

# **The Quartodeciman Controversy**

**Kelly McDonald, Jr.**



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## Introduction

According to the Biblical record, Passover is an ancient celebration which dates back to the time when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. Through the hand of Moses, the God of Israel performed mighty signs and wonders to free His people. They were eventually freed from their bondage through the blood of the Passover Lamb and the meal which was associated with it. The observance of Passover was crucial to their freedom.

Because of this momentous event, Passover and the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread which follows it were established as annual festivals. Evidence of later Passover celebrations are found in the Bible and various archaeological and historical records (such as the Elephantine papyri and Josephus). In the early first century, Jesus Christ observed Passover with His disciples before He suffered and died for the sins of the world. At that event, He told them to continue this observance in remembrance of Him (Luke 22:14-20).

The early disciples followed through with His instruction and observed the ancient Passover with renewed meaning (see I Cor. 5:6-8, 11:17-32). They remembered the suffering of the Messiah to free humanity from spiritual slavery to sin and death. This practice was continued by most if not all Christians for nearly one-hundred years after Jesus' earthly ministry.

In the second century, the Christian community was impacted by several outside influences. During this torrent, a controversy began concerning Passover. Some Christians questioned if they should keep this feast at all. Others questioned if it should be observed at the same time as the Jewish people and what meaning should be ascribed to the day. This became known as the Quartodeciman Controversy.

In Latin, *quarto* means four and *decimus* means tenth. Quartodeciman means the 'fourteenth.' These were the believers who wanted to keep Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan like Jesus and the

early disciples.

During this struggle, an alternative practice emerged and grew. It moved the date for Passover and changed the meaning of the festival. While it was a minority practice at one time, it grew to become more prevalent than the original practice of Jesus and His disciples. Centuries later it became labeled as Easter.

In this work, we will review the influences which contributed to the move away from Passover by some Christians and the factors which sustained this movement into the future. Moreover, we will discuss specific people and events involved in this controversy. Lastly, we will examine how this controversy impacted the seventh-day Sabbath.

There are five historical phases to the Quartodeciman Controversy: **The Controversy Begins, Confusion, Forced Conformity, Scattered to the Wind, and Modern Revival.** In this work, we will only review the first three in depth. As we examine these phases, it is best not to view them rigidly where one phase started and then the previous one (or ones) ceased. Instead, one phase gradually began and then another one is gradually introduced so that more than one phase existed simultaneously. In fact, this controversy still exists today.

**Translation notes:** In the New Testament and early Christian writings, the Greek word used for Passover is *Pascha*. Many modern translations render this word as Easter, but this term is anachronistic for early Church history.

The word Easter did not exist in the first several centuries after Christ. Moreover, it carries connotations that are not applicable to that period (such as bunnies, eggs, cross cakes, etc.). Thus, I have replaced the term Easter with the word Pascha in quotes from all public domain translations. This gives deference to the more accurate historical term and allows the reader to remain more focused on the subject at hand.

While the term Quartodeciman was not used significantly until the fourth century, it still carries the appropriate denotation and connotation for this subject.

# Chapter 1

## The New Testament

In the time of Jesus, the Jewish people celebrated Passover on an annual basis. Historical writers and the gospel accounts bear witness to this fact (see Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 2.14.6, 17.9.3, 18.2.2, 18.4.3, *Wars of the Jews*, 6.9.3; Luke 2:41, John 2:13-22, 6:4 for some examples). The people ate the elements of unleavened bread, lamb, and bitter herbs. They also drank from the cup.

In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples. At this festival, he revealed to them the deeper meaning of these elements. Below, we have an excerpt from Luke 22:14-22.

“14 And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the apostles with him. 15 And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: 16 for I say unto you, I shall not eat it, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. 17 And he received a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: 18 for I say unto you, I shall not drink from henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave to them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. 20 And the cup in like manner after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you. 21 But behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. 22 For the Son of man indeed goeth, as it hath been determined: but woe unto that man through whom he is betrayed!” (ASV)

The Greek word translated as “With desire I have desired...” is *epethymēsa*. It means to intensely desire something. Luke 22:15 is the only verse in the New Testament where this Greek word is used. Jesus intensely desired to eat the Passover with His disciples. We know from the gospel accounts that He was arrested that



evening. He suffered and died the following day.

At His last Passover, Jesus said, “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.” The most literal meaning of ‘do this in memory of me’ is to keep the Passover with a renewed meaning. The focus would be shifted to His suffering and death.

The disciples took this instruction to heart. They continued to observe Passover with the understanding that Jesus is the Passover Lamb for all who believe in Him. The unleavened bread represented His body. The cup represented His blood. His disciples also taught others to do the same.

Later in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote: “6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ: 8 wherefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (I Cor. 5:6-8).

In verse 8, the Greek word translated as “let us keep the feast” is *heortazōmen*; it means take part in the festival. The root word is *herote*, and it is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament. It always refers to the festivals from Leviticus 23. The Apostle Paul instructed the Christians in Corinth to keep the festival, not to allegorize it away.

He discussed more about this subject in the same letter: “23 For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; 24 and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord’s death till he come” (I Cor. 11:23-26, ASV).

Taking the physical elements at the Passover was considered an act of proclaiming the Lord’s death. For more evidence that Pass-

over and Unleavened Bread retained significance in the early church, consider Acts 20:6: “And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we tarried seven days.”

The city of Philippi was not known to have a Jewish synagogue; it was a Roman colony. The Jewish population was either small or non-existent. The city had God-fearers or Gentiles drawn to the practices of Judaism. The fact that Paul and his companions delayed their journey until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread indicates that special activities were held with the brethren there.

If you would like to learn more about Gentiles being drawn to practices considered Jewish, you can read our free book “Prevalence of the Sabbath in the Early Roman Empire” through our website [www.sabbath.blog](http://www.sabbath.blog) (**Free Resources** page).

One detail that is curiously absent from the New Testament is any kind of celebration for the resurrection. While Jesus’ resurrection was a paramount teaching for Christianity and early Christian writers, such as the Apostle Paul, any sort of dedicated day to remember the event is not mentioned.

### **What about Easter?**

In the original language of the New Testament, there is not a term which will properly translate to the word Easter. You may see this word in some older versions of Acts 12:4. A closer look at the underlying language will show that it is not the proper translation.

Consider Acts 12:1-4 in the King James Version: “1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. 2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after **Easter** to bring him forth to the people.”

The Greek word translated as Easter in Acts 12:4 is *pascha*. This word is translated as Passover everywhere else in the New Testament, even in the KJV. So why is it translated differently in this instance? The Greek term *pascha* could not translate to the term

Easter in the first century as no such celebration named Easter existed.

The context also matches translating *pascha* as Passover. In verse three, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is mentioned. Passover and Unleavened Bread occur together. Josephus mentioned that sometimes the entire celebration is collectively called Passover (Ant. 17.9.3). This same usage is found in the New Testament (Luke 2:41, 22:1, John 2:23, 4:45, 6:4, 11:55, 13:1). As previously discussed, Jesus and the earliest disciples recognized and observed these days.

More modern versions of the Bible properly translate *pascha* in Acts 12:4. Consider two of them below:

“Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.” (NIV)

“...intending to bring him before the people after Passover...” (NKJV)

The evidence clarifies that Acts 12:4 should be translated as Passover. Since the term Easter is not found in the New Testament, then where does it come from?

The first usage of the term Easter dates to the seventh or eighth century. At that time, the English historian Bede wrote: “Eosturmonath has a name which is now translated ‘Paschal month’, and which was once called after a goddess of theirs named Eostre, in whose honour feasts were celebrated in that month. Now they designate that Paschal season by her name, calling the joys of the new rite by the time-honoured name of the old observance” (*The Reckoning of Time*, 15).

The name Easter comes from the Anglo-Saxon goddess *Eostre*. Bede informs us that Christians took this name and applied it to their Pascha celebration. She was celebrated in the spring. The worship of mother deities around the spring equinox is an ancient custom. The use of bunnies, eggs, and other accoutrements were added later, and they are connected to fertility symbols of other religions. You certainly will not find them in the Bible.

The information presented in this chapter yields at least two important questions. If Jesus and the early disciples kept the Passover, then why do most Christians today not keep Passover? Since Easter is not in the New Testament, then why do most Christians today celebrate it?

When we study history, we must guard ourselves from thinking that the way things are now is the way that they have always been. The answer to these questions can be traced back to the early days of Christianity. Events progressed over time so that we arrive at our present situation.

Historical changes do not take place overnight. There are usually a series of events that happen over time and multiple influences which gradually converge to form lasting change. Such is the case with the Quartodeciman Controversy.

## Chapter 2

### Christianity Begins to Change

In the second century, various events and factors converged which greatly impacted Christianity. Outside influences flooded Christianity, and it was re-shaped into a mixture of original doctrine and other beliefs. The faith started this century one way but ended it another way. In this chapter, we will review seven factors which contributed to an overall change in Christianity that has lasted in some fashion into modern times.

#### **Factor #1 – The First Apostles Died**

The first disciples of Jesus had a unique faith. They walked with Jesus, served with Him in ministry, and witnessed His suffering and death. Some of them even saw Him after the resurrection. No one could convince them that Jesus did not live, and others could not pervert their knowledge of His teachings.

As the first century progressed, the original disciples gradually passed away. At least some of them were put to death for their faith by either Jewish or Gentile authorities. Some lived into old age and died peacefully.

The last of the twelve Apostles to pass away was John. According to the New Testament and second century church history, John was exiled to the isle of Patmos for His faith. He was released and lived in the city of Ephesus until his death during the reign of Trajan (98-117 AD).

The Apostles were the protectors of Jesus' original teachings and the first Quartodeciman Christians. They held to the faith in its purist form. When these leaders passed, the door was open for alternative ideas and influences to tarnish their doctrine and practice of the faith. As we will discuss in the next chapter, the first Christians to defect from the Biblical Pascha did not appeal to Jesus and the Apostles to justify their practice.

#### **Factor #2 – Persecution**

The New Testament has numerous instructions to believers about the exclusion and suffering that they would endure for Jesus' name. The book of Acts provides an account of persecution endured by early Christians as they spread the gospel message. Stephen was martyred in Acts chapter seven. Other disciples were driven from communities, excluded from fellowship, mistreated, and/or martyred.

Early persecution was also recorded by other sources. Josephus discussed the death of James, the brother of Jesus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9). Roman and Christian writers recorded the persecution of Christians under Nero (for example, see Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44). In about 64 AD, they were falsely accused of setting fire to Rome because Nero wanted the guilt removed from himself. This persecution likely removed all or most Apostolic influences from the city, which would have included Quartodeciman teachers like Paul and possibly Peter. The early Church historian Hegesippus informed us that Simeon Clopas, who was Jesus' brother, was put to death in the early second century (*Fragments of Hegesippus*).

During the reign of the Roman Emperor Trajan (98-117), a legal precedent was established for putting Christians on trial for their faith. In about 110, Pliny the Younger was a magistrate in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He wrote a letter to the Roman Emperor Trajan where he described the trials of those who were accused of being Christians. This was the only charge brought against them. Pliny sought Trajan's approval or disapproval for the way that he handled the situation. We have an excerpt from the letter below:

(Pliny to Trajan) "...An anonymous information was laid before me containing a charge against several persons, who upon examination denied they were Christians, or had ever been so. They repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites with wine and incense before your statue (which for that purpose I had ordered to be brought, together with those of the gods), and even reviled the name of Christ: whereas there is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians into any of these compliances..."

"...I thought it proper, therefore, to discharge them. Some among

those who were accused by a witness in person at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it; the rest owned indeed that they had been of that number formerly, but had now (some above three, others more, and a few above twenty years ago) renounced that error...”

“...They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a stated day before it was light, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal...”

“...After receiving this account, I judged it so much the more necessary to endeavor to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate' in their religious rites: but all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition. I deemed it expedient, therefore, to adjourn all further proceedings, in order to consult you...”

**“...For it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration, more especially as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these prosecutions, which have already extended, and are still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. In fact, this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among the neighbouring villages and country. Nevertheless, it still seems possible to restrain its progress. The temples, at least, which were once almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred rites, after a long intermission, are again revived; while there is a general demand for the victims, which till lately found very few purchasers. From all this it is easy to conjecture what numbers might be reclaimed if a general pardon were granted to those who shall repent of their error. ...”** (*Letters*, 97; emphasis mine).

Trajan replied to this letter and expressed approval for how Pliny handled the situation (see Letter 98). Pliny’s approach became the main precedent to persecute Christians for about 130 years. There is much to glean from Pliny’s correspondence, but we will focus

on two points.

First, it is evidence that regional persecutions against Christians occurred in Asia Minor, perhaps as early as twenty years before. Secondly, two categories of believers emerged at that time. The first one was composed of those who would refuse to deny their faith. They would suffer and even die without recanting. The second category would profess Christ in public but deny Him when threatened.

The evidence for this analysis is clear from the text. Pliny stated that there were some who would confess to being a Christian when first accused, but later deny it when threatened or put on trial. As a show of allegiance to the traditional Roman worship, these people were asked to offer incense to the emperor and sacrifice to the gods. They complied. Pliny admitted that a true Christian could not be forced into these behaviors.

In the second and third centuries, other forms of persecution arose. This included mob violence (such as what is seen in Acts 19) and a revival in dedication to the gods of Rome. During these persecutions, the strongest Christian leaders who were sound in doctrine, faith, and their lifestyle were suppressed, banished, and sometimes put to death.

This included Quartodeciman teachers. The removal of strong leaders in the first and second centuries left Christian communities vulnerable to the influence of teachings that were not sound or Apostolic. The leaders who followed did not always preserve the original integrity of the faith. In the fourth and fifth centuries, ‘mainstream’ Christians would persecute Quartodecimans.

To learn more about persecution in early Christianity, look for our upcoming book *Persecution in Early Christianity* on our website [www.sabbath.blog](http://www.sabbath.blog). We hope to release it sometime in 2022.

### **Factor #3 – Anti-Semitism**

The third factor that impacted second-century Christianity was anti-Semitism. This term refers to hatred and/or disdain for Jewish people or those things which are considered Jewish. Certain practices, such as the Sabbath, were protected by Roman Law (this could have been for political reasons). Despite this fact, anti-



Jewish sentiment was strong in the Roman world in the first and early second century. Some quotes below will illustrate this point.

Seneca, who lived from 4 BC to 65 AD, wrote about the Jewish people. Augustine quotes him in his work *The City of God*. Seneca said the following about the Jewish people:

“What Seneca Thought Concerning the Jews....Seneca, among the other superstitions of civil theology, also found fault with the sacred things of the Jews, and especially the sabbaths, affirming that they act uselessly in keeping those seventh days, whereby they lose through idleness about the seventh part of their life, and also many things which demand immediate attention are damaged. The Christians, however, who were already most hostile to the Jews, he did not dare to mention...When he was speaking concerning those Jews, he said, When, meanwhile, the customs of that most accursed nation have gained such strength that they have been now received in all lands, the conquered have given laws to the conquerors....” (idem, 6.11).

Quintilian, who lived from 35-100 AD, wrote: “The vices of the children bring hatred on their parents; founders of cities are detested for concentrating a race which is a curse to others, as for example the founder of the Jewish superstition...” (*Institutio Oratoria*, 3.7.21).

The famous Roman historian Tacitus, who wrote about 117 AD, said the following: “To ensure his future hold over the people, Moses introduced a new cult, which was the opposite of all other religions. All that we hold sacred they held profane, and allowed practices which we abominate... Their other customs are impious and abominable, and owe their prevalence to their depravity... they feel nothing but hatred and enmity for the rest of the world... the Jewish ritual is preposterous and morbid....” (Tacitus, *Histories*, 5.4-5). He also claimed that Jewish people worshiped the image of a donkey.

This anti-Jewish attitude tarnished Christian writers. The first evidence of this mentality is found in the *Apology* of Aristides (as a side note, the word apology means ‘defense’). He tried to defend Christianity to the Roman Emperor Hadrian. This work is usually dated to the 120s AD.

In it, Aristides attempted to divide all humans into four classes: Barbarians, Greeks, Jews, and Christians. He gave a brief history of each and then tried to explain why Christians are the only group following the fullness of truth and thus better than the rest. We have a brief excerpt below:

“...All-powerful Cæsar Titus Hadrianus Antoninus, venerable and merciful, from Marcianus Aristides, an Athenian philosopher... Nevertheless [the Jews] too erred from true knowledge. And in their imagination they conceive that it is God they serve; whereas by their mode of observance it is to the angels and not to God that their service is rendered:— as when they celebrate sabbaths and the beginning of the months, and feasts of unleavened bread, and a great fast; and fasting and circumcision and the purification of meats, which things, however, they do not observe perfectly... But the Christians, O King, while they went about and made search, have found the truth; and as we learned from their writings, they have come nearer to truth and genuine knowledge than the rest of the nations” (idem, 14-15).

First, notice that Aristides did not introduce himself as a Christian but as a philosopher. Secondly, he misrepresented Jewish people as worshipping angels, especially in their observance of certain practices (including the Sabbath). This made it appear that they did not worship the same God as Christians. He finished out the defense by giving many details as to why Christians are better than the other groups. They alone are considered to have the truth.

The *Epistle of Barnabas*, written not long after Aristides’ *Apology*, contains a sharp increase in anti-Jewish attitude. The author, who is not the Barnabas of the New Testament, claimed that circumcision came from an evil angel (chapter 9). He explained that Christians have covenant with God – but not the Israelites (chapters 13-14). He even called the Jewish people wretched (chapter 16).

In the mid-second century, Justin the Martyr would continue many of these same themes. Among his claims was that the Israelites were given the law because their hearts were hard (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 18). This disagrees with the New Testament. The book of Hebrews is clear that their hearts became hard-

ened after the law was given because they did not combine it with faith (see Book of Hebrews chapters 3 and 4). He also claimed that eating unleavened bread during the festival season did not please God (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 12, 14).

The anti-Semitic attitude developed in this century led to the teaching of replacement theology, which proposes that Christianity has replaced the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. Barnabas was the first to hint at this, but it grew significantly over time. This contradicts the words of Paul; he who wrote that converted Gentiles were grafted into Israel and fellow citizens with them (Romans 9-11, Eph. 2:11-22).

As the second century proceeded, this anti-Semitic tinge to Christian writings increased. Practices associated with the Jewish people, such as the Sabbath and Passover, became labeled as Jewish to denigrate them. Even some Quartodeciman teachers were stained to a degree by anti-Jewish sentiment. Jewish persecution of Christians may have also contributed to this development.

#### **Factor #4 – The Destruction of Jerusalem in 135 AD**

Hadrian was Roman Emperor from 117-138. At the beginning of his reign, he fought with a Jewish army in Egypt. Towards the end of his reign, he engaged in a larger conflict with the Jewish people. From the primary sources, the emperor made one or two moves which sparked the second conflict.

One source says that he banned circumcision (Aelius Spartianus, *The Life of Hadrian*, 14). A second source, the historian Cassius Dio, stated that he tried to build a temple to Jupiter on top of the ruins of the Second Temple. This happened in about 131/132. Whatever the cause, a great war ensued. This has also been called the Bar Kokhba rebellion. Dio gives us details regarding these events:

“At Jerusalem he founded a city in place of the one which had been razed to the ground, naming it Aelia Capitolina, and on the site of the temple of the god he raised a new temple to Jupiter. This brought on a war of no slight importance nor of brief duration, for the Jews deemed it intolerable that foreign races should be settled in their city and foreign religious rites planted there... At first the Romans took no account of them. Soon, however, all

Judaea had been stirred up, and the Jews everywhere were showing signs of disturbance... Fifty of their most important outposts and nine hundred and eighty-five of their most famous villages were razed to the ground. Five hundred and eighty thousand men were slain in the various raids and battles, and the number of those that perished by famine, disease and fire was past finding out. Thus nearly the whole of Judaea was made desolate, a result of which the people had had forewarning before the war. For the tomb of Solomon, which the Jews regard as an object of veneration, fell to pieces of itself and collapsed, and many wolves and hyenas rushed howling into their cities. 3 Many Romans, moreover, perished in this war. Therefore Hadrian in writing to the senate did not employ the opening phrase commonly affected by the emperors, 'If you and our children are in health, it is well; I and the legions are in health'..." (*Roman History*, 69,12.1-2, 13.1, 14.1-3).

As a result of this major war, Hadrian banned Jewish people from the city in 135. This included Jewish people who were Christians. Eusebius discussed this event in his work *Church History*.

"...But I have learned this much from writings, that until the siege of the Jews, which took place under Adrian [Hadrian], there were fifteen bishops in succession there [Jerusalem], all of whom are said to have been of Hebrew descent, **and to have received the knowledge of Christ in purity**, so that they were approved by those who were able to judge of such matters, and were deemed worthy of the episcopate. For their whole church consisted then of believing Hebrews who continued from the days of the apostles until the siege which took place at this time..." (idem, 4.5.2; emphasis mine).

"...the whole nation was prohibited from this time on by a decree, and by the commands of Adrian [Hadrian], from ever going up to the country about Jerusalem. For the emperor gave orders that they should not even see from a distance the land of their fathers...And thus, when the city had been emptied of the Jewish nation and had suffered the total destruction of its ancient inhabitants, it was colonized by a different race, and the Roman city which subsequently arose changed its name and was called Aelia, in honor of the emperor Aelius Adrian. **And as the church there was now composed of Gentiles, the first one to assume the**

**government of it after the bishops of the circumcision was Marcus”** (ibid, 4.6.3-4; emphasis mine).

Eusebius attested that every Christian bishop of Jerusalem was Jewish up to 135. Additionally, he stated that they held the knowledge of Christ in purity and were worthy of that office. With their removal, the legitimate apostolic line of succession for that city was interrupted.

A man named Marcus, who we know very little about, became the first Gentile Bishop of Jerusalem. The fact that he was a Gentile was not the problem; the issue was that he held to practices contrary to the original teachings of Jesus. We do not know much about him. The implication from Eusebius is that Marcus and the bishops which followed him did not hold the message of Christ in purity as did those before him.

In about 400 AD, Sulpicius Severus also wrote about this development: “Then under Adrian [Hadrian] the Jews attempted to rebel, and endeavored to plunder both Syria and Palestine; but on an army being sent against them, they were subdued. At this time Adrian (Hadrian), thinking that he would destroy the Christian faith by inflicting an injury upon the place, set up the images of demons both in the temple and in the place where the Lord suffered. And because the Christians were thought principally to consist of Jews (for the church at Jerusalem did not then have a priest except of the circumcision), he ordered a cohort of soldiers to keep constant guard in order to prevent all Jews from approaching to Jerusalem. This, however, rather benefited the Christian faith, because almost all then believed in Christ as God while continuing in the observance of the law. Undoubtedly that was arranged by the over-ruling care of the Lord, in order that the slavery of the law might be taken away from the liberty of the faith and of the church. In this way, Mark [Marcus] from among the Gentiles was then, first of all, bishop at Jerusalem...” (*Sacred History*, 2.31).

According to this writer, nearly all Christians kept the Law of God up to the time of Hadrian’s war with the Jewish people. He also acknowledged that Marcus was the first to take over the leadership of Christianity in Jerusalem. Sulpicius viewed the Jewish ban from Jerusalem in a positive light because he did not like ob-

servances of the law.

Why was this event so significant? In the book of Acts, we learn that Jerusalem was considered the de-facto capital of Christendom. Leaders met there to make important decisions. Ministers were sent out to assist the brethren in other places. Those same ministers reported back to Jerusalem about their activity. For some examples of this, see the following verses: Acts 1:4-8, 11:1-2, 11:19-22, 11:26-27, 12:24-25, 13:13, 15:2, 16:4, and Gal. 2:1-2.

With the historical headquarters of Christianity stricken with confusion, other cities began to compete to take its place. Leaders in Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, and other cities claimed that they were the inheritors of Apostolic succession. They tried to function in the same way that Jerusalem had functioned in the book of Acts.

There was infighting between these cities as each contended to exert itself as supreme over the others. This fractured Christianity and contributed to the development of differences of practice on certain topics, such as Pascha. Other writers, some of which we will review in this work, traced divergent views of Pascha back to the time of Hadrian's ban.

### **Factor #5 – Heresy**

During the second century, heresy influenced Christianity. Heresies are teachings that blatantly contradict the Bible. They are destructive. They threatened to pervert or taint the original doctrine and faith delivered to the saints.

The chief heresy that influenced Christianity in the second century was labeled Gnosticism. The term is derived from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means knowledge. It was a blend of oriental mythology and Greek philosophy. While it was not a unified belief system, there are some commonalities found among teachings with this label.

First, most Gnostics held that the physical world was evil, but the spiritual world was good. Secondly, they believed that an inferior or evil god created the physical world, but a superior god created the spiritual world. Third, one who possessed certain knowledge

and mysteries will be allowed to leave the bondage of the physical world and ascend into the spiritual realm (i.e., 'saved' from this evil, material world).

To the Gnostic, one's knowledge saved the soul, so the treatment of the body was not as important. Some Gnostics took great liberty with this idea; they did not mind engaging in gross sin and sexual immorality with their physical body so long as they 'fed' themselves spiritually. After all, the material world was already evil. Marriage was usually rejected because procreation makes generates another material being, which they viewed as evil. Some of them rejected the consumption of meat.

Because they viewed physical matter as evil, they also rejected the idea that a perfect Messiah could have been physically born, suffer, and die. Moreover, many Gnostics displayed serious anti-Semitic prejudice.

Two well-known teachers of this time, Saturninus and Basilides, propagated the idea that Christ came to destroy the 'God of the Jews' (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.24.2-4). They also diminished the importance of the Old Testament for Christians. For instance, Saturninus taught that some prophecies in the Old Testament were from angels and some from the devil (Pseudo-Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 7.16). Another teacher, Cerdon, taught that the God of the Old Testament was "...the author of evils, to take delight in war, to be infirm of purpose, and even to be contrary to Himself" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.27.1-2; emphasis mine).

Marcion was among the famous heretical teachers of this time. He continued Cerdon's doctrine, but also taught that the God of the Old Testament was a separate God from that of the New Testament (Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 4.6). From this viewpoint, he tried to separate the Law of God from the gospel. Furthermore, he tried to mutilate the New Testament by removing all references to Jesus being Israelite. We have some quotes from Tertullian about this false teacher:

"Marcion's special and principal work is the separation of the law and the gospel...[his works] aim at committing the gospel to a variance with the law, in order that from the diversity of the two

documents which contain them, they may contend for a diversity of gods also. Since, therefore, it is this very opposition between the law and the gospel which has suggested that the God of the gospel is different from the God of the law...Marcion, the author of the breach of peace between the gospel and the law. **Now this peace, which had remained unhurt and unshaken from Christ's appearance to the time of Marcion's audacious doctrine,** was no doubt maintained by that way of thinking, which firmly held that the God of both law and gospel was none other than the Creator, against whom after so long a time a separation has been introduced by the heretic of Pontus” (*Against Marcion*, 1.19; emphasis mine).

“But since both the place and the work of illumination according to the prophecy are compatible with Christ, we begin to discern that He is the subject of the prophecy, which shows that at the very outset of His ministry, ‘He came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but rather to fulfil them’ (Matthew 5:17) **for Marcion has erased the passage as an interpolation...**Marcion must even expunge from the Gospel, ‘I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel’; (Matthew 15:24) and, ‘It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs’, (Matthew 15:26) — in order, forsooth, that Christ may not appear to be an Israelite” (ibid, 4.7; emphasis mine).

Tertullian indicated that the gospel and the law were in harmony with each other until the time of Marcion. This infamous teacher started his work in the 140s which was just after Hadrian’s death. This is very close to the time identified with other writers that Christianity began to change.

His followers also supported fasting on the Sabbath to denigrate the ‘God of the Jews.’ He wrote: “Since that day is the rest of the God of the Jews, who made the world and rested the seventh day, we therefore fast on that day, that we may not do anything in compliance with the God of the Jews” – (Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 42.3.4; English translation from Bingham, p 52).

These Gnostics were part of a larger movement to separate Christianity from its Judaic roots. They promoted extreme forms of anti-Semitic rhetoric. At the end of the next chapter, we will connect the influence of Gnosticism to the Quartodeciman Contro-



versy.

To learn more about Gnosticism and specific teachers that spread these doctrines in the second century, read chapter three in our work *The Life of Polycarp*. You can download it for free from our website [www.sabbath.blog](http://www.sabbath.blog) (**Free Resources page**).

### **Factor #6 – Syncretism**

In general, syncretism refers to the mixing of two religions together. For the purposes of this work, syncretism is when someone mixes the Bible with other religions or philosophies. Many of the heretical teachers we just reviewed sought to syncretize Christianity with Gnosticism, Greek philosophy, or other religions. Other Christian writers who are considered ‘orthodox’ engaged in the same practice.

Because of anti-Semitism, Christian teachers started to devalue the Old Testament. They sought to replace it with non-Jewish sources so that there were multiple background sources to the New Testament. Gnostic mythology was a source for some. Others used Greek philosophy. Another group drew upon polytheistic practices, such as sun worship, to mix with the faith.

As an example, consider the writings of Clement of Alexandria. He was a popular Christian writer of the late second and early third century who said that: “Accordingly, before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration...” (*Stromata*, 1.5). In another place, Clement of Alexandria proposed that certain pagan motifs were foreshadowed in the Old Testament (see *ibid*, 5.6).

The idea that philosophy was ‘righteousness for the Greeks until Christ came’ is contrary to what the Bible teaches. So are many other ideas espoused by Clement. In I Corinthians 1:20-25, the Apostle Paul rejected the idea that the wisdom of man and philosophers could even compare to the great wisdom of God. In this passage, man’s philosophy is essentially called foolishness. Later in the same letter, he wrote that the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God (I Cor. 3:18-19). Jesus said that the things highly valued by man are detestable to God (Luke 16:15).

Sun worship was also syncretized with the faith. Christians started praying towards the sun despite God's admonishment in Ezekiel 8:14-16 to avoid this practice. From the second century forward, Christians began to compare Christ to the sun in increasing measure. Additionally, some Christians started to gather on the first day of the week, which is called Sunday. By the early third century, Christians had to guard themselves from the accusation of sun worship (see Tertullian, *Against the Nations*, 1.13-14, *Apology*, 1.16).

Syncretism also contributed to the move away from the Biblical Pascha. It was fueled by anti-Semitism and the desire to seek alternative sources for Christianity besides the Old Testament. To read more about the influence of sun worship on Christianity, see chapters three and four in the book *How Did Sunday Become the First Day of the Week?* You can download it for free from [www.sabbath.blog](http://www.sabbath.blog) (**Free Resources** page).

### **Factor #7 – Allegorizing Scripture**

The last factor that impacted this subject was the allegorizing of Scripture. This is a unique method of interpreting the Bible which tends to disregard the literal meaning of verses. Instead, details in the Bible are treated as symbols. These symbols are then reapplied in a way that is subjective to the interpreter. Those using this method usually come to conclusions that negate the literal application of verses; it fits the desired interpretation of an individual. We will review some examples to illustrate.

The first Christian writing that exercises a heavy use of allegory was the *Epistle of Barnabas*, which we reviewed earlier. The author claimed that the true Sabbath would come after 6,000 years had passed since creation. He also claimed that abstaining from wickedness was observing the rest of the Sabbath (idem, 15). These allegorical views of the Sabbath caused the literal meaning and physical rest of the day to be diminished. He utilized a highly allegorical interpretation of other practices, such as the distinction between clean and unclean animals, in a way that nullified their literal application (ibid, 10).

Justin the Martyr, who wrote just after this time, continued this trend. Concerning the eating of Unleavened Bread, he wrote: "...

For this is the symbolic significance of unleavened bread, that you do not commit the old deeds of wicked leaven. But you have understood all things in a carnal sense, and you suppose it to be piety if you do such things, while your souls are filled with deceit, and, in short, with every wickedness..." (*Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 14)

If those physical elements did not matter, then why would his practice of the Eucharist matter? He extols his practice on the subject (*ibid*, 41). This use of allegory was a way to demean practices connected to Jewish people, but also to exalt alternative traditions.

In this same section, Justin used allegory to connect circumcision to the resurrection of Jesus. "The command of circumcision, again, bidding [them] always circumcise the children on the eighth day, was a type of the true circumcision, by which we are circumcised from deceit and iniquity through Him who rose from the dead on the first day after the Sabbath, [namely through] our Lord Jesus Christ. For the first day after the Sabbath, remaining the first of all the days, is called, however, the eighth, according to the number of all the days of the cycle, and [yet] remains the first" (*ibid*).

In the Old Testament, we learn that the circumcision of male babies was originally designed to occur on the eighth day (Lev. 12:3). He utilized this practice as an allegory to foreshadow the resurrection of Christ on the day after Sabbath, which is Sunday. He called it eighth day of the week even though it is the first. The goal of this tactic was to present Sunday as a better day than Sabbath and as the day of the resurrection. However, the Bible never discusses an eight-day week and it never negates the Sabbath.

Allegory was employed with regards to Pascha. Roman Church writers viewed keeping of Pascha on the first day of the week in honor of the resurrection as the proper way to keep Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan for the death of Jesus. This is obviously confusing and contradictory. Through this method of interpretation, the literal meaning of the Passover practiced by Jesus and the Apostles was diminished to embrace a newer tradition which is not found in the Bible.

Allegory did impact Quartodeciman teachers to a degree. They viewed Jesus as the true Lamb of God, but not in a way that diminished the literal observance of the day.

Two quotes from early Church History will summarize the issues Christianity faced in the second century. Moreover, they will reinforce the time in which these difficulties were introduced. The first comes from Hegesippus, and the second comes from Clement of Alexandria.

### **Hegesippus (150-170 AD)**

“And, after profound peace had been established in every church, they remained down to the reign of Trajan Caesar...[98-117 AD]... **Up to that period the Church had remained like a virgin pure and uncorrupted...But, when the sacred band of apostles had in various ways closed their lives...then did the confederacy of godless error take its rise through the treachery of false teachers**” (*Fragments of Hegesippus*; emphasis mine).

### **Clement of Alexandria (180s AD)**

“For the teaching of our Lord at His advent, beginning with Augustus and Tiberius, was completed in the middle of the times of Tiberius. And that of the apostles, embracing the ministry of Paul, ends with Nero. **It was later, in the times of Adrian [Hadrian] the king, that those who invented the heresies arose; and they extended to the age of Antoninus the elder [who is also called Antonius Pius]...**” (*Stromata*, 7.17)

Hegesippus said that the church was a virgin up until the reign of Trajan (98-117 AD). To say that the church was a virgin is figurative language meaning that the Christian faith was free from moral, spiritual, and doctrinal corruption. She was still pure up until that time. Clement said that heretics arose during the reign of Hadrian (117-138) and that they continued into the reign of Antonius Pius (138-161).

The details from this chapter provide us with a time frame in which elements were at work to tarnish the Christian faith. It is during this confusing time that the Quartodeciman Controversy began.

## Chapter 3

### The Controversy Begins

As discussed in chapter one, the earliest Christians followed the example of Jesus and kept a commemoration of Jesus' death on Passover. During the second century, a shift away from this practice occurred. Epiphanius was the bishop of Salamis in the mid to late fourth century. He wrote the following about this subject:

[speaking of a group called the Audians] “For they choose to celebrate the Passover with the Jews...And indeed, < it is true > that this used to be the church's custom...each is found writing to the other and quarreling, and down to our own day. This has been the situation ever since was thrown into disorder after the time of the circumcised bishops... And there were altogether fifteen bishops from the circumcision. And at that time, when the circumcised bishops were consecrated at Jerusalem, it was essential that the whole world follow and celebrate with them, so that there would be one concord and agreement, the celebration of one festival. Hence their concern [was] to bring people's minds into accord for the unity of the church” (*Panarion*, 70.9.1-2,9, 10.4-5, Translated by Frank Williams).

Epiphanius attested that the earliest Christians kept Passover in the same manner as the Jewish people. He then asserted that the confusion concerning this observance started after the time of the Jewish bishops of Jerusalem. As discussed in the last chapter, this happened during Hadrian's reign. He banned Jewish people from Jerusalem; this included Jewish Christians. As discussed in the last chapter, this was the same time that other factors were at work to influence Christianity.

These events contributed to the beginning of what would be known as the **Quartodeciman Controversy** – or the controversy about Passover.

#### **Polycarp Visits Rome**

The first major episode in this controversy occurred in about the

year 155. At that time, the Bishop of Rome, Anicetus, decided to deviate from the Apostolic Pascha. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna and leader of the Churches in Asia, still observed Passover in the manner of Jesus and the first Apostles.

Of these two figures, we know more about Polycarp. He was taught by the first Apostles, and early Church writers attest that he was ordained by the Apostle John as the Bishop of Smyrna. The second-century Christian leader Irenaeus heard him as a youth and recorded the following concerning him:

“For, while I was yet a boy, I saw you in Lower Asia with Polycarp, distinguishing yourself in the royal court, and endeavouring to gain his approbation. For I have a more vivid recollection of what occurred at that time than of recent events (inasmuch as the experiences of childhood, keeping pace with the growth of the soul, become incorporated with it); so that **I can even describe the place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit and discourse — his going out, too, and his coming in — his general mode of life and personal appearance, together with the discourses which he delivered to the people; also how he would speak of his familiar intercourse with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; and how he would call their words to remembrance. Whatsoever things he had heard from them respecting the Lord, both with regard to His miracles and His teaching, Polycarp having thus received [information] from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life, would recount them all in harmony with the Scriptures...**” (*Fragments of Irenaeus*; emphasis mine)

“But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time... having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresy*, 3.3.4).

Polycarp is an extremely important figure in early Christianity because of his relationship with the first disciples of Jesus. He is a tremendous example of Apostolic teaching. When Anicetus decided to deviate from the example of the first Apostles, Polycarp

met with him. Eusebius described this meeting:

“At this time, while Anicetus was at the head of the church of Rome, Irenaeus relates that Polycarp, who was still alive, was at Rome, and that he had a conference with Anicetus on a question concerning the day of the paschal feast” (*Church History*, 4.14.1).

“And when the blessed Polycarp was at Rome in the time of Anicetus, and they disagreed a little about certain other things, they immediately made peace with one another, not caring to quarrel over the matter. **For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John the disciple of our Lord, and the other apostles with whom he had associated;** neither could Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, as he said that he ought to follow the **customs of the presbyters that had preceded him.** But though matters were in this shape, they communed together, and Anicetus conceded the administration of the eucharist in the church to Polycarp, manifestly as a mark of respect. And they parted from each other in peace, both those who observed, and those who did not, maintaining the peace of the whole church” (ibid, 5.24.16-17; emphasis mine).

Essentially, the issue between Polycarp and Anicetus came to a standstill. There is one detail from this meeting that is extremely important to emphasize. Polycarp observed what he learned from John and the early disciples who in turn learned it directly from the Lord Jesus. He had greater standing to maintain his view than did the bishop of Rome. He had direct communication with the first Apostles who were also the first Quartodeciman Christians.

Anicetus decided to stay with the customs of man instead of those teachings which came from Jesus and the early Apostles. He was the tenth or eleventh bishop of Rome. As we will learn at the end of this chapter, he allowed heresy to run rampant during his tenure. The bishop of Rome diverted people from the example of the first believers.

While the two parties disagreed, they still communicated with each other. Not long after his visit to Rome, Polycarp was martyred for the faith. It is hard to fathom the impact that this influential Quartodeciman teacher would have continued to exert if he lived longer. To learn more about him, download our free book

*The Life of Polycarp* from our website [www.sabbath.blog](http://www.sabbath.blog) (**Free Resources page**).

### **The Dispute in Laodicea**

About a decade after this event, another dispute about Pascha arose in the province of Asia while Lucius Sergius Paullus was proconsul of that region. This incident dates to the 160s AD. The chronicler Eusebius described the situation:

“In those days also Melito, bishop of the parish in Sardis, and Apollinarius, bishop of Hierapolis, enjoyed great distinction. Each of them on his own part addressed apologies in behalf of the faith to the above-mentioned emperor of the Romans who was reigning at that time. The following works of these writers have come to our knowledge. **Of Melito, the two books On the Passover**, and one On the Conduct of Life and the Prophets [he goes on to list others] and the books On the Devil and the Apocalypse of John, and the work On the Corporeality of God, and finally the book addressed to Antoninus...

...In the books On the Passover he indicates the time at which he wrote, beginning with these words: “While **Servilius Paulus\*** was proconsul of Asia, at the time when Sagaris suffered martyrdom, there arose in Laodicea a great strife concerning the Passover, which fell according to rule in those days; and these were written. And Clement of Alexandria refers to this work in his own discourse *On the Passover*, which, he says, he wrote on occasion of Melito's work” (ibid, 4.26.1-4; emphasis mine).

\*The text should read Sergius Paulus instead of Servilius Paulus.

Eusebius does not quote much from Melito's work. In a later episode of this controversy, Melito is listed among the Quartodeciman teachers. It appears that the nature of the conflict in Asia concerning Pascha was serious. People recorded the events surrounding it and even described the importance of their Paschal practice.

This episode introduced a new paradigm where Christian leaders composed works to defend or clarify their view on Pascha. For instance, Melito composed two works on the subject. It was followed by others such as Clement of Alexandria.



One of Melito's works on this subject was published in the mid-nineteenth century. It was eventually given the title *On Pascha* (Stewart-Sykes, pp 9-10). This work was either a Christian Haggadah or at least a homily which explained to Christians the renewed meaning of Passover.

In it, Melito recalled the works of the true God to free the Israelite people in Egypt. This included many miracles and the death of the physical lamb in Exodus 12. He explained that these wonderful miracles from God foreshadowed the greater Lamb – Jesus Christ.

Other themes are expressed in this work, including the importance of creation. The one true God created all things, but humanity was deceived into sin by the serpent. Since that time, humanity has descended into increasing moral depravity and can only be redeemed through the Passover Lamb of God, which is Jesus. He expressed the idea that through this Lamb all mankind can receive forgiveness of sins and true freedom.

One section of the work displays serious anti-Jewish themes, which includes blaming the death of Jesus on Israel. This is evidence that the anti-Semitism discussed in the last chapter influenced some Quartodeciman teachers to a degree.

Despite this issue, Melito still maintained important beliefs in other areas connected to the Jewish people, such as: the continuity between the Old Testament and the Christian faith; belief that the true God was involved in Creation; and that some aspects of Jewish practice are still to be appreciated and retained for the Christian Pascha. For instance, two times he called Jesus the *aphikomen*, which was the bread used in the Jewish Passover Seder. Overall, Melito reinforced the idea that Jesus is the embodiment of law, grace, and the Father.

For a summary of Melito's work with some commentary, see **Appendix A: Melito's *On Pascha***.

Another church leader from this time mentioned by Eusebius was Claudius Apollinarius. He served as the bishop of Hierapolis, a city close to Laodicea, between 160-180. He also composed a

work *On Pascha*. Because of his proximity, we would expect him to be involved in this dispute. While we do not possess his full work, we have a couple of excerpts from it below:

“...There are, then, some who through ignorance raise disputes about these things (though their conduct is pardonable: for ignorance is no subject for blame-it rather needs further instruction), and say that on the fourteenth day the Lord ate the lamb with the disciples, and that on the great day of the feast of unleavened bread He Himself suffered; and they quote Matthew as speaking in accordance with their view. Wherefore their opinion is contrary to the law, and the Gospels seem to be at variance with them...”

“...The fourteenth day, the true Passover of the Lord; the great sacrifice, the Son of God instead of the lamb, who was bound, who bound the strong, and who was judged, though Judge of living and dead, and who was delivered into the hands of sinners to be crucified, who was lifted up on the horns of the unicorn, and who was pierced in His holy side, who poured forth from His side the two purifying elements, water and blood, word and spirit, and who was buried on the day of the passover, the stone being placed upon the tomb...” (*Fragments* of Claudius Apollinarius).

The writer introduced a new wrinkle in this dispute that likely occurred between believers who observed the Apostolic Pascha. Did Jesus die on the fourteenth or fifteenth of Nisan? Claudius clearly thought that Jesus died on the fourteenth of Nisan and used the gospels (plural) to support this view.

Nevertheless, this piece of evidence shows us that divisions likely occurred within the Quartodeciman camp. Believers held different views about the chronology of events at the end of Jesus life. Due to the limited amount of material, it is not clear how or if these differing views affected their practice.

The last piece of evidence we will introduce for this episode is called *Epistula Apostolorum*. It is a letter purportedly written by the eleven Apostles to combat the heresies of Simon and Cerinthus. It proposes to contain quotes from Jesus. The dating of the letter ranges from as early as the 140s to as late as 180.

Overall, it is an anti-gnostic work. It also contains many prophetic

references. While the letter was not written by the first Apostles, it contains content pertinent to this subject. We have provided an excerpt below:

“But do ye commemorate my death. Now when the Passover cometh, one of you shall be cast into prison for my name’s sake; and he will be in grief and sorrow, because ye keep the Pascha while he is in prison and separated from you, for he will be sorrowful because he keepeth not Pascha with you. And I will send my power in the form of mine angel Gabriel, and the doors of the prison shall open. And he shall come forth and come unto you and keep the night-watch with you until the cock crow. And when ye have accomplished the memorial which is made of me, and the Agape (love-feast), he shall again be cast into prison for a testimony, until he shall come out thence and preach that which I have delivered unto you...

...And we said unto him: Lord, is it then needful that we should again take the cup and drink? (Ethiopic: Lord, didst not thou thyself fulfil the drinking of the Passover? is it then needful that we should accomplish it again?) He said unto us: Yea, it is needful, until the day when I come again, with them that have been put to death for my sake (Ethiopic: come with my wounds)...

...We said unto him: Lord, after how many years shall this come to pass? He said unto us:2 When the hundredth part and the twentieth part is fulfilled (120 years), between the Pentecost and the feast of unleavened bread, then shall the coming of my Father be [the Coptic reads 150 years]... (idem, sections 15, 17; translated by James, pp 489-490)

The beginning of section fifteen may very well be a reference to Acts chapter 12 when Peter was freed from prison during the Passover season. The end of this same section also proposed observance of Passover on the same day as the Jewish people until Jesus returns. More likely than not, this is a reference to the fourteenth of Nisan rather than an alternative celebration. In his article “The Asian Context of the New Prophecy and of Epistula Apostolorum”, Stewart-Sykes explains that the lack of reference to any specific date assumes the Quartodeciman practice (idem, p 424).

The prophetic references in sections fifteen and seventeen are also

fascinating. The author of *Epistula* connects them with Passover. It is important to remember that Jesus gave some extremely valuable prophetic teaching just before His last Passover (see Matthew chapters 24 and 25).

In section seventeen, the author predicts when Jesus might come back. All known manuscripts of this document – Coptic, Ethiopic, and Latin – express the belief that Jesus would come back between the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. This is an indirect reference to the need to keep Passover. Observing Passover on the proper date is necessary to start the count to Pentecost (so that one can anticipate Jesus’ return at the right season).

The author could easily have composed *Epistula Apostolorum* as a stand-alone work dating to the time of Polycarp or as part of the Laodicean dispute over Pascha. For more information about the document history, origin, and some other details pertaining to this work, see **Appendix B – *Epistula Apostolorum***.

### **Controversy in Rome**

Eleutherus was the bishop of Rome from 174-189 AD. During his tenure, another clash arose concerning the Passover. People worked to convince others in Rome to return to the example of Jesus. Among these was a man named Blastus.

We do not know much about him. In Pseudo-Tertullian we learn: “In addition to all these, there is likewise Blastus, who would latently introduce Judaism. For he says the Passover is not to be kept otherwise than according to the law of Moses, on the fourteenth of the month...” (*Against all Heresies*, 8)

Immigration from east to west was very common in the ancient world. The Quartodeciman Christians who immigrated and settled near Rome likely maintained their native practice. Blastus and others could have fallen in this category. According to Eusebius, he had a significant following.

“Others, of whom Florinus was chief, flourished at Rome. He fell from the presbyterate of the Church, and Blastus was involved in a similar fall. **They also drew away many of the Church to their opinion**, each striving to introduce his own innovations in

respect to the truth... Irenaeus wrote several letters against those who were disturbing the sound ordinance of the Church at Rome. One of them was to Blastus *On Schism...*" (*Church History*, 5.15.1, 5.20.1).

Florinus was another dissenter who drew people away from practices of the Roman Church. He was a former disciple of Polycarp who drifted into Gnosticism. To our knowledge, Blastus only differed from Rome in the Quartodeciman practice. His movement must have been influential because the well-known bishop Irenaeus wrote a letter to counter his efforts. We do not possess much information about this episode in the controversy.

### **Victor and Polycrates**

In the 190s, the practice of Pascha was the cause for additional conflict between the western and eastern churches. This time the disagreement occurred between Polycrates, who was the bishop of Ephesus, and Victor, the bishop of Rome. Eusebius is our chief source of information concerning this fourth major conflict concerning Passover. He wrote:

"A question of no small importance arose at that time. For the parishes of all Asia, as from an older tradition, held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should be observed as the feast of the Saviour's Passover. It was therefore necessary to end their fast on that day, whatever day of the week it should happen to be. But it was not the custom of the churches in the rest of the world to end it at this time, as they observed the practice which, from apostolic tradition, has prevailed to the present time, of terminating the fast on no other day than on that of the resurrection of our Saviour" (*ibid*, 5.23.1).

One detail introduced in this episode was the concept of a pre-Paschal fast. According to Hall, the Jewish people of that time observed a one-day fast which ended with the Passover meal. It was called the fast of the firstborn ("Melito in the Light of the Passover Haggadah", p 31). The Jewish Encyclopedia also mentions this fast (article: First-born, Redemption of; Fasting and Fast-Days), citing the Talmud (see Pesachim 108a, Soferim 21.3). Christians continued this practice as part of their Pascha observance.

They fasted prior to Pascha in a fashion similar to the Jewish people. In the early second century, there may have been some differences about the number of days or hours prior to the feast in which this fast occurred. By the late second century, some Christians, mainly out of Rome, extended the Paschal fast up until a resurrection Sunday service. Eusebius claimed that this was the apostolic practice and that the rest of Christianity agreed with it. These statements are problematic.

While he claimed that the Roman practice was ‘apostolic’, no known quote from the second century agrees with this statement. Irenaeus attested that the Roman Pascha practice dates to no earlier than the second century; we will examine his quote later in this chapter. Secondly, Eusebius’ claim contradicts his earlier statement that keeping Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan in honor of Jesus was the ‘older tradition.’ He went on to write:

“Synods and assemblies of bishops were held on this account, and all, with one consent, through mutual correspondence drew up an ecclesiastical decree, that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be celebrated on no other but the **Lord's Day\***, and that we should observe the close of the paschal fast on this day only. There is still extant a writing of those who were then assembled in Palestine, over whom Theophilus, bishop of Caesarea, and Narcissus, bishop of Jerusalem, presided. And there is also another writing extant of those who were assembled at Rome to consider the same question, which bears the name of Bishop Victor; also of the bishops in Pontus over whom Palmas, as the oldest, presided; and of the parishes in Gaul of which Irenaeus was bishop, and of those in Osrhoëne and the cities there; and a personal letter of Bacchylus, bishop of the church at Corinth, and of a great many others, who uttered the same opinion and judgment, and cast the same vote” (ibid, 5.23.2; emphasis mine).

Eusebius claimed that Christian bishops in different regions convened councils about Pascha and came into agreement with the Roman practice. According to him, they sought to change by vote what was established by the example of Jesus and the early Apostles.

He made it appear that most of Christendom suddenly changed on this topic. This is an oversimplification to say the least. There are

details in this description that are either conflated, inflated, or interpolated. We will review five major issues with this section of Eusebius.

First, he used the phrase “Lord’s Day” for Sunday in reference to these events. In the late second century, this label was relatively new. Other writers near this period, such as Justin the Martyr, do not use the phrase at all. Secondly, no other source describes the meetings Eusebius cited.

Third, the decentralized structure of Christianity at that time did not lend itself to a rapid, organized response such as he described. Striving for uniformity in all parishes regarding Pascha is behavior more reminiscent of the fourth century (which is when he lived). In the 190s, Christian churches tended to be organized in such a way that there was one bishop over each city. There were no ‘super bishops’ who presided over entire countries or all Christianity. Eusebius mentioned bishops in several cities and regions which met concerning this issue, but this was hardly representative of Christendom. For instance, Jerusalem was one of the cities mentioned. As reviewed in the last chapter, Jewish people and Jewish influence were removed from the city in the decades prior. Could we expect them to agree with practices labeled Jewish?

Fourth, there is significant evidence from the third and fourth centuries that the Quartodeciman practice still had a significant following, especially in the east. Therefore, the practice did not disappear. Fifth, no uniformity was achieved at that time regarding the exact manner of keeping the day. These last two points will be discussed more over the next two chapters.

Eusebius then introduced another very important piece of evidence. He cited a letter that Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, wrote to Victor about Pascha. We have quoted the bulk of it below:

“But the bishops of Asia, led by Polycrates, decided to hold to the old custom handed down to them. He himself, in a letter which he addressed to Victor and the church of Rome, set forth in the following words the tradition which had come down to him: **‘We observe the exact day;** neither adding, nor taking away. For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on

the day of the Lord's coming, when he shall come with glory from heaven, and shall seek out all the saints. Among these are Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who fell asleep in Hierapolis; and his two aged virgin daughters, and another daughter, who lived in the Holy Spirit and now rests at Ephesus; and, moreover, John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and, being a priest, wore the sacerdotal plate. He fell asleep at Ephesus...

...And Polycarp in Smyrna, who was a bishop and martyr; and Thraseas, bishop and martyr from Eumonia, who fell asleep in Smyrna. Why need I mention the bishop and martyr Sagaris who fell asleep in Laodicea, or the blessed Papius, or Melito, the Eunuch who lived altogether in the Holy Spirit, and who lies in Sardis, awaiting the episcopate from heaven, when he shall rise from the dead?...

...All these observed the fourteenth day of the passover according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith. And I also, Polycrates, the least of you all, do according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have closely followed. For seven of my relatives were bishops; and I am the eighth. **And my relatives always observed the day when the people put away the leaven.** 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, am not affrighted by terrifying words. For those greater than I have said 'We ought to obey God rather than man' [Acts 5:29...

...I could mention the bishops who were present, whom I summoned at your desire; whose names, should I write them, would constitute a great multitude. And they, beholding my littleness, gave their consent to the letter, knowing that I did not bear my gray hairs in vain, but had always governed my life by the Lord Jesus" (ibid, 5.24.1-8).

In this letter, Polycrates took a strong stand for his faith. He refused to bend in the slightest from Victor's demand that the churches of the east change their practice of Pascha. He stated that they observed the 'exact day' – neither adding to nor taking away from it. This indicates that others had added to it or taken away from it. Polycrates then appealed to the example of previous



leaders who were well known and held to the same observance.

He started with the Apostles John and Philip. The mention of John is especially significant to this conversation because he is discussed as the one who leaned upon the Lord's chest at Jesus' last Passover. No such reference is found for the Roman way of practicing *Pascha*.

Polycrates then listed bishops after them who continued the same practice. He started with Polycarp and enumerated them up to his time. At least a few of these leaders were martyred.

According to Tertullian, Polycarp was the first bishop to establish Apostolic Succession (*Prescription Against Heretics*, 32). He also stated that someone who taught the same doctrine as the Apostles was considered Apostolic. Therefore, Polycrates continued the mantle of Apostolic succession on this subject. He followed in the footsteps of the first Apostles, Polycarp, and other leaders and taught the same doctrine.

Polycrates then mentioned that he also celebrated the feast of unleavened bread, which is a seven-day feast after Passover. Moreover, he stated that there were a great multitude of bishops who gave their agreement to his stance. Their cities were not cited, but his support had to be significant considering the weight of the authorities mentioned in the letter.

In the letter, the author also attested that he had lived sixty-five years 'in the Lord', which likely means he had been converted that long. This means he was a contemporary to many of the post-Apostolic bishops he mentioned such as Polycarp, Melito, and the rest. He would have been influenced by their teachings and manner of life.

In the late fourth century, Jerome discussed the disagreement between the Polycrates and Victor. In his work *On Illustrious men*, he mentioned a work that Irenaeus wrote on this subject.

"...Other works of his are in circulation to wit: to Victor the Roman bishop *On the Paschal controversy* in which he warns him not lightly to break the unity of the fraternity, if indeed Victor believed **that the many bishops of Asia and the East, who with**

**the Jews celebrated the passover, on the fourteenth day of the new moon**, were to be condemned. But even those who differed from them did not support Victor in his opinion..." (idem, 35; emphasis mine).

Jerome seems to be familiar with a work by Irenaeus where many bishops of Asia **and the East** observed Pascha at the same time as the Jewish people. This detail corroborates with Polycrates' letter where he claimed that 'a great multitude' of bishops supported his stance. It also clarifies that this would have included many bishops outside of the province of Asia.

The Bishop of Rome, Victor, did not respond kindly to Polycrates' letter. He attempted to excommunicate these parishes of Asia. Eusebius related:

"Thereupon Victor, who presided over the church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the common unity the parishes of all Asia, with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox; and he wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate. But this did not please all the bishops. And they besought him to consider the things of peace, and of neighborly unity and love. Words of theirs are extant, sharply rebuking Victor" (ibid, 5.24.9-10).

Victor attempted to excommunicate the churches of Asia. Some modern writers have suggested this statement referred to the Asian immigrant communities near Rome (Stewart-Sykes, p 1). This maneuver was an attempt to cut them off from the 'true church.' This is the first time that the Bishop of Rome tried to assert such authority over another group of churches – and the first time they tried to sever ties with others. Other bishops did not respond well to this move; they rebuked Victor. In later centuries, this attempt to exert control over another region would become standard practice.

Irenaeus, who we discussed earlier, sent a scathing letter to Victor. According to Eusebius, he agreed with the Roman practice concerning Pascha. However, he did not agree with Victor's response to Polycrates. In his letter, Irenaeus stated that some of the prior Roman bishops did not observe Pascha. At the same time, they did not excommunicate Christians who celebrated it. We

have a quote from him provided by Eusebius:

“Among them [the bishops who disagreed with Victor] was Irenaeus, who, sending letters in the name of the brethren in Gaul over whom he presided, maintained that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be observed only on the Lord's Day. He fittingly admonishes Victor that he should not cut off whole churches of God which observed the tradition of an ancient custom and after many other words he proceeds as follows:

‘For the controversy is not only concerning the day, but also concerning the very manner of the fast. For some think that they should fast one day, others two, yet others more; some, moreover, count their day as consisting of forty hours day and night...

And this variety in its observance has not originated in our time; but long before in that of our ancestors. It is likely that they did not hold to strict accuracy, and thus formed a custom for their posterity according to their own simplicity and peculiar mode. Yet all of these lived none the less in peace, and we also live in peace with one another; and the disagreement in regard to the fast confirms the agreement in the faith...’

...He adds to this the following account, which I may properly insert: ‘Among these were the presbyters before Soter, who presided over the church which you now rule. We mean Anicetus, and Pius, and Hyginus, and Telesphorus, and Xystus. They neither observed it themselves, nor did they permit those after them to do so. **And yet though not observing it**, they were none the less at peace with those who came to them from the parishes in which it was observed; although this observance was more opposed to those who did not observe it. But none were ever cast out on account of this form; but the presbyters before you who did not observe it, sent the eucharist to those of other parishes who observed it” (ibid, 5.24.11-15).

In this excerpt, Eusebius provides two significant quotes from Irenaeus. In the first, we learn more about the different views concerning the Paschal fast. Some fasted only one day, which is closer to the original Jewish practice, and others fasted longer periods. Irenaeus claimed that these methods of fasting were all developed based on tradition. Ultimately, no fast before Passover

was mentioned in the Bible. Therefore, any such practice would be considered tradition.

The concept of extending the one-day fast of the Jewish people beyond the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan may have contributed to the development of a Sunday Pascha. Anti-Jewish views towards the Sabbath influenced people to fast on that day. The same practice might have developed as it relates to Pascha. As the Jewish people and other Christians feasted on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, other Christians wanted to fast at least through the end of that day so as to differentiate themselves from the Jewish practice.

In the second quote from Irenaeus, he provided a list of the bishops who stopped keeping the Apostolic Pascha or continued fasting through it. I have compiled them below and referenced the approximate years they served as bishop of Rome:

**Xystus** – 115-125

**Telesphorus** – 125-136

**Hyginus** – 136-140

**Pius** – 140-155

**Anicetus** – 155-166

**Soter** – 166-175\*

\*For some reason, the bishop between Soter and Victor, Eleutherius, was not listed by Irenaeus. It is possible that there was a brief revival of Quartodeciman practice in the West by this intervening bishop. Recall that the Quartodeciman teacher Blastus had a significant following in Rome at that time. He may have had success in convincing large numbers of Christians to keep the Apostolic Pascha. This may have contributed to Victor's harsh response.

The first bishop listed by Irenaeus to abandon Pascha was Xystus (also called Sixtus); he served from 115-124. This was mostly during the reign of Hadrian. If you will recall from primary sources discussed at the end of chapter two, this was the time when heresies gained popularity. Notice that neither Peter nor Paul was mentioned in this list (the New Testament record would contradict any such a claim). Thus, the list of bishops who did not keep Pascha does not go back to any Apostles. As aforementioned, this practice of Rome was not even Apostolic in its own claim.

From this excerpt, we learn that some people in the Western part of the church were still observing the Apostolic Pascha in the 190s. This lends credence to the idea that Victor's ire was directed towards local immigrants. Up until the time of Victor, no one had been excommunicated or treated differently because of their disagreements. Irenaeus brokered a peace between the two sides, but this issue persisted for centuries to come. As we will discuss in the conclusion, this issue was used by the Roman Church to attack the Sabbath.

One major question remains to be resolved in this conversation. When did the bishops institute Sunday gatherings for the resurrection in the place of a remembrance for Jesus' death? By the time of Victor, it seems that the Church of Rome celebrated their newer Pascha practice on the Sunday which followed the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.

A story from Catholic legend provides some insight as to when this shift may have happened. There is an ancient book called the *Liber Pontificalis* or book of the popes. It contains an account that may or may not be true. However, people in the Roman Church at one time believed it to be true.

Pius I was the bishop of Rome from 140-154. In about the year 147/148, an angel supposedly appeared to someone named Hermas and told him to keep Passover on Sunday, not on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. We have an excerpt from this account below:

“Hermas wrote a book in which he set forth the commandment which the angel of the Lord delivered to him coming to him in the garb of a shepherd and commanding him that the holy feast of Pascha should be observed upon the Lord's Day” (idem, XI, p 14).

One issue with the account is the fact that the phrase “Lord's Day” was not commonly used in the mid-second century. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, other writers from the mid-second century do not use the phrase at all. The second issue is that a vision from an angel was considered more important than what the Scriptures said and the example of Jesus Christ. This is something that New Testament writers warned believers to avoid

(Gal. 1:6-9).

This legend may have some basis in history. Later writers, such as Bede, certainly thought that Pius was responsible for this change (see *Concerning the Reckoning of Time*, Translated by Faith Wallis, p 202). Perhaps it was under Pius I or his successor Anicetus that the Sunday gathering started for Pascha. Recall that the first episode in this controversy occurred during the tenure of Anicetus.

The city of Rome did not have top-down control over other congregations in either the west or the east in the second century. This explains why the bishops of other areas rebuked Victor for trying assert such control. At that time, Christianity was composed of a loose collection of congregations led by local bishops. Sometimes these congregations looked to a well-known bishop to resolve more serious issues. This certainly happened with Polycarp and Polycrates in our current discussion.

### **Gnostic Influence**

A final issue to be discussed in this chapter is the influence of Gnosticism on this subject. The initial dispute of the Quartodeciman Controversy occurred when Gnosticism heavily influenced Christian thinking, especially in the city of Rome.

Irenaeus related: “For Valentinus came to Rome in the time of Hyginus, flourished under Pius, and remained until Anicetus...Marcion, then, succeeding him, flourished under Anicetus...” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.4.3; emphasis mine).

Another reason for Polycarp’s visit to Rome was to confront these heretical teachers. Irenaeus wrote:

“...To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time -- **a man who was of much greater weight, and a more stedfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics.** He it was who, **coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God,** proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles -- that, namely, which is

handed down by the Church...” (*Against Heresies*, 3.3.4; emphasis mine).

Polycarp arrived in Rome at an eventful time: it was the height of Valentinus’ and Marcion’s heresy and the bishop of Rome refused to honor the Apostolic Pascha. Irenaeus testified that Polycarp turned many heretics back to the faith once delivered to the saints. He also rebuked Marcion to his face!

“And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said, ‘Dost thou know me?’ [Polycarp replied] ‘I do know thee, the first-born of Satan’” (ibid).

Polycarp was uniquely equipped for such a task of fighting back these various difficulties. As the heretics sought to deviate from the original teachings of what we call the New Testament, he handily refuted them. To early Church writers, he was unanimously accepted as an eyewitness of those who walked with Jesus. He either knew the New Testament by heart or had access to the original documents (or their copies).

Jerome also summarized Polycarp’s visit to Rome: “He, on account of **certain questions concerning the day of the Passover**, went to Rome in the time of the emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161) while Anicetus ruled the church in that city. **There he led back to the faith many of the believers who had been deceived through the persuasion of Marcion and Valentinus...**” (*On Illustrious Men*, 17; emphasis mine).

It is fascinating that these two issues were addressed in the same visit by Polycarp – the keeping of Passover and refuting Gnosticism. Are these two subjects possibly linked?

Consider that many Gnostics in one form or another taught against the physical birth, suffering, and death of Jesus. They also displayed serious anti-Jewish prejudice in their writings. Many of them diminished or sought to separate the Old Testament from belief in Jesus as Savior.

When we compare Gnostic beliefs to the Christian Passover, then the conflict between the two becomes evident. The Christian Passover was and is as an annual reminder that Jesus physically

lived, suffered, and died (I Cor. 5:6-8). It also connects Christianity with its Judaic roots and acknowledges the God of the Old Testament as the true God.

These conclusions agree with Hall's discussion of Melito's work and Gnosticism ("The Origins of Easter", pp 566-567). He discussed four points from *On Pascha* that were pertinent to this topic – the remembrance that creation was formed by the one true God, the connection between Adam and Christ, the continuity between Old and New Testaments, and the continuity between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. Hall also mentions that Passover was the time when the first fruits of the ground were offered to God (ibid; see also Ex. 12-13, Lev. 23:9-14).

These Paschal themes were rejected by Gnostic teachers of the second century. Melito continued the Quartodeciman teaching passed down to him from others who were also anti-gnostic. This connection is also reflected in the *Epistula Apostolorum*, which we have previously discussed. The author composed an anti-gnostic work and incorporated Pascha as part of its message.

The connection between anti-Gnostic teaching and the Apostolic Pascha is clear. The fact that Polycarp addressed the two issues on the same visit helps us understand that Anicetus was influenced to some degree by Gnosticism – even if it was only concerning Pascha.

The idea of a transfiguration of Jesus into indestructible life without a physical death was palatable to Gnostic teaching. Therefore, they could accept some form of resurrection doctrine (even if it was different than what other Christians embraced). As an example, consider the Gnostic teachings of Basilides. Irenaeus described some of his beliefs as follows:

“[quoting Basilides]...He [Jesus] appeared, then, on earth as a man, to the nations of these powers, and wrought miracles. Wherefore he did not himself suffer death, but Simon, a certain man of Cyrene, being compelled, bore the cross in his stead; so that this latter being transfigured by him, that he might be thought to be Jesus, was crucified, through ignorance and error, while Jesus himself received the form of Simon, and, standing by,



laughed at them. For since he was an incorporeal power, and the Nous (mind) of the unborn father, he transfigured himself as he pleased, and thus ascended to him who had sent him, deriding them, inasmuch as he could not be laid hold of, and was invisible to all...so that it is not incumbent on us to confess him who was crucified..." (*Against All Heresies*, 1.24.4).

Any teaching or feast that acknowledged Jesus' death would have been utterly rejected by Gnostics. The idea of a resurrection which ignored the death of Jesus could be embraced. The addition of a resurrection celebration, though it did not have Scriptural backing, would be supported by Gnostic teachers. The resurrection became the greater focus of the Pascha season.

To Christians in the second century, the Apostolic Passover had additional importance. Keeping the Apostolic Pascha was an active resistance to Gnostic teachings. This finding highlights another problem. In the early to mid-second century, the bishops of Rome began to lose their connection to the original Apostles. This was a tragic development.

For another example, consider that some Gnostics fasted on the Sabbath (Tertullian and Epiphanius discussed this practice). We briefly discussed this practice in the last chapter. Within a generation of Polycarp's death, it was adopted by the Roman Church. It eventually became common practice (see McDonald, "Fasting on the Sabbath in Early Christianity (Part 1)" on [www.sabbath.blog](http://www.sabbath.blog) – for online viewers, [CLICK HERE to read more](#)).

The Christians of Asia Minor had greater exposure in frequency and longevity to the first Apostles than most other regions in the Mediterranean world. Paul spent significant time in Asia, especially Ephesus (Acts 19, I Corinthians 15:32, 16:8). He told the Corinthians to observe Passover while he was in Ephesus (I Cor. 5:6-8, 16:8).

Before Paul went to Jerusalem, he gave the elders in that city final instructions. In that final message, he discussed his missionary activity in Asia (Acts 20:17-38). He wrote a letter to the believers in that city. He desired for Timothy to spend time in the same city (I Timothy 1:3). Timothy would have continued the Quartodeciman teachings of the Apostle Paul.

The Apostle Peter also wrote a letter to the brethren in this area. “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...” (I Peter 1:1, KJV). In later years, this region was influenced by John and Philip. Consider the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia. Why were these seven cities chosen of all the others in Christendom?

The most obvious reason is that the Apostle John dwelt in that region towards the end of his life. Another reason is that these regions had greater exposure to Apostolic teachings than other areas. They were expected to continue the ‘good fight’ of the faith for future generations.

If the early Apostles had taught keeping of Pascha on Sunday, then the churches of Asia would especially be aware of it. They were saturated with exposure to more Apostolic influence for decades longer than the city of Rome. The Neronian persecution likely removed all or most Apostolic influence from the Christians in Rome. The fact that the Asian Christians vigorously defended and continued the Quartodeciman practice is clear evidence that it was part of the Apostolic footprints left from the first disciples.

The initial phase of this controversy started with a meeting Polycarp and Anicetus, which was a watershed moment in early Church history. Polycarp was the stalwart of older Apostolic practice. He confronted the newer, popular practices influencing believers in Rome, including Gnosticism and the alternative practice of Pascha.

This controversy progressed into believers composing works promoting one practice or another concerning Pascha. This first phase reached a climax in the episode between Victor and Polycrates. Each contended that their practice should be observed – but only the Quartodeciman practice could claim Apostolic origin.

As time passed, other concepts concerning the *Pascha* celebration were invented and promoted. More books were composed which attempted to calculate the keeping of Passover so many years into the future. Deviation from the Apostolic Pascha caused great confusion.

## Chapter 4

### Confusion Abounds

The first phase of this controversy ended with the dispute between Polycrates and Victor. The bishop of Rome tried to excommunicate the churches of Asia because they kept Passover in the manner of Jesus and the early disciples. Polycrates and the many bishops who supported him contended that they would observe the season exactly as described in the Scriptures and the example of Jesus. Victor contended that the tradition of the bishops of Rome, which possibly went back as far as the time of Hadrian, was the correct practice.

As briefly discussed in the last chapter, Eusebius claimed that bishops from various cities gathered to discuss Pascha and voted to keep the feast on a Sunday. He makes it seem that there was a broad agreement with the bishop of Rome about the subject. As discussed in the last chapter, this claim has significant problems.

Ultimately, the first phase of the Quartodeciman Controversy did not result in broad uniformity. Confusion was the result. Pascha might be observed in a different way or date depending on the city or region. In the last chapter, we quoted Irenaeus, who discussed the differences in pre-Paschal fasts that developed since the time of the Apostles. Other differences in practice also existed. Most of these alternative calculations shifted the emphasis from the death of Jesus to His resurrection or tried to combine the two events into one feast.

Several works on the Passover were composed in the third century by authors such as Hippolytus, Dionysus, and pseudo-Cyprian. Many of them focused on the exact date Pascha should be observed and tried to calculate the feast dates for so many years into the future. This was a new development in the controversy. Why was this necessary?

The Biblical reckoning of months for celebrations is determined by the moon (Psalm 104:19). The phases of the moon are com-

pleted over about 29.5 days. This is commonly called a lunar month. A full year of 12 lunar months is called the lunar year; this is about 354 days. The number of days it takes for the earth to orbit the sun is called the solar year; it is about 365.25 days.

As you can see, there is about a 11.25-day difference between these yearly cycles. Due to this discrepancy, there must be some procedure in place so that the months stay in their proper seasons. For instance, Passover is supposed to occur either in March or April (on our modern calendar). Without some mechanism to adjust the lunar year, Passover would progressively fall behind the solar year and eventually be observed in February, January, December, etc.

We will use a practical example to illustrate this point. In 2022, Passover was the evening of April 14. If one followed a strict lunar year (354 days), then in five years Passover would occur in February; five years after that it would occur in December. Without some sort of adjustment, Passover gradually falls behind the season in which it is supposed to occur.

The Spring equinox was viewed by many early Christian writers as the chief way to keep the lunar calendar linked to the proper seasons of the year. Thus, many groups waited until the first full moon after the Spring Equinox to start Pascha. This was also attractive to certain Christians because the Jewish people of that time were often accused of not using the equinox in their calculations. In this way, they had another reason to distinguish themselves from those practices considered Jewish.

A quintessential writing on various Passover calculations in early Christianity was composed by Anatolius of Alexandria. It is one of the few surviving works from the third century on this subject. He was the bishop of Syrian Laodicea in the mid to late third century. In his work *The Paschal Canon*, Anatolius discussed the variation of calculations concerning the Pascha date. We have a lengthy excerpt from his work below:

**“To us, however, with whom it is impossible for all these things to come aptly at one and the same time, namely, the moon’s fourteenth, and the Lord’s day, and the passing of the equinox, and whom the obligation of the Lord’s resurrection**

**binds to keep the Paschal festival on the Lord's day, it is granted that we may extend the beginning of our celebration even to the moon's twentieth...** And if the moon should rise in the third watch, it is clear that the 22nd or 23rd of the moon would then be reached, in which it is not possible that there can be a true celebration of Pascha. For those who determine that the festival may be kept at this age of the moon, are not only unable to make that good by the authority of Scripture, but turn also into the crime of sacrilege and contumacy, and incur the peril of their souls; inasmuch as they affirm that the true light may be celebrated along with something of that power of darkness which dominates all...

...Accordingly, it is not the case, as certain calculators of Gaul allege, that this assertion is opposed by that passage in Exodus, where we read: 'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the first month, at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread until the one-and-twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses.' From this they maintain that it is quite permissible to celebrate the Passover on the twenty-first day of the moon; understanding that if the twenty-second day were added, there would be found eight days of unleavened bread...

...But what wonder is it that they should have erred in the matter of the 21st day of the moon who have added three days before the equinox, in which they hold that the Passover may be celebrated? An assertion which certainly must be considered altogether absurd, since, by the best-known historiographers of the Jews, and by the Seventy Elders, it has been clearly determined that the Paschal festival cannot be celebrated at the equinox...

...**But nothing was difficult** to them with whom it was lawful to celebrate the Passover on any day when the fourteenth of the moon happened after the equinox. **Following their example up to the present time all the bishops of Asia—as themselves also receiving the rule from an unimpeachable authority, to wit, the evangelist John, who leant on the Lord's breast, and drank in instructions spiritual without doubt—were in the way of celebrating the Paschal feast, without question, every year, whenever the fourteenth day of the moon had come, and the lamb was sacrificed by the Jews...**

...Moreover, the allegation which they sometimes make against us, that if we pass the moon's fourteenth we cannot celebrate the beginning of the Paschal feast in light, neither moves nor disturbs us...And this, too, the most especially, as we are pressed by three difficulties, namely, that we should keep the solemn festival of the Passover on the Lord's day, and after the equinox, and yet not beyond the limit of the moon's twentieth day...

...The Paschal or Easter Table of Anatolius. Now, then, after the reckoning of the days and the exposition of the course of the moon, whereon the whole revolves on to its end, the cycle of the years may be set forth from the commencement. This makes the Pascha circulate between the 6th day before the Kalends of April (March 27) and the 9th before the Kalends of May (April 23), according to the following table...

...This cycle of nineteen years is not approved of by certain African investigators who have drawn up larger cycles, because it seems to be somewhat opposed to their surmises and opinions. For these make up the best proved accounts according to their calculation, and determine a certain beginning or certain end for the Pascha season, so as that the Paschal festival shall not be celebrated before the eleventh day before the Kalends of April (March 22) nor after the moon's twenty-first, and the eleventh day before the Kalends of May (April 21). But we hold that these are limits not only not to be followed, but to be detested and overturned..." (idem, 7-15; emphasis mine)

In the beginning of this excerpt, Anatolius admitted that it was impossible for the fourteenth day of the first Hebrew month to fall on Sunday (which he calls Lord's Day) after the equinox every year. This was an impossible situation because they added an element to the equation that the Bible never implied – trying to force Pascha to occur on a specific day of the week (Sunday).

As discussed in the last chapter, the Roman Church started to deviate from the Biblical celebration of Pascha, which was always occurred on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, regardless of the day of the week. Some other cities followed their example. Anatolius reasoned that Pascha could be celebrated anytime between the 14<sup>th</sup> day through the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the first month so long as it was held on the Lord's Day.

Because this rationale mixes some human reason with some Biblical reasoning, variations of practice were developed by other Christians. We will review some of the ones described by Anatolius.

The first group he described might keep Pascha as late as the 22<sup>nd</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the first month, which he found unacceptable. He also disagreed with those in Gaul (modern-day France) who commemorated Pascha on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the first month (or as late as the 21<sup>st</sup> day). Epiphanius identified some in Cappadocia who kept March 25 as Pascha every year (*Panarion*, 50.1.6). Breen and McCarthy propose that the March 25 group were in Gaul (*The Ante-Nicene Christian Pasch*, p 89).

He then transitioned to discuss the Quartodeciman Christians. He claimed that they did not have any difficulty with their observance. He reported that all (or most of) the bishops of Asia continued to follow the example of the Apostle John in keeping Passover on the same date as the Jewish people. This provides us with a reliable witness that the practice of keeping Apostolic Pascha continued into the third century.

In the next section, Anatolius discussed the difficulty of trying to put Pascha on the Lord's Day (Sunday) after the spring equinox yet not beyond the twentieth day of the first month. According to him, any day beyond that would put the entire festival outside of the Biblically prescribed time. He then reasoned that it was appropriate to calculate a nineteen-year cycle for Passover. According to his calculations, Pascha would always fall between March 27 and April 23.

Anatolius then admitted that his cycle was not accepted by certain believers in Africa. They asserted that Pascha had to fall between March 22 and April 21. Anatolius detested this alternative set of dates. Why did this discrepancy exist?

In ancient times, the spring equinox was recognized as a different day in different places. The Julian Roman Calendar set March 25 to be the day of the equinox, but the Alexandrian Calendar viewed the equinox as March 21 (the latter of which is more astronomically accurate). This just added to the confusion of when

one should keep the newer Pascha.

To learn more about the manuscript evidence of Anatolius' work and his work's relationship to other early Christian writings, see McCarthy and Breed's work *The Ante-Nicene Christian Pasch De Ratione Paschali*.

At the very least, the writing of Anatolius gives us an idea of the diversity which immediately followed the first phase of the Quartodeciman Controversy. He is only one writer, so variations of practice likely existed beyond what he described. The variation of time cycles used to keep the lunar and solar years in sync with each other can also be used to bolster this point.

For instance, Anatolius argued for a nineteen-year time cycle. Eusebius admitted that other time cycles were utilized. Consider two quotes from him below:

“At that time Hippolytus, besides many other treatises, wrote a work on the passover. He gives in this a chronological table, and presents a certain paschal canon of sixteen years, bringing the time down to the first year of the Emperor Alexander” (*Church History*, 6.22.1).

“Dionysius, besides his epistles already mentioned, wrote at that time also his extant Festal Epistles, in which he uses words of panegyric respecting the passover feast. He addressed one of these to Flavius, and another to Domitius and Didymus, in which he sets forth a canon of eight years, maintaining that it is not proper to observe the paschal feast until after the vernal equinox....” (*Church History*, 7.20).

Hippolytus calculated a sixteen-year cycle, but Dionysius computed a cycle of eight years. There is also the famous Hippolytus statue, which was found in Rome in the sixteenth century. On it is inscribed a 112-year cycle for keeping Pascha, which started in 222 AD. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, an 84-year time cycle was also utilized in the early church (article: Easter Controversy).

These different time cycles added even more confusion as to the variation of dates for different cities and/or regions. Many years



passed before a high degree of uniformity could be achieved. In some ways, it has never been fully resolved. We will look at a few later examples.

In the early 450s, Pope Leo I wrote a letter to a bishop in Sicily to correct him and others regarding a dispute concerning when to keep Pascha in 455 (ibid). The parishes in the British Isles did not conform to the Roman view on the subject until the seventh century (Synod of Whitby). Even the calendar accepted in the West has been adjusted from time to time. Presently, the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches keep Pascha, or Easter as they call it now, on different days most years.

When the Bishops of Rome and other leaders decided to go outside of the boundaries of the Scripture, it caused confusion. As the Apostle Paul wrote: “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace...” (I Cor. 14:33). There was no command in the New Testament to move Passover away from the time when the Jewish people observed it. There was no command, stated or implied, to move it to a specific day of the week. The introduction of human reasoning allowed many different variations to be justified – which often contradicted the Bible and the example of Jesus.

Epiphanius, the bishop of Salamis, summarized the confusion caused since the time of Hadrian: “For long ago, even from the earliest days, its various celebrations in the church differed, occasioning ridicule every year, with some keeping it a week early and quarreling with the others, others a week late—some celebrating it in advance, some in between, others afterwards. And in a word, as is not unknown to many scholarly persons, there was a lot of muddle and tiresomeness every time a controversy was aroused in the church’s teaching about this festival—as in the time of Polycarp and Victor the east was at odds with the west and they would not accept letters of commendation from each other. But in as many other times—as in the time of Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, and Criscentius, when each is found writing to the other and quarreling, and down to our own day. This has been the situation ever since was thrown into disorder after the time of the circumcised bishops” (*Panarion*, 70.9.7-9; Translation from Frank Williams).

This second phase of the controversy also included a gradual in-

crease in marginalization against Quartodeciman believers. Aside from Victor's attempted action against them, a work titled *Against All Heresies* denigrated the group. The composition dates to the early third century and is traditionally attributed to Hippolytus. Newer research has disproven his authorship (see David Litwa's work, *Refutation of All Heresies*, SBL Press, 2015). Despite this detail, the work still dates to the time in discussion. We have a quote below:

“And certain other (heretics), contentious by nature, (and) wholly uniformed as regards knowledge, as well as in their manner more (than usually) quarrelsome, combine (in maintaining) that Pascha should be kept on the fourteenth day of the first month, according to the commandment of the law, on whatever day (of the week) it should occur. (But in this) they only regard what has been written in the law, that he will be accursed who does not so keep (the commandment) as it is enjoined. They do not, however, attend to this (fact), that the legal enactment was made for Jews, who in times to come should kill the real Passover. And this (paschal sacrifice, in its efficacy,) has spread unto the Gentiles, and is discerned by faith, and not now observed in letter (merely). They attend to this one commandment, and do not look unto what has been spoken by the apostle: ‘For I testify to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.’ In other respects, however, these consent to all the traditions delivered to the Church by the Apostles” (idem, 8.11).

The author of *Refutation* identified groups which were deemed heretical and included the Quartodecimans in that category. It is interesting to note that the author of *Refutation* identified them as being orthodox in all other areas. Despite this detail, the writer employed language which marginalized the group. These attacks increased in fervency in the fourth century. As time passed, the label of heresy had more grave consequences.

The developments discussed in this chapter gave way to the next phase, which started in the fourth century.

## Chapter 5

### Forced Conformity

The third phase of the Quartodeciman Controversy is **Forced Conformity**. In the fourth and fifth centuries, attempts were made to force people to comply with the Roman Church practice concerning Pascha. Different methods were used in these efforts. They can be placed into four categories: 1) Church Councils, 2) Polemic Writings, 3) Roman Law, and 4) Force.

The concept of councils to decide important matters on local or regional levels occurred in the early church. Examples of this include Antioch (264-269) and Elvira (305). While these types of councils continued, a broader concept of church councils emerged in the early fourth century. It involved gathering as many church leaders as possible from different parts of the Christian world.

While these meetings were initially convened to resolve internal disputes, they were eventually utilized to bring about greater conformity on matters of practice. The goal was to push practices approved by the Roman Church upon as many parishes as possible. Leaders who did not agree were marginalized. Polemic rhetoric in the form of sermons, letters, and books were composed to attack dissenters from their perspective. Later, more coercive measures were used.

Because the initial reason for these larger councils was to address disputes between Christian groups, civil rulers were asked to intervene in them. This included the highest civil authority, which was the emperor. As time passed, emperors increased their interest in Christian practice.

Eventually, these leaders codified some church practices into laws. This included laws that marked non-approved groups and practices. People who participated in them were in danger of violating imperial law. Strict penalties were put in place for non-conformists. The goal was to harass people and force conformity. The events preceding these harsh policies help us understand how

they came into existence.

In the third and fourth centuries, the Roman Empire was mired in disorder and chaos. In times of crisis, emperors would force the general population to dedicate themselves to the gods of Rome. They viewed this measure as the key to gaining divine favor and intervention. This placed Christians in opposition to the empire; the results were devastating to these groups. Sometimes Christians were purposefully targeted by persecution. We will explore these details more in a future work, *Persecution in Early Christianity* (we hope to release in 2022). A series of events reversed this situation and changed the trajectory of Western civilization.

In 312 AD, Constantine fought and prevailed over Maxentius for control of the Western Roman Empire. His approach towards religion was more relaxed than some of his predecessors. He needed allies who could help maintain order in the empire. Instead of persecuting different religious groups, Constantine and his brother-in-law Licinius gave Christians and other groups religious freedom starting with the Edict of Milan in 313.

As one would expect, many Christians rejoiced at the thought of religious freedom. Constantine was extolled by many contemporary Christian writers. They did not see that Constantine, being the clever politician, used this newly gained favor to control Christianity.

The Edict of Milan was celebrated greatly because it marked a formal end to a ten-year period called The Great Persecution. One way that Roman officials harassed Christians leaders during that terrible time was to require that they hand over important texts of the faith, such as the writings we presently call the New Testament or other early church writers, to be burned. Those who handed over these writings were called the *traditor*, which is from the Latin root *tradere* meaning ‘to hand over.’ This is the origin of the modern English word traitor.

During and after the Great Persecution, there was controversy on how to treat believers who handed over sacred texts. In Carthage, there was a bishop named Mensurius who was a traditor. He ordained a man named Caecilian to take his place. Seventy leaders gathered in North Africa and refused to accept this ordination be-

cause it was conducted by a traitor. They placed Majorinus in this position instead of Caecilian.

This was a significant issue for multiple reasons, but I will mention two for our purposes. First, Christians in Carthage and other areas needed to know who to trust as their legitimate spiritual leader. Secondly, this position involved the management of finances, property, and influence. Thus, there was vested interest for the civil authorities to be involved in this dispute. This debate also impacted other cities, as some chose a bishop loyal to Caecilian and others loyal to Majorinus.

The concept of appealing to Caesar to resolve an issue is found in the book of Acts (Acts 25:11-12). We see it with this subject as well. In 313, the two sides appealed to Constantine to help sort out the mess (Augustine, *Letter* 43.4). He was the highest official in the Western Empire. Constantine appointed bishops from regions not affected by this conflict to help judge which person should be bishop of Carthage.

The Council of Rome was convened in October 313 to decide the situation. By this time, Majorinus had been replaced by Donatist. The bishops appointed to the case and the bishop of Rome, Miltiades, concluded that Caecilian was innocent and should remain in place. Moreover, they determined that Donatist should be removed from his position. Lastly, they ruled that all those cities with two bishops should allow the one with the longest tenure to retain the post.

The Donatists appealed this verdict on the basis that only nineteen bishops decided the Council of Rome, but seventy bishops had previously ruled in their favor. Because more bishops were involved in the first meeting, they argued that their case was more correct. Constantine then had another meeting arranged with greater representation. Delegates from different regions in the Western Roman Empire were asked to convene at Arles, a city in modern-day France, in August 314. Miltiades had died by the start of this council; Sylvester succeeded him.

This was the first time a church council was held with such extensive representation. While the Donatist issue was the initial cause for the meeting, it was utilized by the Roman Church to address

other issues. The bishop of Rome, Sylvester, used this meeting to impose upon Western churches the one and the same practice for Pascha observance. This included the same day of the week and the same calculation/time cycle for it.

Pascha was the **first issue** of church practice to be discussed. This exemplifies its importance to the Roman Church. The first canon of this council reads as follows:

“Primo loco de observatione paschae dominici, ut uno die & uno tempore per omnem orbem a nobis observetur, & juxta consuetudinem literas ad omnes tu dirigas” (Labbe and Cossartii, p 1445).

“In the first place, concerning the observation of the Lord’s Pascha, we have determined that it be observed on one day and at one time throughout the world by us, and that you send letters according to custom to all” (Ayer, p 292).

Why might Pascha be so significant at this council? The first and most obvious reason is to resolve the confusion discussed in the last chapter. It would be difficult to have a cohesive evangelism strategy if there was confusion on such an important topic. Secondly, the Roman Church leaders believed that they had the pre-eminent Apostolic succession. Therefore, they thought every Christian group should follow their example. This continued the trend started by Victor. They wanted to reinforce that Pascha should be held on the dates established by their leaders and that the focus remained on the resurrection.

The bishops gathered at Arles were expected to send letters to all the congregations in their parishes with this instruction concerning Pascha. This power move by the Roman Church would initiate a series of events to centralize and standardize the Pascha practice, especially in the West. As for the Donatists, they were ruled against at Arles and appealed to Constantine again. Their movement would last for a little over one hundred years.

The next episode of this phase occurred at the Council of Nicaea in 325. In the prior year, Constantine gained control of the entire Roman Empire after defeating his brother-in-law Licinius. The circumstances surrounding this gathering were very similar to that of Arles.

The original basis for the Council of Nicaea was to settle the Arian controversy and the Meletian Schism. Pascha was also a central focus. The Arian and Meletian issues required decisions from Christian bishops of the highest stature and the highest civil authority – Constantine. We will briefly review these two situations.

In the early fourth century, Arius of Alexandria began to teach about the nature of God and Christ in a way that was contrary to the Roman Church. His writings are not extant to defend himself, but we are able to reconstruct some of his teachings from contra writings. He likely taught in some form that Jesus was not completely equal with the Father (though how is not completely clear). He also attempted to define how Jesus was begotten from the Father (from John 3:16). He may have conveyed the idea that Jesus was a created being. This caused a serious division among Christian congregations, especially in the East. His followers were called Arians.

Another division in the east was sparked by a group called the Meletians. Like the Donatists, they disagreed with the Roman Church's laxity towards apostates during the Great Persecution. The group was also known as the Church of the Martyrs.

Hosius of Cordova was a religious advisor to Constantine and presided over the Council of Nicaea. He likely convened the gathering and invited the emperor to participate and make final decisions (in a similar fashion to Arles). Constantine arrived about a month into the proceedings.

While these two situations caused division, the Council of Nicaea was also used to force conformity on the observance of *Pascha*. Twenty canons, or church decisions, were made at the meeting.

A synodal letter was also written to the brethren explaining to them the result of the council. The Christian historian Socrates summarized the conclusion of these events:

“We have also gratifying intelligence to communicate to you relative to unity of judgment on the subject of the most holy feast of Pascha: for this point also has been happily settled through your prayers; so that all the brethren in the East who have heretofore

kept this festival when the Jews did, will henceforth conform to the Romans and to us, and to all who from the earliest time have observed our period of celebrating Pascha...This epistle of the Synod makes it plain that they not only anathematized Arius and his adherents, but the very expressions of his tenets; and that having agreed among themselves respecting the celebration of Pascha, they readmitted the heresiarch Melitius into communion, suffering him to retain his episcopal rank, but divesting him of all authority to act as a bishop..." (*Church History*, 1.9).

The Arians and Meletians were ruled against at Nicaea. Arius was banished from Alexandria by Constantine. After several years, he was brought back. Many people are not aware that Constantine became sympathetic to Arians towards the end of his life – mainly through the influence of his sister. The Arians continued to have significant influence for at least one hundred years after Nicaea.

To my knowledge, Arius was the first person to be punished by civil authority for holding a different view of the Scriptures than another group. Constantine's actions set a dangerous precedent in this area. As a result, Christian groups started to appeal to civil rulers, such as the emperor, to resolve internal disputes regarding doctrine. This precedent was later utilized to justify horrific acts against non-Roman Catholic Christians.

Another result of this convention was a letter written by Constantine to mandate that they follow the Roman rite as it comes to the observance of Pascha. To read this complete letter, see **Appendix C**. An excerpt of it is located below:

"There also the question having been considered relative to the most holy day of Pascha, it was determined by common consent that it should be proper that all should celebrate it on one and the same day everywhere...And in the first place, it seemed very unworthy of this most sacred feast, that we should keep it following the custom of the Jews; a people who having imbrued their hands in a most heinous outrage, have thus polluted their souls, and are deservedly blind. Having then cast aside their usage, we are free to see to it that the celebration of this observance should occur in future in the more correct order which we have kept from the first day of the Passion until the present time. **Therefore have noth-**



**ing in common with that most hostile people the Jews...**" (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 3.18; emphasis mine).

I have placed part of this quote in bold because some use it to justify the view that Constantine banned keeping the Sabbath and other practices, but no such interpretation can be applied. Moreover, there are no records of any laws he enacted to force compliance with this letter. So, we must not misconstrue the letter to have the approval of the imperial government concerning the Pascha celebration. How then should we view it?

Constantine did not issue this letter as a Christian leader, but as a civil ruler adjudicating between two disputing parties. He left it up to the Christian congregations and their officials to enforce its decisions. Being an emperor with much authority, he probably thought that these leaders had the authority and ability to force compliance concerning their own religious rites without any further intervention from him. Imperial approval for the Roman Pascha may have persuaded some people to modify their practice, especially since Constantine was viewed as a liberator by Christians.

There is a lack of evidence that Constantine viewed himself as a Christian. He certainly viewed himself as emperor and pontifex maximus, which means that he was required to take an interest in religious matters. To learn more about Constantine, read our book *Constantine and the Sabbath*, which can be downloaded for free from [www.sabbath.blog](http://www.sabbath.blog) (Just look on the **Free Resources** page).

At this point, I think it is important to understand how the church councils of this time worked. There is much confusion on this subject. The Roman Church did not have the civil authority to force other people to comply with their church discipline and practice. Instead, these councils attempted to affirm what they viewed to be 'orthodox' teaching and then bring about greater uniformity among those Christian leaders who might disagree. At the very least, these councils express the will of the Roman Church.

Those who refused to comply with the findings of councils like Arles and Nicaea could be threatened with not having support

(financial and spiritual), recognition, and communication with the Roman Church. As the bishops of Rome grew in influence and 'orthodox' Christianity began to centralize more around their city, these councils had even greater weight. In the fourth century, civil rulers increased their interest and involvement with them. Constantine set the precedent; it lasted for centuries into the future.

Despite the rulings at Nicaea, several issues continued for a time. As aforementioned, Arianism lasted for at least one hundred years into the future. Also, non-conformist believers continued to keep Pascha on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.

One proof that Nicaea did not stop Quartodeciman Christians is the fact that multiple church councils which condemned and excommunicate those who persisted in the practice. Among these were the Councils of Antioch (341), Laodicea (364), and Constantinople (381). Most of the councils that discussed this subject were convened in the east because that was the location of most or all Quartodeciman Christians.

The precedent set by Constantine that Christians could be persecuted for differences of beliefs favored the Roman Church for a time. During the reign of Constantius (337-361), the pendulum swung in the opposite direction. Arians appealed to him for help, and he acted against those who were favorable to Nicaea. Those who supported the Roman Church were persecuted. Houses of prayer were taken from them and given to Arian believers (Sozomen, *Church History*, 4.20-27).

Councils were held with Constantius presiding over them, much like had been done under his father's reign. However, these councils ruled in favor of Arians. Among the first councils conducted in this manner was that of Antioch in 341. While this gathering addressed other subjects, the first canon addressed the keeping of Pascha.

"All those who dare to act contrary to the command of the great and holy Synod, assembled at Nicaea in presence of the pious Emperor Constantine, beloved of God, in regard to the sacred feast of Pascha, shall be excommunicated from the Church if they obstinately persist in their opposition to this most excellent decision. This refers to the laity. But if after this command any of the

church-officers, bishop, priest, or deacon, still dares to celebrate the feast of Pascha with the Jews, and to follow his own perverse will to the ruin of the people and the disturbance of the churches, the holy Synod holds such a person from that time as separated from the Church, because he not only sins himself, but is the cause of ruin and destruction to many ; and the Synod not only deposes such persons from their office, but also all those who after their deposition presume to hold communion with them. The persons deposed shall also be deprived of the external honours enjoyed by the holy canon and the priesthood” (translation from Hefele, 2:67).

This canon rebuked those who continued to keep Pascha with the Jews. At the very least, this is evidence that the Quartodeciman practice still retained a strong following. The laity who engaged in this observance were excommunicated and cut off from communion with the ‘true church.’ Ordained persons faced the same punishment and lost their positions. At that time, these actions were considered the maximum penalty that one Christian group could levy against another.

Constantius died in 361. Two short reigns followed him: Julian and Jovian. The latter’s ended in 364. In about the same year, the Council of Laodicea was held.

Over the years, there has been some debate about dating this council. Some ascribe it to Constantine’s time, but there is a lack of evidence to support that conclusion. The argument for the 364 dating is most convincing (for further discussion about the dating of this council, see Hefele, 2:295-299). Below, we have some quotes from its rulings:

**“Canon 7:** That heretics returning from the Novatian, Photinian, or Quartodeciman heresies, whether they have been reckoned among the [catechumens] or the faithful, shall not be received until they have anathematized all heresies, and more especially those in which they were themselves implicated. These, as soon as they have learnt the creed, and received the anointing of the holy chrism, shall share in the holy mysteries.

**Canon 16:** The Gospels are to be read on the Sabbath [i.e. Saturday], with the other Scriptures.

**Canon 29:** Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday, but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day they shall especially honour, and, as being Christians, shall if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ.

**Canon 37:** No one shall accept festal presents from Jews and heretics, or keep the festivals with them.

**Canon 38:** No one shall accept unleavened bread from the Jews or take part in their profanity.”  
(Quotes from Hefele, 2:302, 310, 316, 318)

From these statements, we can see the continued use of anti-Semitic rhetoric which started centuries earlier. Celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread was labeled “profanity.” It is fascinating that both the Sabbath and Quartodeciman practices were attacked in the same council. This shows that both practices continued to maintain strong followings. As discussed in previous works (*Constantine and the Sabbath*, pp 55-60), most Christians still observed the seventh-day Sabbath.

Laodicea was the first council to label Quartodeciman believers as heretics. This means that they were not allowed fellowship in any Roman-approved congregation until after they denounced their beliefs. Recall from previous chapters that Laodicea was a city where the Quartodeciman Controversy had surfaced nearly two hundred years earlier.

In 364, Valentinian I became ruler of the West and his brother Valens ruler of the East. Valentinian displayed religious toleration but tended to support Arians. On the other hand, Valens was an ardent supporter of Arianism. He continued Constantius' policy of marginalization against non-Arian groups, but with greater severity.

After Valens death in 378, the influence of Arianism in the Eastern Roman Empire steadily declined. Theodosius was the next Emperor over the East. Early in his reign, he heard the perspectives of different Christian groups. He sided with the Roman Church. And so, the pendulum swung back in their favor.

In 380, Theodosius enacted a law which attempted to force all peoples under his rule follow the bishops of Rome and Alexandria. We have an excerpt from this decree below:

“To the residents of Constantinople: It is our will that all the peoples whom the government of our clemency rules shall follow that religion which a pious belief from Peter to the present declares the holy Peter delivered to the Romans, and which it is evident the Pontiff Damascus and Peter, bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic sanctity, follow; that is, that according to the apostolic discipline and evangelical doctrine we believe in the deity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit of equal majesty in a holy trinity. Those who follow this law we command shall be comprised under the name of Catholic Christians; but others, indeed, we require, as insane and raving, to bear the infamy of heretical teaching; their gatherings shall not receive the name of churches; they are to be smitten first with the divine punishment and after that by the vengeance of our indignation, which has divine approval” (CT: 16.1.2; quoted from Ayer, pp 367-368).

This law required that everyone follow the bishops of Rome and Alexandria and believe in the Trinity to receive the title of ‘Catholic Christian.’ Those who did not conform to these principles were to be called insane, raving, and heretical. The meeting places of these groups were no longer to be called churches. The bishop of Rome was, for the first time, formally called Pontiff. This was an ancient Roman title that granted one control over pagan rites in the empire.

The very next year a decree was issued to the proconsul of Asia. All churches were given to those who confessed the Trinity. Any who dissented from the Trinitarian belief and their bishops were declared heretics. The Nicene creed was also upheld (CT: 16.1.3). From this time forward, decrees against non-Catholic groups increased with intensity.

This same year, The Council of Constantinople was held. It is considered the second general council after Nicaea. It upheld the Nicene Creed and condemned many non-conformist groups, including Quartodecimans. In the seventh canon we read:

“Those who from heresy turn to orthodoxy, and to the portion of those who are being saved, we receive according to the following method and custom: Arians, and Macedonians, and **Sabbatians\***, and Novatians, who call themselves Cathari or Aristori, and **Quarto-decimans or Tetradites\*\***, and Apollinarians, we receive, upon their giving a written renunciation [of their errors] and anathematize every heresy which is not in accordance with the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of God. Thereupon, they are first sealed or anointed with the holy oil upon the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, and ears; and when we seal them, we say, The Seal of the gift of the Holy Ghost.” But Eunomians, who are baptized with only one immersion, and Montanists\*\*\*, who are here called Phrygians, and Sabellians, who teach the identity of Father and Son, and do sundry other mischievous things, and [the partisans of] all other heresies -- for there are many such here, particularly among those who come from the country of the Galatians: -- all these, when they desire to turn to orthodoxy, we receive as heathen. On the first day we make them Christians; on the second, catechumens; on the third, we exorcise them by breathing thrice in their face and ears; and thus we instruct them and oblige them to spend some time in the Church, and to hear the Scriptures; and then we baptize them...” (Translated by Henry Percival, p 185).

\* Sabbatians – A splinter group who also kept Passover with the Jewish People (Sozomen, Church History, 7.19; Socrates, Church History, 5.21). This reference must be an interpolation because the group was not formed until years after this council was held.

\*\* Tetradites – This is the Greek form of the Latin word Quarto-deciman.

\*\*\* Montanists were a group connected with Quartodeciman practices according to Stewart-Sykes; see his article “The Asian Context of the New Prophecy and of Epistula Apostolorum.”

This council divided groups deemed heretical into two categories. The first category was required to provide a written statement renouncing their beliefs. They were then obliged to be anointed by a priest on their sensory organs. The canon implies that these people backslid from communion with the Holy Spirit and were being brought back into fellowship with God’s Spirit through their conversion back to orthodoxy. The second category, which included Montanists, were treated as if they were never converted at

all. The council required a stricter reconversion policy for them, including the act of being baptized.

### **Polemic Writers**

Certain clergy within the Roman Church wrote polemic works against Quartodeciman Christians. Some writers, such as Epiphanius and Theodoret, simply said that they were in error and shrugged them off. Others were more virulent and threatened them with the judgment of God, such as John Chrysostom. Below, we will review quotes from them.

“But they have fallen into an error, and one of no small importance, by supposedly following the letter of the Law’s saying, ‘Cursed is he who shall not keep the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month.’...They will keep the Passover on whichever day it is that the fourteenth of the month falls” (Epiphanius, Panarion, 50.1.4, 6; Translated by Frank Williams).

“But on this point the Audians cite the Ordinance of the Apostles, which is held to be dubious by many but is not spurious. For it contains every canonical regulation and no falsification of the faith there—of its confession, or of the church’s order, law and creed... ‘Reckon ye not, but celebrate when your brethren of the circumcision do; celebrate with them’....But the Audians were not aware of the apostles’ intent and the intent of the passage in the Ordinance, and thought that the Paschal Feast should be celebrated with the Jews... And there were altogether fifteen bishops from the circumcision. And at that time, when the circumcised bishops were consecrated at Jerusalem, it was essential that the whole world follow and celebrate with them, so that there would be one concord and agreement, the celebration of one festival. Hence their concern [was] to bring people’s minds into accord for the unity of the church” (ibid, 70.10.1-5; Translated by Frank Williams).

In the first quote, Epiphanius discussed the Quartodecimans. They taught that people were cursed if they did not keep Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan. In the second quote, he discussed the Audians; they were another group similar to Quartodecimans.

They cited the “Didascalia”, which is a document which supposedly described the Apostles’ original teachings. They cited it to say that the Apostles never intended for any believer to change

the date of Passover from the day originally celebrated by the Jewish people. In this context, Epiphanius then reminded the reader that all Christians kept the Passover with the Jewish people so long as the circumcised bishops ruled in Jerusalem. As discussed in chapter two, this ended during the reign of Hadrian in the 130s AD.

Theodoret was the Bishop of Cyrus. He wrote in the early to mid-fifth century. He said the following about Quartodeciman Christians.

“The Quartodeciman heresy has this supposition: they say that the evangelist John preached in Asia and taught them to celebrate the feast of the Pascha on the fourteenth day of the moon. They have a defective understanding of the apostolic tradition for they do not wait for the day of the Lord’s resurrection but might keep the third day, or the fifth, or the Sabbath, or whatever day it might occur, and celebrate with praise the memory of the passion. Moreover they employ falsified acts of apostles and other falsehoods far removed from grace, which they call ‘apocrypha’” (*Compendium of Heretical Tales*, 3.4; Quoted from Stewart-Sykes, p 94).

Theodoret discounts the Quartodeciman claim of Apostolic authority, which was not questioned by earlier writers such as Eusebius. He then referred to alleged writings of the Apostles which supported their practice. This was likely a reference to works such as the *Epistula Apostolorum*.

In the late fourth century, John Chrysostom wrote an extensive polemic work titled *Eight Homilies Against the Jews*. In it, he denounced Jewish people and Christians that practiced anything considered Jewish; this included Quartodecimans. We have included several quotes from him below:

“Christ did keep the Pasch with them. Yet he did not do so with the idea that we should keep the Pasch with them. He did so that he might bring the reality to what foreshadowed the reality...” (idem, 3.3.9).

“Once the reality has come, the type which foreshadowed it is henceforth lost in its own shadow and no longer fills the need. So



do not keep pleading this excuse, but show me that Christ did command us to observe the old Pasch. I am showing you quite the opposite. I am showing you that Christ not only did not command us to keep the festival days but even freed us from the obligation to do so..." (ibid, 3.4.1).

"And so is not the observance of the time annulled among the Jews so that the Pasch may be observed in Jerusalem? Will you not show greater concern for the harmony of the Church than for the season? So that you may seem to be observing the proper days, will you outrage the common Mother of us all and will you cut asunder the Holy Synod? How could you deserve pardon when you choose to commit sins so enormous for no good reason?" (ibid, 3.5.6).

"What, then, are the questions? I will ask each one who is sick with this disease: Are you a Christian? Why, then, this zeal for Jewish practices?" (ibid, 4.3.5).

"Let me say what Elijah said against the Jews. He saw the unholy life the Jews were living: at one time they paid heed to God, at another they worshipped idols. So he spoke some such words as these: 'How long will you limp on both legs? If the Lord our God is with you, come, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.' Let me, too, now say this against these Judaizing Christians. If you judge that Judaism is the true religion, why are you causing trouble to the Church? But if Christianity is the true faith, as it really is, stay in it and follow it. Tell me this. Do you share with us in the mysteries, do you worship Christ as a Christian, do you ask him for blessings, and do you then celebrate the festival with his foes? With what purpose, then, do you come to the church?" (ibid, 4.4.1).

"Consider well, then, the dignity and worth of the man you save. Do not think lightly of the care you show to him. Even if a man gives away more money than you can count, he does not do as great a thing as the man who saves a soul, leads it from its error, and takes it by the hand along the road to godliness. The man who gives to the poor takes away the poor man's hunger; the man who sets a Judaizing Christian straight, wins a victory over godlessness. The first man gave consolation to the poor; the second put a stop to reckless transgression. The first freed the body from pain,

the other snatched a soul from the fires of hell” (ibid, 6.7.9).

In other places, John claimed that it is impossible to keep Passover and Unleavened Bread outside of Jerusalem (ibid, 4.4.3-4, 4.5.4-5). This was part of his argument that no one, not even Jewish people, could keep Passover. As previously discussed, Jewish people were banned from Jerusalem at that time.

John’s writing is filled with demeaning content towards Jewish people and Christians who followed those practices labeled as Jewish. In his eyes, both groups were condemned to hell. This severe rhetoric was aimed at pressuring and coercing people to conform to the ‘orthodox’ practice, including that of Pascha. Later in this chapter, we will look at more coercive measures that Chrysostom took towards these believers.

### **Roman Laws**

Roman law was another method by which Paschal conformity was imposed on others. There were two categories of laws that impacted this subject. The first was a series of laws which recognized the festival and regulated activities during it. The second kind punished heretics; this included those who observed Pascha at a time different than the Roman Church.

The first category of laws on this subject granted the Roman Pascha recognition by the imperial government. Specific legal activities were accordingly adjusted as part of this recognition. The process started between 367-369 when two laws were enacted that allowed for certain criminals, such as those who did not commit heinous crimes, to be released from confinement for the season (CT: 9.38.3-4). This activity has some precedent in ancient Roman celebrations such as Saturnalia (see Lucian, *Saturnalia*, section 8).

Another law was issued between 368-370 which granted the same criminals pardons at the Paschal season (CT: 9.35.4). Eventually, high treason was excluded from such pardons (9.38.8 [386 AD]). Religious dissenters could be considered guilty of high treason depending on the interpretation of certain laws (see CT: 16.1.4 [386 AD]).

The next stage towards imperial promotion of this holiday was to

mandate that legal proceedings and other public events be suspended during the festivities. This forced the average person to be aware of the Roman Pascha because public activities were restricted. Moreover, these injunctions would automatically place any alternative reckoning as contrary to recognized law.

The quotes from the Codex Theodosianus come from Pharr's translation. Because this work is not in the public domain yet, I have left the translation of Easter unchanged. The underlying Latin word is still Pascha or Paschae. Sometimes these words are correctly rendered as Paschal or Passover.

“CT: 2.8.19 Emperors Valentinian, Theodosius, and Arcadius Augustuses to Albinus, Prefect of the City. We order all days to be court days. It shall be lawful for only those days to remain as holidays which throughout two months a very indulgent year has recognized as a respite from toil for the mitigation of summer heat and for the harvesting of the autumn crops. 1. We also set aside the kalends of January (January 1) as a customary rest day. 2. To the aforementioned days We add the natal days of the greatest cities, Rome (April 21) and Constantinople (May 11), to which the law ought to defer, since it also was born of them. 3. We count the same category the holy Paschal days, of which seven follow Easter;\* likewise the Days of the Sun which revolve upon themselves at regular intervals. 4. It is necessary for Our anniversaries also to be held in equal reverence, that is, both the day which brought forth the auspicious beginning of Our life and the day which produced the beginning of Our imperial power” – August 7, 389 (English: Pharr, p 44; Latin: Haenel, p 210). This law is repeated in CJ: 3.12.6

\*The term Easter is not in the text.

“CT: 2.8.21 – The same Augustuses to Tatianus, Praetorian Prefect. All legal actions whether public or private shall be excluded from the fifteen Paschal days. Given second consulship of Arcadius Augustus and the consulship of Rufinus” – May 27, 392 (Pharr, pp 44-45).

“CT: 2.8.24 The same Augustuses to Aurelianus, Praetorian Prefect. Out of respect for religion We provide and decree that on the seven days of Quadragesima\* and on seven Paschal days, when

through religious observances and fasts men's sins are purged, and also on the birthday and on Epiphany, spectacles shall not be produced" – February 4, 400; 405 (English: Pharr, p 45; Latin: Haenel, pp 212-213).

\*Quadragesima was a seven-day period before Passover that included fasting. In the Eastern tradition, the Sabbath was never a fast day except during this period.

"CT: 15.5.5 – The same Augustus and Valentinian Caesar to Asclepiodotus, Praetorian Prefect. On the following occasions all amusements of the theaters and the circuses shall be denied throughout all cities to the people thereof, and the minds of Christians and of the faithful shall be wholly occupied in the worship of God: namely, on the Lord's Day, which is the first day of the whole week, on the Natal Day and Epiphany of Christ, and on the day of Easter\* and of Pentecost, as long as the vestalments that imitate the light of the celestial font attest to the new light of holy baptism; at the time also when the commemoration of the Apostolic Passion, the teacher of all Christianity, is fully celebrated by everyone. If any persons even now are enslaved by the madness of the Jewish impiety or the error and insanity of stupid paganism, they must know that there is a time for prayer and a time for pleasure. No man shall suppose that in the case of spectacles in honor of our Divine Majesty he is, as it were, under some major compulsion by reason of the necessity in his duty to the Emperor, and that he will incur for himself the displeasure of Our Serenity unless he should neglect the divine religion and should give attention to such spectacles and if he should show less devotion to Us than customary. Let no one doubt that then especially is devotion paid to our Clemency by humankind, when the reverence of the whole earth is paid to the virtues and merits of the omnipotent God" – Feb. 1 425 AD (English: Pharr, p 433; Latin: Haenel, pp 1453-1454). This law is repeated in CT: 2.8.19 and CJ: 3.12.6.

\*The Latin word translated as Easter is paschae.

The laws listed above were decreed between 389-425 AD. They set the precedent that the Roman Church method of calculating Pascha was to be recognized by imperial law and the legal system. Constantine laid the foundation for this recognition at Nicaea. Later emperors who were more involved with the Roman

Church deepened that recognition with specific legislation. Over time, all legal activities and certain businesses were suspended for the seven days prior to Pascha, the day of Pascha, and seven days afterwards. On some years this would include some or all those days which were observed by Quartodeciman Christians. This made it difficult for those trying to marginalize their practice.

The second category of Roman laws that impacted Quartodecimans were those which condemned heretics. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Church Councils started to define, standardize, and codify certain beliefs and practices as ‘heretical’ in the fourth century. In the latter part of the same century, punishments against groups deemed ‘heretical’ became codified as Roman law.

This development was brought to fruition through the intertwining of Roman Church and Roman State. While this process started under Constantine, it was made definite and complete during the reign of Theodosius. The latter made the Roman Church a state-regulated institution. As discussed earlier in this chapter, he tried to force everyone to become Roman Catholic. All others were condemned.

At times, Theodosian laws relating to religion were fanatical. People were not allowed to discuss religious matters in public (CT: 16.4.1 [388 AD]). If they violated this, they could be punished. Anyone caught disturbing the “Catholic faith” was to be exiled (CT: 16.4.3 [392 AD]). Non-Roman Catholic groups were banned from owning church buildings or assembling. Theodosius tried to intimidate people into conformity.

These laws also regulated the Roman Church. There were laws which codified the office of deaconess and its qualifications (CT: 16.2.27 [390 AD]). Some laws prevented the clergy from serving in the public arena and granted them tax exemption. Later rulers built upon this precedent. After the reign of Theodosius, more laws regulated the ordination of clergy (CT: 16.2.33 [398 AD]). Catholic clerics were even exempt from paying taxes on the buying and selling of food up to a certain amount (CT: 16.2.36 [401 AD]).

In 382, a law was enacted which condemned a heretical group called the Manichaeans to be intestate. That means a person could

not leave an inheritance to the next generation. Their goods were confiscated at death. Various other groups were condemned to death.

Christians who observed an alternative timing for Pascha were also condemned in the same manner! The end of the law reads: “Furthermore, investigation shall be made with the greatest care, so that if any person should not convene on the same day for Easter, in obedience to religion, they shall undoubtedly be considered as persons whom We have condemned by this law” (CT: 16.5.9; Pharr, p 452).

As aforementioned, sects condemned by Catholic Church were not allowed to assemble or have churches. Their practices were banned. Their houses of worship were to be confiscated by the imperial government at the feast of Pascha (CT: 16.5.12 [383 AD]). From this law it appears that they utilized the Pascha timing to determine who followed the Roman rite versus alternative dating for the day. Heretics were banned from cities, such as Rome (CT: 16.5.62 [425 AD]).

Two other laws, one from 413 and another from 423, expressed similar condemnation of non-conformists on this subject.

“CT: 16.6.6 by Honorius and Theodosius. Furthermore, We do not permit to go unavenged that transgression which was disregarded by the Emperors in former times and is practiced by accursed men in violation of the sacred law, and especially by those deserters and fugitives from the company of the Novatians who strive to be considered the authors rather than the more powerful persons of the aforesaid sect, whose name is derived from the crime, inasmuch as they wish to be called **Protopaschites**. But if the Novatians should suppose that the day of Easter, noteworthy and commemorated through the ages, ought to be celebrated on another day than that observed by the bishops of the orthodox, deportation as well as proscription shall pursue the authors of such assemblies. Against such persons an even more severe punishment ought to have been promulgated, since in this crime they even surpass the insanity of the heretics by observing the festival of Easter at another time than that of the orthodox, and thus they venerate almost another Son of God than the one whom We worship – March 21, 413” (Pharr, p 465; emphasis mine).

Protopaschites is a Greek term meaning “the first Pascha.” These Christians kept Pascha at the same time as the Jewish people. Some commentators view this as a reference to the Sabbatians (see Pharr, p 584).

“The Manichaeans and those who are called Pepyzitae [Montanists] and also those who by this one opinion are worse than all heretics, in that they dissent from all as to the venerable day of the Easter festival, we subject to the same punishment, viz.: confiscation of goods and exile, if they persist in the same unreason” (CT: 16.10.24 [423 AD]; also in CJ: 1.11.16; Ayer’s translation, p 372).

The intertwining of Roman Church and Roman state paved the way for celebrations of the Roman Church, including Sunday and Pascha, to be enshrined as Roman law. It also enabled the marginalization of non-conformist groups. Another law from 428 summarizes the difficult situation these groups faced. It reads:

“Arians, Macedonians, Pneumatomachians, Appollinarians, Novatians or Sabatians, Eunomians, Tetradites or Tessarecaidecadites... Paulians....Donatists, Audians...Paulinists, (and others) who are to be classed as guilty of the worst of all heretical crimes, shall never have the power to assemble or reside in the Roman Empire... Moreover, all laws which have formerly, at different times, been enacted against them and others who are opposed to our religion, shall always be observed in all their force, whether they have reference to donations made in assemblies of heretics, which they audaciously attempt to designate as churches, or to property left under any circumstances by a last will, or to private buildings in which they meet, either with the permission or connivance of the owner, and which should be claimed by us for the Holy Catholic Church; or whether they refer to an agent who has acted without the knowledge of his principal, who, if he is free born, shall be subject to a fine of ten pounds of gold, and if he is of a servile condition, shall be sentenced to the mines, after having been scourged; so that they can not assemble in any public place, or build their so-called churches, and can plan nothing for the evasion of the laws; and no assistance, either civil or military, shall be furnished them by either curiae, defenders, or judges, under the penalty of twenty pounds of gold. All laws which have

been promulgated with reference to the army, to various penalties, and to different kinds of heretics, shall remain in full force, so that no special privilege shall be valid as against said laws” (CJ: 1.5.5 [428 AD]; translation from Scott).

This last law summarizes the dire situation that these groups faced. First, notice that the emperors identified the Roman Church as ‘their’ religion. Secondly, non-conformist groups were exiled from the entire Roman Empire. Third, it recalled previous laws on the subject and required that they be stringently enforced. Anyone caught assisting these groups were fined and could be severely punished.

Essentially, this second category of laws pertaining to Pascha took most civil protections away from groups considered heretical. Some Quartodeciman groups did persist for a while into the future, but their numbers and influence were greatly diminished. The label of heresy carried with it penalties that dissuaded most people from association with these practices.

### **Were these edicts ever enforced?**

As aforementioned, Theodosius started the trend of coercive laws against non-conformist groups like Quartodecimans. Sozomen, an early Christian historian, informed us that this ruler chose not to enforce the worst of them.

“The emperor, after receiving their formularies, expressed himself in favor of that one alone in which consubstantiality of the Trinity was recognized...[he] enacted a law, prohibiting heretics from holding churches, from giving public instructions in the faith, and from conferring ordination on bishops or others. Some of the herodox were expelled from the cities and villages, while others were disgraced and deprived of the privileges enjoyed by other subjects of the empire. Great as were the punishments adjudged by the laws against heretics, they were not always carried into execution, for the emperor had no desire to persecute his subjects; he only desired to enforce uniformity of view about God through the medium of intimidation...” (*Church History*, 7.12).

While Theodosius chose not to enforce his worst edicts, keep in mind that they became legal precedent. This explains why some later laws, such as CJ: 1.5.5, reviewed above, required that previ-



ous laws be properly enforced. After his reign, there are some recorded instances where the punishments proscribed by these decrees were carried out.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, John Chrysostom was a virulent anti-Semitic teacher of that time. He was also the bishop of Constantinople from 398-403. Socrates Scholasticus recorded the following about his actions in Asia.

“And as it happened at that time that the bishop of Ephesus died, John was obliged to go to Ephesus for the purpose of ordaining a successor...Having therefore among other matters deprived many of the Novatians and Quartodecimans of their churches, he returned to Constantinople” (*Church History*, 6.11).

“Others, however, asserted that John had been deservedly deposed, because of the violence he had exercised in Asia and Lydia, in depriving the Novatians and Quartodecimans of many of their churches, when he went to Ephesus and ordained Heraclides” (*ibid*, 6.19).

John went to Ephesus to resolve an issue about who should be the bishop of that city. While there, he deprived Novatians and Quartodecimans of their church buildings (the mention of Novatians could be a reference to Sabbatians). Not long after this, John was deposed from his position. Socrates claimed that some people of that time thought this happened because he exercised violence towards non-conformist groups when he took away their buildings.

If his actions matched the hostility of his written and oral rhetoric, then one could hardly be surprised he did such things. The weight of imperial law also supported his behavior. Thus, his violence would be justified in his own mind and by the imperial government.

Nestorius was the archbishop of Constantinople from 428-431. This was about the time that CJ: 1.5.5 was enacted. He also persecuted religious dissidents with violence. Socrates related the following concerning these events:

“...After the death of Sisinnius, on account of the spirit of ambi-

tious rivalry displayed by the ecclesiastics of Constantinople, the emperors resolved that none of that church should fill the vacant bishopric, notwithstanding the fact that many eagerly desired to have Philip ordained, and no less a number were in favor of the election of Proclus. They therefore sent for a stranger from Antioch, whose name was Nestorius, a native of Germanicia, distinguished for his excellent voice and fluency of speech; qualifications which they judged important for the instruction of the people...

...Being ordained on the 10th of April, under the consulate of Felix and Taurus, he immediately uttered those famous words, before all the people, in addressing the emperor, 'Give me, my prince, the earth purged of heretics, and I will give you heaven as a recompense. Assist me in destroying heretics, and I will assist you in vanquishing the Persians.' Now although these utterances were extremely gratifying to some of the multitude, who cherished a senseless antipathy to the very name of heretic...

...Accordingly on the fifth day after his ordination, having determined to demolish a chapel in which the Arians were accustomed to perform their devotions privately, he drove these people to desperation; for when they saw the work of destruction going forward in their chapel, they threw fire into it, and the fire spreading on all sides reduced many of the adjacent buildings also to ashes...

...For he could not rest, but seeking every means of harassing those who embraced not his own sentiments, he continually disturbed the public tranquility. He annoyed the Novatians also, being incited to jealousy because Paul their bishop was everywhere respected for his piety; but the emperor by his admonitions checked his fury. With what calamities he visited the Quartodecimans throughout Asia, Lydia, and Caria, and what multitudes perished in a popular tumult of which he was the cause at Miletus and Sardis, I think proper to pass by in silence..." (ibid, 7.29).

There are many fascinating details in this account of Nestorius' early years of service. First, we learn that the emperors chose him for the position rather than other Christian leaders. This exemplifies the control over church matters that these leaders wielded. Roman laws dictating various aspects of the church paved the

way for this power to be exerted by them. Christian leaders apparently accepted such intervention.

Second, we learn about Nestorius' initial sermon. In it, he claimed that God would grant the emperors heaven and victory over the Persians, an ancient enemy, if they would rid the empire of heretics. Socrates described the "senseless antipathy" held by the population for heretics. The influence of Church Councils, polemic writings, and Roman Law contributed to such this public attitude.

Nestorius then sought to show his zeal for the cause by having a chapel of the Arians demolished. He caused many troubles for Quartodeciman Christians in western Asia Minor. Apparently, many people were even put to death! His aggressive rhetoric may have incited mob violence against them.

While unconscionable, the actions of Nestorius and even John Chrysostom were merely following established Roman Law towards non-conformists (which sometimes included the penalty of death). These leaders were not stopped because they followed the will of the imperial government as defined by law. While these are only two examples of this behavior, we would expect that it happened in other places (but without more sources we are, at this time, unaware of the frequency and severity).

These violent acts were a by-product of the intertwining of Church and State which began many decades before these events. The 'will of God' could be viewed from either side of the coin – state or church. A state-sponsored church leader like Nestorius had to prove his zeal for orthodoxy and the emperors because the state was deeply connected to the Roman Church. Heretical groups were viewed as a threat to the religion of the emperors. The Roman Church defined heretical groups and then the Roman Emperors codified these definitions as law and prescribed punishments for them. At times they were carried out.

Another point to be emphasized in these sources is that Quartodeciman practice still existed in the fifth century. This means that the group did not instantly disappear in previous times. Due to the continual pressure from Church Councils, Polemic Writings, Roman Law, and Force, Quartodeciman Christians were reduced to a

small minority. Their civil rights were taken from them. Being involved with or connected to the group was dangerous for multiple reasons. These factors certainly hindered interest and participation in their observance.

And so Quartodeciman Christians were scattered to the wind. In the conclusion, we will offer some final thoughts on this subject and examine to what degree, if any, this subject impacted the seventh-day Sabbath.

## Conclusion

The observance of Passover connected the Judaic origins of Christianity to the renewed meaning found through Jesus' suffering and death. The early disciples of Jesus maintained the same meeting date for this observance – the fourteenth of Nisan. This is the Apostolic Pascha.

In the second century, at least seven influences converged and impacted the original Christian teaching on this subject. They include the passing of the early Apostles, persecution, anti-Semitism, the destruction of Jerusalem in 130s, heresy, syncretism, and allegorizing Scripture. These factors created an environment by which people were pulled away from practices which appeared Judaic.

These influences resulted in the development of a newer celebration which changed both the date and the focus of Pascha. The new date was concerned more with a specific day of the week (Sunday) rather than the fourteenth of Nisan. The focus was also adjusted to the resurrection rather than the suffering and death of Jesus. Rome seems to be the first city to engage in this phenomenon.

The attempt to alter the original Apostolic Pascha was so serious that Polycarp, a disciple of the first Apostles, traveled to Rome. He attempted to persuade Anicetus, the bishop of Rome, to return to the original practice. He was unsuccessful in this effort. While in Rome, Polycarp also confronted the Gnostic leaders who were twisting the original teachings of Jesus and the Apostles. They were major contributors for the move away from the Apostolic Pascha. The anti-Judaic views of these teachers likely contributed to the idea of extending the pre-paschal fast to beyond the fourteenth of Nisan so as to distinguish themselves from practices considered Jewish.

After this initial conflict in the Quartodeciman Controversy, subsequent disputes arose. This included those in Laodicea, the Ro-

man schism involving Blastus, and the vigorous dispute between Polycrates and Victor. In the process, other cities altered their Pascha celebration. The latter of these episodes occurred about forty years or one generation after Polycarp.

Once the believers in Rome and other areas decided to change the Apostolic Pascha, confusion arose about when exactly to keep this new celebration (which might be properly called the Roman Pascha). This second phase was a logical result of altering the original practice. The Bible defines the date of Passover as the fourteenth of Nisan. The symbols used in Passover, such as the lamb, bitter herb, unleavened Bread, and *aphikomen*, were transferrable to the concept of Jesus' suffering and death. The new celebration did not have such a defined date in the Scriptures and lacked the symbols established in the Old Testament.

This confusion resulted in multiple ways to keep Pascha in the Christian world. The Quartodeciman Christians remained unconfused as they adhered to the teachings which were defined in the Scriptures and practiced by the Apostles. They tended to live in Asia Minor and other places in the east.

In the fourth century, the mainstream Christian view began to consolidate around the Roman Church. Starting with some internal disputes, the opportunity existed for the Roman Church to assert its timing and practice of Pascha as foremost among all others. It would be affirmed at church councils, polemic writings, Roman Law, and by acts of force.

In the third phase of this controversy, the full fury of the 'orthodox' party was unleashed on Quartodeciman Christians. While they were not as numerous as their opposition, they were peacefully holding onto the mantle of Apostolic practice concerning Passover. The mere existence of Quartodeciman Christians was a thorn in the side of the Roman Church. Why did they have such a fierce reaction?

One's view of the Pascha greatly impacted one's view of church history, specifically the concept of Apostolic succession. Which Pascha practice had a more accurate Apostolic claim?

The Roman Church leaders had to squelch other views so that

they could continue to assert their alternative view of Church History. Their very authority to dictate ‘orthodoxy’ to other churches rested on their ability to control the historical narrative concerning Pascha—by whatever means necessary. Quartodeciman groups were the ultimate enemy because they threatened to upend the foundation of their power structure.

The Roman Church claimed (and still claims) that Peter and Paul instituted their Paschal practice. It is one of the fundamental beliefs underpinning their belief in Apostolic succession. If it is not true (and it is not), then the house falls. The evidence is severely lacking for their claim.

As reviewed at the end of chapter three, the province of Asia was saturated by multiple Apostolic influences. This included Paul, Peter, Timothy, John, and Philip. If anyone could claim Apostolic influence, then this region could do it. The examples of these leaders and the New Testament writings are complementary to the Quartodeciman cause and contrary to the claims of Rome concerning Pascha.

While the Quartodeciman practice in Asia has the backdrop of Apostolic influence, the Roman Church practice of Pascha has the backdrop of anti-Semitism, Gnosticism, and syncretism. The Christians of Rome were not influenced by as many Apostles. Those which certainly influenced it, such as Paul, did not do so for a very long time. The Neronian persecution likely removed much of the Apostolic Christian authority from the Christian community of Rome in the 60s AD. This made the city more vulnerable to outside influences from that point forward. Asia Minor retained Apostolic influence decades longer than this date. Furthermore, Rome is a significant distance from the epicenter of Christian beginnings.

These points bring us to another subject: to what extent, if any, did the Quartodeciman Controversy affect the Sabbath?

Like the Apostolic Pascha, the seventh-day Sabbath was an ancient institution connecting Christianity to its Judaic roots. It also received a renewed meaning in Christ, as He proclaimed Himself Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28). The early disciples also obeyed His example and gathered on the day with Jews and Gen-

tiles (for examples, see Acts 13:13-48, 16:11-15, 17:1-4, 18:1-5).

By the time of Victor, the Roman Church kept Passover on the first Sunday after the 14th of Nisan. From the position of a once-a-year observance, pro-Roman Church writers pushed for weekly observances. Friday was promoted as a day of fasting because they believed Christ died on that day. Weekly Sunday services were pushed because they believed Christ resurrected on that day.

Tertullian (155-220) remarked about the weekly Friday fast and Sunday gatherings; he called Sunday the ‘day of the Lord’s resurrection.’ He wrote the following: “Why do we devote to Stations the fourth and sixth days of the week, and to fasts the preparation-day?” (*On Fasting*, 14). “We, however (just as we have received), only on the day of the Lord’s Resurrection ought to guard not only against kneeling, but every posture and office of solicitude...” (*On Prayer*, 23).

By the time of Tertullian, some Christians attempted to extend the Friday fast over into the Sabbath. In his work *On Fasting*, which we quoted earlier, he stated: “Why do we devote to Stations the fourth and sixth days of the week, and to fasts the preparation-day? Anyhow, you sometimes continue your Station even over the Sabbath — a day never to be kept as a fast except at the pass-over season, according to a reason elsewhere given...” (idem, 14).

The practice of fasting on every Sabbath is first found among the Gnostic writers such as Marcion. It was a way to denigrate the day and rob it of any connection to the Creator God. By the time of Eusebius (early fourth century), it became more common in the West to fast on Friday and Sabbath and then meet on Sunday. He wrote: “But we celebrate these same mysteries throughout the whole year, commemorating the passion of the Saviour by fasting on every day before the Sabbath [that is, Friday]...and on every Lord’s day [Sunday] being revived by the sanctified body of the same saving Pascha...” (*De Solemnitate Paschali*, quoted by Odom, p 287)

In another place, Eusebius claimed that these weekly practices replaced the once-a-year meeting for Passover. “Those with Moses killed the lamb of the Passover once in every year toward



evening on the fourteenth (day) of the first lunar month; but we, those of the new covenant [who are] observing the Pascha on every Lord's day [Sunday], are always satisfying ourselves with the body of the Saviour, always partake of the blood of the Lamb... Wherefore, also, in every week we perform the feast of our Pascha on the salutary and Lord's Day [Sunday], fulfilling the mysteries of the true Lamb by whom we are redeemed" (ibid, p 286). This reasoning requires a heavy use of allegory.

If the establishment of a Sunday Pascha service yearly and weekly is not supported by either Scripture and Apostolic practice, then where did it come from?

In the second century, non-Scriptural traditions became entrenched in Christian practice. In chapter three, we reviewed Irenaeus' discussion of various pre-Paschal fasts which existed at this time. All of them were established by tradition.

In two works, *The Chaplet* and *On Fasting*, Tertullian discussed the importance of tradition in establishing Christian practice. In the first work, he wrote:

"If no passage of Scripture has prescribed it, assuredly custom, which without doubt flowed from tradition, has confirmed it..." (idem, chapter 3). He then goes through a list of Christian practices that did not have Scriptural injunction – this included a ceremony some believers added to the practice of baptism. He went on to say:

"We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord's day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Pascha to Whitsunday...If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer..." (ibid, chapters 3 and 4).

In his work *On Fasting*, he wrote: "We, however (just as tradition has taught us), on the day of the Lord's Resurrection ought to guard not only against kneeling, but every posture and office of solicitude, deferring even our businesses lest we give any place to the devil" (Catholic Encyclopedia: Sunday).

In Migne's edition of *On Fasting*, the text note (c) mentions that these practices are accepted on the authority of tradition (PL 1:1191). In the early fourth century, Eusebius wrote more about this subject. An excerpt from his exposition on Psalm 92 is found below:

"...All things whatsoever it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's (day) [Sunday], as more appropriately belonging to it, the chief, and first, and more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath. For on this same (day), in the creation of the world, God said: 'Let there be light, and there was light' [Genesis 1:3]; and on it the Sun of righteousness rose [to shine] upon our souls....Wherefore it also has been handed down by tradition to us to assemble ourselves together on this (day), and it is required that we do [on it] the things which have been commanded by this psalm" (idem; translation from Odom, p 292).

In this quote, Eusebius admitted that the concept of 'transferring' the Sabbath rest from the seventh day to the 'Lord's Day' was not done by Jesus or the early disciples. He clearly stated that 'we', meaning the Roman Church, transferred it. It was established by tradition. Bible verses were later taken out of context to justify its existence.

In other writings, Tertullian advocated for the continuity of the Sabbath (see *Against Marcion*, 4.12). In it, he stated that Christ did not come to introduce anything new. This statement is contrary to other writings, such as those we have reviewed, which advocate for innovation.

"O Pharisee, and you too, O Marcion, how that it was proper employment for the Creator's Sabbaths of old to do good, to save life, not to destroy it; how that **Christ introduced nothing new**, which was not after the example, the gentleness, the mercy, and the prediction also of the Creator..." (ibid; emphasis mine).

But traditions do not appear out of thin air. There must be background material to assist in formulating these new observances. Scripture was not the original basis for the observance of Sunday

celebrations; Christian meaning was added later. Then what writings or source materials were used to justify its existence?

Clement of Alexandria was a major influence on early Christian thought (we discussed him in previous chapters). In his work *Stromata*, he gave a long discourse comparing the writings of Plato with Christianity. In it, he wrote:

“And the Lord’s day Plato prophetically speaks of in the tenth book of the Republic, in these words: And when seven days have passed to each of them in the meadow, on the eighth they are to set out and arrive in four days. By the meadow is to be understood the fixed sphere, as being a mild and genial spot, and the locality of the pious; and by the seven days each motion of the seven planets, and the whole practical art which speeds to the end of rest. But after the wandering orbs the journey leads to heaven, that is, to the eighth motion and day. And he says that souls are gone on the fourth day, pointing out the passage through the four elements. But the seventh day is recognised as sacred, not by the Hebrews only, but also by the Greeks; according to which the whole world of all animals and plants revolve” (*Stromata*, 5.14).

He claimed that the ‘Lord’s Day’ was prophetically spoken of by the writings of Plato. It is interesting that he did not appeal to the Old Testament or even the New Testament as the source of the practice. He utilized Greek philosophy as a prophetic source for Christian practice; this is a form of syncretism.

Tertullian, writing at a similar time, defended Christians who met on Sunday from the accusation of Sunday worship. We have two quotes from his writings below.

“Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the god of the Christians, because it is a well-known fact that we pray towards the east, or because we make Sunday a day (Latin: *precationem vel die solis, laetitiam curare*) of festivity. What then? Do you do less than this?... It is you, at all events, who have even admitted the sun into the calendar of the week; and you have selected its day, in preference to the preceding day as the most suitable in the week for either an entire abstinence from the bath, or for its postponement until the evening, or for taking rest and for banqueting... (*Ad Nationes*,

1.13).

“Others, again, certainly with more information and greater verisimilitude, believe that the sun (Latin: *solem*) is our god. We shall be counted Persians perhaps, though we do not worship the orb of day painted on a piece of linen cloth, having himself everywhere in his own disk. The idea no doubt has originated from our being known to turn to the east in prayer. But you, many of you, also under pretence sometimes of worshipping the heavenly bodies, move your lips in the direction of the sunrise. In the same way, if we devote Sun-day (*diem solis*) to rejoicing (*laetitiae indulgemus*), from a far different reason than Sun-worship (*religione solis*)...” (*Apology*, 1.16).

These excerpts mark the first time that Christians had to defend themselves from the accusation of sun worship. The lines between polytheistic worship and that of Christian worship were becoming increasingly blurred by the early second century.

These quotes allow us to understand that Greek philosophy and other religions, such as sun worship, were influential sources for Sunday gatherings. The research of this work, especially in chapter three, allows us to add Gnosticism as another contributing factor. Anti-Semitism was also a driving force to find alternative material upon which to base new Christian practices or edit existing ones, such as altering the pre-Paschal fast. Outside influences contributed to an alternative Pascha feast.

Some of these influences may have started in Rome even before the second century. By the end of the first century, Clement I wrote to the Corinthians and compared the resurrection to the phoenix from Greek mythology (*idem*, chapters 25-26).

The new Roman Pascha practice had a definite starting point. Said another way, there were specific individuals who chose to start this practice on a specific date. While we do not know the exact date that the practice started, the details in this work narrow down the time frame when this tradition was introduced – the second century. It was an epoch when outside influences impacted Christian teaching and practice. No example in the New Testament or immediate Apostolic writers hint at the observance of the Roman Pascha.

The Quartodeciman Controversy was part of a movement led by the Church of Rome to abandon any practices considered 'Jewish.' The decision to institute a new celebration eventually contributed to the Roman Church abandoning the seventh-day Sabbath and replacing it with a weekly Sunday gathering. Fasting on Friday and into the Sabbath were also established. Most Christians, especially in the East, resisted this trend (Augustine, *Letters* 36.4 and 82.14; John Cassian, *Institutes*, 3.9). In the early fifth century, Innocent I tried to require the practice (Epistle 25.4). Despite this development, most Christians in the fifth century still observed the seventh-day Sabbath (see *Constantine and the Sabbath* by McDonald, pp 55-60).

The Quartodeciman Controversy is among the most significant events in early Church history. It marked a starting point where some Christians departed from practices connected to Jesus and the Apostles. This of course gave way to significant variations of practice among Christians on this subject until the fourth century. At that time, attempts were made to consolidate all believers into one standardized practice. Even then, differences remained and have remained down to the present.

The third phase of this Controversy, Forced Conformity, was the hardest for Quartodeciman Christians to overcome. While a group can overcome peer pressure and slander, the force of the imperial government in writing and action was much harder to resist. While they became outcasts, the practice itself would outlast these attempts.

Those who held to the Apostolic practice were scattered to the wind. Some Christian groups have held to some form of Quartodeciman practice over the centuries, including the Paulician, Tetradoti, and Passagini. In modern times, there has been a revival of the practice.

## Appendix A

### Melito's *On Pascha*

Overall, the homily appears to be a Christian Haggadah for Passover night or a sermon giving instructions to believers about the Christian meaning behind the feast. The beginning of the work gives the impression that the Scriptures about the Exodus in the Old Testament have been read. Melito then proceeds to connect the death of the physical lamb in Exodus 12 with Christ as the true lamb who appeared as man and God. The author summarizes how Christ is all things – the law, the word, grace, and the Father, yet He suffered as a lamb.

Melito then recounts the story of the Israelites suffering in Egypt and their deliverance from that place through the hand of Moses. He described the Passover night from Exodus 12 – the sacrifice of physical lamb, the death angel, and the wailing of Egypt. He then turned his attention to Jesus as the Lamb of God who died as the reality of those events.

From his viewpoint, the Lamb of God replaced the sacrifice of a physical lamb. Despite this view, he still extolled the importance of the Old Testament in pre-figuring the greater glory of the realities in Christ. Some readers could interpret his message as teaching against Old Testament practices. A better view is that Melito retains appreciation for God's work in the past but puts greater weight on Christ's work in bringing about the true, deeper spiritual meaning to them. After all, to Melito Christ is God. We know that they retained the ancient Pascha with a renewed meaning in Christ – so the attempt to demean or diminish the Old Testament practices is lacking.

The author then opened a new segment with a discussion about the creation account in Genesis. He placed a special focus on the creation of mankind and the fall of mankind through the deception of the serpent. He then explained that mankind fell into lawlessness, destruction, and death because of original sin. The discussion is continued as Melito described the depravity of mankind utilizing specific sins that describe the depth of that fall.

This segment becomes the foundational reason that the paschal mystery, Jesus, was necessary for all humanity. Thus, the sacrifice of Jesus was foretold in Law and prophets as mankind continued his spiral downward. Melito then appealed to Old Testament persons such as Abel who foreshadowed the perfect Lamb. He emphasized that Jesus died not just for just one nation, but for all humanity.

There is then a lengthy segment blaming Israel for slaying the Lord. During it, he explains that it was Jesus who freed the Israelites from Egypt, provided for them in the desert, gave them the law, and helped them many times over the centuries. He discussed their suffering and destruction because they forsook the Lord, which most likely refers to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

Melito concludes the homily with a call for all of humanity to come to Jesus, the Passover of salvation so that the stain of sin can be washed away by His blood. In this conclusion, he referred to the suffering of Jesus on earth, but the glory He received after the resurrection when he was seated at the right hand of the Father in Heaven.

The hostile attitude towards Israel is contradictory considering the overall content. He blamed Israel because for Jesus' death, yet claims that Jesus had to die because all humans sinned. If Jesus had to die for all humanity, then why would Israel alone be blamed for His death? In this section of Melito's writing, we can see the influence of anti-Semitic rhetoric on Christian writers discussed in chapter two of this work.

Despite the hostility expressed by Melito towards Israel, he maintained a strong connection between the Old Testament and the Christian Passover. Therefore, his work does not present a complete rejection of the Old Testament. After all, the practice of Pascha comes from the Israelite people.

Melito's work emphasized the importance of Old Testament, especially as it relates to Passover. In two places, Melito calls Christ the *aphikomenos* (sections 66, 86). This provides a direct connection between the Jewish Passover service and early Christian perspective on it. The *aphikomen* was a piece of unleavened

bread used at the Passover service and is connected to the Messianic hope (Stewart-Sykes, p 54). In the work, Melito uses *aphikomenos* in relation to Christ bringing healing to human suffering and eventually resurrection from the dead. Unleavened bread with bitter herbs is mentioned in reference to the bitterness Israel has experienced for rejecting the Lord (section 93).

The author expressed a strong appreciation for God's work through Israel in the Old Testament. He recognizes that the true God is at work in those events and that it was Christ all along who brought them about. As aforementioned, he utilized multiple characters from the Old Testament as foreshadowing Jesus. This theology is very consistent with the Gospel of John (see John 1:14-17, 5:45-46, 6:25-40) and echoes Paul (I Cor. 10:1-13). At the same time, Melito's focus is the supremacy of Christ, who is the true Lamb. More than just redeeming a nation, Christ redeems all of humanity from sin.

The overall content of this work is very much anti-Gnostic whether it was intended or not. I find it hard to believe that anti-Gnostic themes were not intentionally placed in this work (at least to some degree). This is especially true considering the urgency expressed by other authors from a similar time, such as Irenaeus and Polycarp, to suppress Gnostic writings.

To read more about the manuscript history of this work, I highly recommend Stuart Hall's translation of Melito of Sardis (idem, pp xvii-xxii). There are some writers who cast doubt upon the authorship (see Cohick, "Melito of Sardis's 'Peri Pascha' and Its 'Israel'"). In my view, Melito's authorship retains the preponderance of the evidence as presented by Hall and Stewart-Sykes.



## Appendix B

### *Epistula Apostolorum*

In 1895, a manuscript titled *Epistula Apostolorum* in Coptic was discovered by Carl Schmidt at the French Archaeological Institute in Cairo, Egypt. The document dated to the fourth or fifth century. In 1908, a Latin manuscript containing some of the same document was released. In 1910, the complete text was discovered in Ethiopic by Abbé Guerrier, who then released a French version.

In 1919, Schmidt and Wajnberg released a joint work combining all known manuscripts up to that time (Lake, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, pp 334-335). The next year, scholar Kirsopp Lake composed a review of their work for the *Journal of Theological Studies*. He later composed another critical review for the *Harvard Theological Review*.

Lake considered the work to be of ‘first rate importance’ (*Harvard Theological Review*, p 16). He compared it to the Didache because it dates to the second century (ibid). The third century poet Commodian quotes *Epistula Apostolorum* in one section, which lends credence to the early dating of the work (James, p 485). The text is of primary importance for this work because it connects to the Quartodeciman Controversy.

*Epistula Apostolorum* presents itself as a document composed by the eleven apostles to other Christians. It supposedly contains teachings of Jesus. Stewart-Sykes proposes that the author was at the very least a teacher or ordained Christian leader (“The Asian Context of the New Prophecy and of *Epistula Apostolorum*,” pp 424-425).

The author of the work explains that the *Epistula* was composed to oppose Simon and Cerinthus. He or she then explained that Jesus Christ appeared in the flesh. He was physically born, suffered, died, and resurrected. Irenaeus identified both of them as Gnostic in his work *Against Heresies* (1.26.1, 2.preface). These details solidify the work as an anti-gnostic composition.

Later in the work, the author claimed to quote Jesus and put forth

the idea that Christians were still supposed to keep the Passover until Jesus returns. This is the key Quartodeciman section of the work. *Epistula* also contains eschatological themes connected to His return.

For instance, all three manuscripts (Coptic, Ethiopic, and Latin) put forth the idea that Jesus would return with the Father between Passover and Pentecost. This would also reinforce the importance of keeping Pascha because the count to Pentecost is made from that festival season. Thus, a believer would want to keep track of Pascha at the right time as he/she waits in anticipation of this event.

The Coptic version reads that Jesus would return with His martyrs 150 years from His ascension whereas the Ethiopic version reads 120 years. Perhaps the former copy was made from a document edited when Jesus did not come back after 120 years. Lake points out that the document is clearly Johannine in theology, but that it also recognizes the Pauline party as complementary rather than contrary (*Harvard Theological Review*, p 29).

Schmidt seemed to think that the work dated to around 160 (Lake, *Journal of Theological Studies*, p 336; James p 485). Lake leans towards 150 but is willing to admit as late as 180 (*Harvard Theological Review*, p 24). More recent research by Dr. Hannah proposes that the work likely dates to the 140s; he also emphasizes its heavy use of John's gospel ("The Four-Gospel 'Canon' in the '*Epistula Apostolorum*'", p 598).

As to its place of origin, Schmidt thinks the document was written in Asia Minor. Lake dissents from this view and identifies Egypt as the source of *Epistula* chiefly based upon the document's view that Peter and Cephas were two separate people. Apparently, this is more common in the Egyptian tradition (*Harvard Theological Review*, pp 23, 25). Also, attached to the Ethiopic version of the *Epistula* is a testament or apocalyptic discourse from Jesus. This additional work ends with an identical quotation from Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus* section 44 (*Journal of Theological Studies*, p 337).

The document remains important whether the origin is Asia Minor or Egypt. If it is indeed of Egyptian origin, then it shows sup-

port for the Quartodeciman practice and anti-gnostic teaching in that region. Moreover, it would confirm evidence of Johannine theology in Egypt.

The dispute of Asia Minor in the 160s which involved Melito and Claudius Apollinaris triggered a response from Clement of Alexandria, who lived in Egypt. Any Quartodecimans in Egypt might have been tempted to join this dispute and thus contributed to the production of *Epistula*.

As tempting as this conclusion might be, more recent research from Stewart-Sykes' in "The Asian Context of the New Prophecy and of *Epistula Apostolorum*" places the work more firmly in Asia Minor. First, he points out some similarities between *Epistula Apostolorum* and Melito's work *On Pascha* in language and theology (idem, pp 419, 432). For instance, Christ is the Father in both works (*Epistula*, 17; *On Pascha*, 9). Second, he utilizes convincing evidence that helps us to view the *Epistula* as a pre-Montanist or wholly Montanist work. Montanism was a movement which started in Asia Minor and emphasized prophecy. He cited Trevett's work which connects Asian theological issues to Ignatius's correspondence, Montanism, and the *Epistula* (ibid, pp 421-422).

The heavy use of Johannine theology, anti-gnostic themes, and Montanist overtones point strongly to Asia Minor. Other writers with established connections to Asia Minor, such as Ignatius and Irenaeus, are also associated to the content of the work.

Montanists were involved in heavy use of the prophetic Scriptures and the Quartodeciman practice. This further helps us to categorize section 15 of *Epistula* to the subject matter of this work. Pascha could certainly be considered prophetic on the basis that major prophecies of Jesus from Matthew 24 and 25 were given just before His last Passover.

One important detail from section 15 that remains to be resolved is that no specific date was connected to the practice of Pascha. Did the author intend to refer to the fourteenth or fifteenth of Nisan or the Sunday thereafter? Stewart-Sykes explains that no specific date was mentioned because the fourteenth of Nisan was implied (ibid, p 424). In another work, Stewart-Sykes contends that

the document dates to the second century and that Coptic, Ethiopic, and Latin manuscripts are derived from a Greek original (*On Pascha*, 95).

While the work cannot be taken as a literal discourse of Jesus to the first Apostles, it contains much content pertinent to this work. *Epistula* could be viewed as a stand-alone work dating as early as the time of Polycarp's work as bishop of Smyrna or be part of the ongoing dispute in Asia Minor regarding the Quartodeciman practice later in the century (160s onward).

## Appendix C

### Constantine's Letter concerning Nicaea

“Constantine Augustus, to the Churches.

Having experienced from the flourishing condition of public affairs, how great has been the grace of divine power, I judged this to be an object above all things claiming my care, that one faith, with sincere love, and uniform piety toward Almighty God should be maintained among the most blessed assemblies of the Catholic Church. But inasmuch as I perceived that this could not be firmly and permanently established, unless all, or at least the greatest part of the bishops could be convened in the same place, and every point of our most holy religion should be discussed by them in council; therefore as many as possible were assembled, and I myself also as one of you was present; for I will not deny what I especially rejoice in, that I am your fellow-servant...

...All points were then minutely investigated, until a decision acceptable to Him who is the inspector of all things, was published for the promotion of uniformity of judgment and practice; so that nothing might be henceforth left for dissension or controversy in matters of faith. There also the question having been considered relative to the most holy day of Pascha, it was determined by common consent that it should be proper that all should celebrate it on one and the same day everywhere...

...For what can be more appropriate, or what more solemn, than that this feast from which we have received the hope of immortality, should be invariably kept in one order, and for an obvious reason among all? And in the first place, it seemed very unworthy of this most sacred feast, that we should keep it following the custom of the Jews; a people who having imbrued their hands in a most heinous outrage, have thus polluted their souls, and are deservedly blind. Having then cast aside their usage, we are free to see to it that the celebration of this observance should occur in future in the more correct order which we have kept from the first day of the Passion until the present time. Therefore have nothing in common with that most hostile people the Jews...

...We have received from the Saviour another way; for there is set before us both a legitimate and accurate course in our holy religion: unanimously pursuing this, let us, most honored brethren, withdraw ourselves from that detestable association. For it is truly absurd for them to boast that we are incapable of rightly observing these things without their instruction. For on what subject will they be competent to form a correct judgment, who after that murder of their Lord, having been bereft of their senses, are led not by any rational motive, but by an ungovernable impulse, wherever their innate fury may drive them? Thence it is therefore, that even in this particular they do not perceive the truth, so that they constantly erring in the utmost degree, instead of making a suitable correction, celebrate the Feast of Passover a second time in the same year...

...Why then should we follow the example of those who are acknowledged to be infected with grievous error? Surely we should never suffer Pascha to be kept twice in one and the same year! But even if these considerations were not laid before you, it became your prudence at all times to take heed, both by diligence and prayer, that the purity of your soul should in nothing have communion, or seem to do so with the customs of men so utterly depraved...

...Moreover this should also be considered, that in a matter so important and of such religious significance, the slightest disagreement is most irreverent. For our Saviour left us but one day to be observed in commemoration of our deliverance, that is the day of his most holy Passion: he also wished his Catholic Church to be one; the members of which, however much they may be scattered in various places, are notwithstanding cherished by one Spirit, that is by the will of God...

...Let the prudence consistent with your sacred character consider how grievous and indecorous it is, that on the same days some should be observing fasts, while others are celebrating feasts; and after the days of Pascha some should indulge in festivities and enjoyments, and others submit to appointed fastings. On this account therefore Divine Providence directed that an appropriate correction should be effected, and uniformity of practice established, as I suppose you are all aware...

...Since then it was desirable that this should be so amended that we should have nothing in common with that nation of parricides, and of those who slew their Lord; and since the order is a becoming one which is observed by all the churches of the western, southern, and northern parts, and by some also in the eastern; from these considerations for the present all thought it to be proper, and I pledged myself that it would be satisfactory to your prudent penetration, that what is observed with such general unanimity of sentiment in the city of Rome, throughout Italy, Africa, all Egypt, Spain, France, Britain, Libya, the whole of Greece, and the dioceses of Asia, Pontus, and Cilicia, your intelligence also would cheerfully accept; reflecting too that not only is there a greater number of churches in the places before mentioned, but also that this in particular is a most sacred obligation, that all should in common desire whatever strict reason seems to demand, and what has no communion with the perjury of the Jews...

...But to sum up matters briefly, it was determined by common consent that the most holy festival of Pascha should be solemnized on one and the same day; for it is not even seemly that there should be in such a hallowed solemnity any difference: and it is more commendable to adopt that opinion in which there will be no intermixture of strange error, or deviation from what is right. These things therefore being thus consistent, do you gladly receive this heavenly and truly divine command: for whatever is done in the sacred assemblies of the bishops is referable to the Divine will...

...Wherefore, when you have indicated the things which have been prescribed to all our beloved brethren, it behooves you to publish the above written statements and to accept the reasoning which has been adduced, and to establish this observance of the most holy day: that when I arrive at the long and earnestly desired view of your order, I may be able to celebrate the sacred festival with you on one and the same day; and may rejoice with you for all things, in seeing Satanic cruelty frustrated by divine power through our efforts, while your faith, peace and concord are everywhere flourishing. May God preserve you, beloved brethren” (Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, 1.9).

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### **A Beginner's Guide to the Sabbath**

The Sabbath is a weekly celebration from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. This delight was given to mankind to help us spend more time with God and our family. In this booklet, you will learn answers to basic questions such as “What is the Sabbath?”; “When is the Sabbath?”; and “How Do We Keep the Sabbath?” You will also learn important reasons to keep this holy day and ways to practice it so that you can be in tune with God’s Sacred Rhythm.

### **A Brief History of the Sabbath in Early Christianity**

Many people who attend Church today meet on Sunday. In the New Testament, the early Church met on Sabbath, which is from Friday sunset through Saturday sunset. Did you know that most Christians 400 years after Jesus still honored the Sabbath? In this informative booklet, you will learn the seven major historical factors that affected the Sabbath in the early Church.

### **Prevalence of the Sabbath in the Early Roman Empire**

When the Gentiles heard the early gospel message, how did they respond as it relates to the Sabbath? Were Gentile converts persuaded to keep the Sabbath like their Jewish counterparts? Did they seek to abandon it? In this work, the author reviews two Jewish, two Christian, fifteen Gentile primary sources, and the New Testament to examine the prevalence of the Sabbath in the early Roman Empire. The answer will surprise you!

### **Sabbath and Sunday Laws in the Roman Empire**

In the Roman Empire, a series of laws were passed concerning the Sabbath. Hundreds of years later, Sunday laws were also passed. These laws help us to understand the protection of Sabbath observance in broader Judaism and Christianity as well as the development of Sunday as a day of rest in the Roman Church.

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How did the first day of the week, which does not have a name in the Bible, come to be called Sunday? How did the other days of the week come to have their names? In this work, you will learn about the history of two seven-day cycles in the early Roman Empire: The Biblical week and the planetary week. This study will also reveal insight into the development of Sunday as a day of gathering among certain groups in early Christianity.

### **The Life of Polycarp**

After the death of the first Apostles, confusion entered the Christian community. Persecution and false teachers threatened the purity of the faith. Amid this chaos stood a man named Polycarp. He was taught and ordained by the first Apostles; he battled false teachings. In this work, you will learn about the events surrounding Polycarp's fight for the faith. He is a true hero for all Christians.

### **Constantine and the Sabbath**

Did Constantine change the Sabbath? Did he pass a law to prohibit people from keeping it? Did he work with the Church of Rome to pressure people to keep Sunday? In this book, we will sort out the confusion and provide clarity on Constantine's reign using primary sources. This research will also unearth new, exciting paradigms for this subject.

### **How Do We Know Jesus Really Lived?**

Imagine for a moment that you did not have a Bible to learn about Jesus. How would you know that He ever lived on earth? Would it be possible to prove His existence? In modern times, there has been skepticism about the historical validity of Jesus' existence and the New Testament account. In this book, we will address the historical, archaeological, and textual evidence to see if Jesus and His earliest followers ever existed.



The Quartodeciman Controversy refers to a dispute between Christians about when to keep the Passover feast, also called Pascha. Christians in the east contended that the feast as observed by Jesus and the first disciples should be retained. On the other hand, believers in Rome argued that a newer practice should become the standard.

Confusion and conflict resulted as Christians in various cities calculated the timing for the new Passover in different ways. Starting in the fourth century, the Roman Church tried to force their celebration on everyone else. Despite these efforts, Quartodeciman Christians still existed into the fifth century.

In this book, you will learn about the first three hundred years of the Quartodeciman Controversy.



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