was not a Hellenist either (Acts 9:26-29).

## **The Church of God Had the Full Canon from the Beginning**

While some believe that because the Church of Rome held meetings to determine the canon for itself (and that to a major degree the Protestants followed many of the decisions), the reality is that the Church of God had the books from the beginning.

This is confirmed in many sources. For example, in the early third century, Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, and a supporter of COG doctrines, taught that the proper books were "handed down to us" (Eusebius. The History of the Church, Book VI, Chapter XII, verses 3-4, p. 125-126), thus negating the idea of a late canonization for the faithful.

Notice that around the end of the 4th century, the “Nazarenes” (people who held Church of God doctrines like the Sabbath) knew that they had the scriptures and that they came from God, not a Greco-Roman council. Jerome wrote that the Nazarenes stated:

...God has given us the Law and the testimonies of scriptures. (Jerome, cited in Pritz R. Nazarene Jewish Christianity. Magnas, Jerusalem, 1988, p. 63)

The Catholic Bishop and saint Epiphanius similarly taught about the Nazarenes:

For they use not only the New Testament but also the Old (cited in Pritz, p. 33)

Now, while many believe that because of the Latin Vulgate Bible by Jerome, that the Catholic Church gave the world the Bible, those who espouse that view overlook the question of where Jerome got his information. Based on records in Latin and other languages, Scholars Ray Pritz and the Catholic Priest Bagatti both concluded that Jerome got some of his information on the Bible from the Nazarenes and from various synagogues (Pritz, pp. 49-53; 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. 84-85).

It is a fact that Jerome did deal with “Nazarene Christians” who kept the Sabbath, etc. (Jerome. Letter 112 to Augustine, Chapter 4). Jerome also wrote that he was friendly with at least:

“one of the Hebrews that believed” (Translation by Priest Bagatti of Jerome, Epistula CXXV, Chapter 12. Patrologia Latina (22, 1079). The edition by J. P. Migne, c. 1886, p. 1079).

Thus, it is logical to conclude that Jerome got some of his information from people who held to Church of God doctrines.

Therefore, then it would appear that the often heard claim that the Roman “Church gave the world the Bible” neglects to mention that their church most likely got the Bible from those in the true Church of God, also known as the Nazarenes in Asia Minor and in Jerusalem!

This seems to be indirectly acknowledged by some modern scholars. Notice a 21st century account by Gerd Theissen:

Therefore we can advance the hypothesis that above all those writings entered the canon on which the

Christian communities of Asia Minor and Rome could agree. (Theissen G, Translated by John Bowden. Fortress introduction to the New Testament. Fortress Press, 2003, p. 178)

Taking this a step further, even those who later compromised in Asia Minor apparently recognized that they knew of the complete canon and thus they (and probably others) influenced the Church of Rome.

## Quotes in the New Testament from the Greek

Here is what the Catholic priest Jerome wrote about the Book of Matthew and its use of the Old Testament,

Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforesaid publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library. at Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who use it. In this it is to be noted that wherever the Evangelist, whether on his own account or in the person of our Lord the Saviour quotes the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint but the Hebrew. Wherefore these two forms exist “Out of Egypt have I called my son,” and “for he shall be called a Nazarene” (Jerome. De Viris Illustribus (On Illustrious Men). Excerpted from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 3. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. American Edition, 1892. Online Edition Copyright © 2005 by K. Knight).

I simply cited that to show that Hebrew is what was normally what was used for scripture in Palestine.

But, since nearly all of the New Testament was written in Greek, it is logical that Greek translations were sometimes quoted.

## New Testament Predicted in the Old

Perhaps it should be added that there is a passage in the Old Testament that predicts a New Testament as it shows that the disciples would essentially finalize the Bible. Notice:

16 Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples (Isaiah 8:16).

While other portions of this article have shown that various of Christ's disciples were involved, the above verse suggests that there would be no additions "to the law and to the testimony" (an expression for the Bible, see Isaiah 8:20), after those disciples were gone. Isaiah is thus indicating that the original disciples would have finalized the New Testament--that would include people such as Peter, Paul, and John.

## Conclusion

The Jews in Palestine were tasked with preserving the books of the Old Testament, which were almost exclusively written in Hebrew and naturally contained no Greek. This is what Jesus and the disciples would have normally used. Melito, one-time Bishop of Smyrna (and a saint even according to Catholic sources), stated that the books of the Old Testament were those that he listed. And those that he listed were those from the Palestinian Jews (the so-called protocanonical books) and did not include one book from the additional ones that the Hellenists preserved (sometimes called deuterocanonical books). And note that Melito, according to Catholic sources, knew that the Jews had not accepted the books of the Hellenistic Alexandrians.

The 39 books that are in the Old Testaments that those in the COGs and Protestant Churches use are the correct books of the Old Testament. Only the antinomian Justin Martyr, and those that supported some of his heresies or the heresies of others, supported that the Christian Church would use different books than the Palestinian Jews. And, of course, those in the true Church of God (as well as most Protestants), never accepted this.

Even the Catholic supporting saint and doctor Jerome recognized (at least for a time) some of the flaws of the deuterocanonical books—hence, based upon his initial research he only really accepted the 39 books as truly valid and apparently consulted partially with those with Church of God doctrines when he put his books together.

The true Old Testament canon is based on the biblical criteria and this canon essentially was affirmed during the 2nd century by one considered to have been faithful (Melito). And while it is true that "the Church gave the world the Bible"--it was the church established by Christ through the apostles Peter, Paul, and John and their successors as inspired by the Holy Spirit that did so--the Church of God which Polycarp and other early saints were part of.

## APPARITIONS CLAIMING TO BE MARY

By Bob Thiel

Starting every May, vast multitudes of Roman Catholics descend on the town of Fatima, Portugal as they believe that Mary, the mother of Jesus, appeared there once per month, from May until October of 1917.

As far as Fatima goes, it should be understood that what actually appeared there wore a short skirt, yet most who visit the shrine and sanctuary there do not realize this. Nearly all visitors there have been deceived.



*Fatima Capelinha Statue    Description of Witnesses*

The above pictures show that what really appeared in Fatima (the picture on the right) is not dressed like the statues that are on display and that many bow down to in Fatima. Based upon the general consensus that Mary would have not violated cultural norms for modesty in 1917 Portugal (cf. 1 Timothy 2:9), what appeared could not possibly be the Mary of the Bible, as the only three people who claimed to have seen the apparition all reported that she wore a short skirt. Yet, in 1917 Portugal, women never appeared in public showing parts of their legs uncovered.

## Reported Apparitions are NOT Mary of the Bible

Although there have reportedly been thousands of apparitions that people felt or that themselves claimed to be Mary of the Bible, it is interesting to note that this was not part of the experience of the early Christians:

There is no recorded literature about apparitions for the early centuries of the Church. The first attestations of Marian apparitions are from the fourth century. For example,

Gregory of Nyssa, who lived in the fourth century, recorded that Gregory the Wonder worker (213-270 A.D.) was the first beneficiary of a Marian apparition. (Apparitions of the Past: A Statistical Study. The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, Dayton, Ohio.)

Gregory...was believed to have been gifted with a power of working miracles, which he was constantly exercising...the demons were subject to him...he could cast his cloak over a man, and cause his death...he could bring the presiding demons back to their shrine (Roberts A, Donaldson J. Ante-Nicene Christian Library. Volume 20: The Works of Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius of Alexandria, and Archelaus. Syriac documents attribute. Originally 1871, modern printing by Elibron.com, 2006, p. 3).

It was in the third century that the history of the faithful Christians became much harder to track and a Greco-Roman confederation began to emerge, partially based on a mystic (cf. Isaiah 47:5-6,12). Notice that the first Marian apparition seen was by someone who seemed murderous.

There are relatively few accounts of people seeing apparitions they thought were Mary (or receiving oral messages called locutions from a spiritual source) before the 1100s. Catholic believers (including various ones considered as saints) have claimed to have received messages which they believed were from Mary (Fanning S. Mystics of the Christian Tradition. Routledge, New York. 2001, reprinted 2006, pp. 55-56,84,87-89,108-109,128-130,132-134). Some of these people were believed to have been visited by demons and/or became rigid (ibid). Sergius, a Russian Orthodox saint, also claimed to have seen a Marian figure who gave one or more messages (ibid, p. 47). Many believe that it was because of "Marian" apparitions that Latin America and certain other lands became predominantly Catholic.

With some of the apparitions, various prophetic statements have been uttered. Since we in the *Continuing Church of God* contend that Mary is dead and awaiting the resurrection, we do not believe that the apparitions are actually Mary of the Bible, but messengers from their imaginations or elsewhere.

This is not to say that we believe that all the reports of apparitions are made up or are hallucinations. It's just that we do not believe that according to the Bible that it is possible that any of them could truly be Mary, mother of Jesus. Several of the comments reported from the apparitions/messengers suggest a demonic presence as the messengers often make claims that are against those of the Bible (but, since even Satan can quote the Bible, see Matthew 4, the apparitions sometimes make biblically appropriate statements).

## Certain Apparitions Seem to Have Messages Consistent with Satan's Plan

Those who claim to see such apparitions often tell of various messages from them.

Notice what one allegedly "Marian" message stated in Pfaffenhofen, Germany on April 25, 1946:

Wherever it is taught that I am all-powerful, I will spread peace, for peace will be where all men have faith in my power...I am the sign of the Living God..." (Culleton, Reign of Antichrist, p. 216).

Yet, the Bible does not state that Mary is all-powerful, that people should have faith in her power, or that she is the sign of the Living God. But it appears that apparitions claiming to be Mary (or somehow implying that) may ultimately be claimed to be a confirming sign for a power that will emerge in the 21st century that is actually opposed to the true God (cf. Isaiah 47; Revelation 18). And the above apparition is implying that those who do not have faith in her power will not have peace--hence those who hold fast to the Bible will apparently be persecuted by those who have faith in Mary.

Notice what another messenger allegedly stated in Pfaffenhofen, Germany on June 25, 1946:

I am the great Mediatrix of Grace. The Father wants the world to recognize His handmaid...My sign is about to appear. God wills it...I cannot reveal my power to the world as yet...Then I will be able to reveal myself... Chose a sign for yourself so that the Trinity may soon be adored by all! Pray and sacrifice through me!...I will impose crosses on my children that will be as heavy and as deep as the sea because I love them in my sacrificed Son. I pray, be prepared to bear the cross in order that the Trinity may be honored (Culleton, Reign of Antichrist, pp. 217-218).

Real Christians would not pray and sacrifice through Mary. This is something that Satan, however, would encourage.

In 1958, Matous Losuta of Czechoslovakia claimed that a "Marian" messenger stated:

All my children will receive and carry the sign of the cross on their foreheads (Flynn, Ted & Flynn, Maureen. Thunder of Justice: The Warning, the Miracle, the Chastisement, the Era of Peace. Signs of the Times Maxkol Communications, 1992, p. 331).

But this is not something that the Bible advocates.

The Catholic saint Bridget claimed that a “Marian” messenger said the following in the 14th century:

...my Son and I never sinned...(Revelations of St. Bridget. TAN Books, 1984, p. 14)

But the Bible clearly teaches, that other than Jesus (Hebrews 4:15) all have sinned:

23 For all have sinned, and do need the glory of God. (Romans 3:24, DRB)

Thus, Mary of the Bible would never have claimed that she never sinned.

A woman who calls herself Mariamante claims that an apparition/locution told her the following on February 22, 1987:

You will know by the sign in the heavens which is I myself that the time is at hand for the instant conversion of the multitude (Flynn, p. 326).

Hence, the above prophesies a time that an apparition of Mary will be involved in a coming ecumenical religion--the Bible itself warns that the entire world will fall for a false religion (Revelation 13:4,8). If a “Marian” apparition is involved, this could be one of the “lying wonders” that the Apostle Paul warned about in 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12.

Many “Catholic” writings strongly suggest that visions of one claiming to be Mary are extremely likely to be a major unifying factor for the European Beast power and its future allies around the world.

Another “Marian” messenger allegedly made the following statement on September 8, 1989:

I also, your heavenly leader, am signing, with MY heavenly seal, all those who have consecrated themselves to MY Immaculate Heart and have formed part of my army. I am imprinting my seal on your foreheads with the most holy sign of the Cross of my Son Jesus...Allow yourselves all to be signed on the forehead and on the hand with my motherly seal. (Flynn, pp. 330-331).

This imprinting cross mark not only is not biblical, it could be warned against (cf. Revelation 13:16-17).

### **The Bottom Line: Despite Claims, Marian Interventions are Not Part of God’s Plan, But Do Fit into Satan’s Plan**

Oddly, some Catholics like Ted and Maureen Flynn, have

gone so far as to also claim:

God is using apparitions (heavenly appearances) and locutions (interior messages) because other means have failed. (Flynn, 1993, p. 4)

But this simply is not the message of the Bible--the idea that Mary is needed is a Satanic concept. The Bible is clear that God’s plan is to provide to a witness (Matthew 24:14) and if humans do not listen, additional witnesses and punishments (Leviticus 26:14-28). The Bible never indicates that formerly-human apparitions are God’s plan. And if one reads the Book of Revelation beginning to end, one will clearly see that God will provide witnesses to His way (Revelation 11:2-12) and use punishments (Revelation 16:1-19). God does not fail and the use of apparitions of Mary is not in the Book.

In the end times, the Bible shows that signs and lying wonders, including possibly claimed “Marian Apparitions,” will be involved to get the Europeans and many others to follow the Beast (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12; Isaiah 47). And while some Catholics believe these apparitions are good, biblically will be bad (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12).

Many do not realize that the Bible warns that a certain virgin, lady, city, mother, and harlot, all make the same type of statements and all are condemned (Isaiah 47:1-14; Zephaniah 2:15; Revelation 17:1-18; 18:7-8), despite “miraculous signs” called sorceries (Isaiah 47:9, 12; Nahum 23:4; Revelation 18:23) being involved. Christians will need to be on their guard to not fall for them or their Babylonian system (cf. Revelation 18:4).

All should realize that Mary of the Bible is NOT prophesied in sacred scripture to return, be seen, or to help save humankind. If some apparition appears that does so, please do not believe it. God has limited Satan’s power such that His truly faithful people will not be deceived (1 Corinthians 10:13; Matthew 24:24) if they truly love the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10). There is a way of escape for people who love God, love His word, and who love the truth (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Believe God, believe His Word. Believe God more than deceptive signs you may see with your very own eyes (2 Corinthians 5:7). Show that you have real faith in the unseen God (Hebrews 11:1-3; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:20; Colossians 1:15).

Christians are to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) and should not allow themselves to be deceived by lying wonders that will get worse in the last days (2 Timothy 3:13).

# Fulfilling Matthew 24:14 and Matthew 28:19-20



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The leading pastor in *Continuing Church of God* is a regular radio guest using radio to reach audiences in many areas.

The *Continuing Church of God* also uses printed and electronic magazines, books, and weekly letters to the Brethren to also support Matthew 24:14 and Matthew 28:19-20

