

## RISE OF THE FALSE CHURCH : PART ONE

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True Christian Worship Is Not Bound By A Building Place Or Time, A Spiritual Temple, Jesus Was Rejected By His Jewish Brethren, Blindness Of Jews, False Shepherds And Hirelings, The Lord's Table, Apostasy From The Truth, Left With Just The Bible's Covers, Doctrinal Dangers Of Organized Religion, Leaven Of The Pharisees, Twisting Meaning Of The Scriptures, False Prosperity Gospel, Pervasive Materialism In The Church, Church Of Laodicea, The Apostasy Of Ancient Israel And Pagan Temple Building, Israelites Choose Saul To Be Their Own King, Jews Choose A Temple Of Stone And Mortar Over A Temple Of The Heart, A Divided Kingdom Due To Sin, War And Selfish False Shepherds, God Never Desired A Temple, God Honors People Who Are Of A Contrite Obedient Spirit, Saul Is Rejected As King, Meaningless Rituals Hollow Traditions And Vain Repetitions

As I point out in articles such as "Gargoyles: Satan Loves Church Buildings!", "Churchianity or Christianity: Which Do You Practice?" and "Is the KJV Bible the Inerrant Word of God?", contrary to what was believed by many of the ancient Jews, and contrary to what is likewise believed by a lot of modern Christians, worship of our Heavenly Father has never been, is not, and should not, be bound by or attached to a physical place or building. Furthermore, our worship is not limited by -- or dictated by -- particular time constraints, so that we must worship God on a particular day, or follow a predetermined schedule. As the Lord informed the Samaritan woman at the well in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, true worship of the Father is in Spirit and in Truth. It is free from any shackles placed upon it by human and church traditions, or by any other human convention, as we see by the following verses:

"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at

Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

John 4:21-24, KJV

In his first Epistle, the Apostle Peter reiterated what he had learned from the Lord concerning the spiritual nature of our Temple when he wrote the following to the brethren:

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner . . ."

1 Peter 2:4-7, KJV

Finally, concerning whether Christians should worship God on Sunday or on Saturday, or on some other day of the week, the Apostle Paul wrote the following wise counsel in his Epistle to the Romans:

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Romans 14:5, KJV

In other words, Paul's clear message appears to be that what day(s) we choose to worship the Lord is a matter of personal conscience; that we should operate according to our personal degree of faith; and that we should not allow this issue to cause division amongst the Body of Christ. When all things are considered, what day Christians should worship is really a minor point which was not even brought to the table at the meeting which was held by the First Century Church Elders in Jerusalem in Acts chapter fifteen. For a deeper look at this issue regarding Sabbath day worship, please consider reading my article entitled "Are Christians Obligated to Keep the

Sabbath?".

As the previous verses clearly demonstrate, collectively, we, the worldwide Body of Believers, form the Lord's Spiritual Temple. Each one of us is a living stone cemented together in Faith and in Love, and Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone, or Foundation Stone, upon which our entire structure rests. You will notice that Peter says that this Chief Cornerstone was disallowed, or rejected, by the builders. He is referring to the fact that even though Jesus came to His own people first -- that is, to His Jewish brethren and the religious elders of His day -- many of them did not receive Him. In fact, they deemed Him unworthy to be the foundation of their faith. Not only that, but they accused Him of being a false prophet, a deceiver, and a man possessed by the Devil. This is because they were blinded and deceived by Satan himself, who is the Father of Lies. Consider the following verses which describe the spiritual blindness of both the unbelieving Jews, and the unbelieving Gentiles:

"And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."

Matthew 13:10-16, KJV

"Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

Matthew 15:14, KJV

"Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear

by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! . . . Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."

Matthew 23:16, 24, KJV

"And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other."

Mark 3:5, KJV

"And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?

Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."

John 9:39-41, KJV

"(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day . . . For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

Romans 11:8, 25, KJV

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

1 Corinthians 2:14, KJV

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

Ephesians 4:17-19, KJV

Thus, precisely as John wrote at the beginning of his Gospel, Jesus took His message of Love, Forgiveness and Salvation to those people who would gladly hear and receive it. That is, to the common people, and eventually to the Gentiles as well.

That is, to you and I, as we can see by these verses:

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:"

John 1:11-12, KJV

". . . And the common people heard him gladly."

Mark 12:37, KJV

"And in his name shall the Gentiles trust."

Matthew 12:21, KJV

While they may not realize it yet, people who place their faith and trust in organized religion, and in the buildings which are associated with organized religion, may be headed for difficult times. Someday in the future, it is possible that the physical church system may no longer exist. There are many sinister forces in the world today -- both human and spiritual -- which are slowly working towards achieving just such an ungodly objective. It may take them time, but they are gradually gaining ground. Even if the physical church system is allowed to remain, based on what we already see happening within it now, will it truly be God's Church?

As many of you will already know, even now there are many denominations and congregations that have been taken over by false shepherds, priests and pastors who are poisoning their flocks with false doctrines, liberalism and secular humanist ideas. Such churches are merely hollow shells. They are a facade without the real Spirit of God dwelling within them. Such false shepherds pretend to fulfill the spiritual needs of their congregations, while in reality they only enrich themselves, and leave their flocks hungry and naked. You will find this topic discussed in greater detail in articles such as "Money-Making Bible Hucksters and Mammon". As the Lord said, these are not true shepherds. They are really just hirelings, as we see by the following verses:

"But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep."

John 10:12-13, KJV

It is important that the modern Christian learns to feed himself spiritually; or better said, that he learns to be fed directly by the Lord. As the young shepherd David wrote in the twenty-third Psalm, the Lord will not only care for us and provide for us, but He will also meet our spiritual needs by preparing a spiritual banquet before us, if we take the time to dwell upon His Word. In the following verse, the word "want" is translated from the Hebrew word "chacer", and actually means to be lacking or to be without something:

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters . . . Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

Psalms 23:1-2, 5, KJV

As I point out in other articles, it is extremely important that the foundation of the modern Christian's faith be built directly upon the Word of God, and not solely upon what he is hearing or being taught in his local church building, or in a Sunday School class. While this may come as a surprise to some of you, you need to realize that not everything one hears within the four walls of his local church is true and accurate. In fact, some of it is absolutely wrong, and maybe even meant to pervert his perception of the Truth, or else to totally alienate him from the Truth. Let us not forget some of the strong warnings that the Apostle Paul included in some of his Epistles, such as the following:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;"

2 Thessalonians 2:3, KJV

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;"

1 Timothy 4:1-2, KJV

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."

2 Timothy 3:13, KJV

Some people are falling away from the Truth of the Gospel and don't even realize it. This is because it can be a slow, gradual process. I have told the story before concerning the poor woman who after many years of listening to her pastor tell her that a certain group of Scriptures didn't mean what they said, or that a particular passage no longer applied to our modern day, was left with nothing but the front and back covers of her Bible. The woman was wondering if she should just throw those away as well.

I honestly don't know whether or not that is a true story. However, the main lesson that it conveys is that we must all be very cautious. We should not just blindly place our faith in organized religion; especially not in priests, pastors, elders and teachers who quote very little Scriptures during the mass or service, or in their Bible classes. We should also beware of those people who twist the meaning of God's Word in order to support their own wayward doctrines. As you may recall, almost two thousand years ago, Jesus issued the same warning concerning the teachings of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Consider the following verses:

". . . Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

Luke 12:1, KJV

"Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."

Matthew 16:6-12, KJV

Following that same line of thought, the Apostle Peter, in referring to the writings of the Apostle Paul, also wrote in

his second letter regarding those people who distorted the meaning of some of Paul's Epistles. In the following verses, the word "wrest" means to distort or divert to an unnatural or inappropriate use or meaning, to pervert something. It is derived from the Greek word "strebloo":

"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."

2 Peter 3:15-16, KJV

Of course, unbiblical doctrines are not the only danger that exists within modern organized religion. As many of you will already know, it is also extremely easy to be led astray by the materialistic, worldly spirit which has taken over so many churches today. The so-called "prosperity gospel" is heard everywhere. It is so sad that some people view going to church as nothing more than a bothersome necessity which they must endure in order to maintain their social status in the local community. During my lifetime, I have attended a number of churches which boasted of an all-white membership that was comprised for the most part of the local community's successful business and political leaders. Such churches are nothing more than social clubs for the elite.

No one can deny that the pleasant decor that is found in so many churches today can have a very mesmerizing effect on the congregants. The plush, comfortable pews, the wall-to-wall carpet, the colorful stained-glass windows, the very elegant woodwork, the expensive organ, the stereo sound system, etc., appeal to one's physical senses. One can be overtaken with a sense of well-being, while his spiritual perception remains dull. While some affluent Christians claim that the so-called "abundant life" is a Biblical principle, as I explain in the article "Abundant Life Doctrine: Scripturally Exposed!", I am convinced from the Scriptures that succumbing to worldliness and materialism is contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Apostles. I am reminded of the prophecy against the Church at Laodicea that is found in the Book of Revelation:

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I

would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

Revelation 3:15-19, KJV

You may find it rather interesting to note that similar to Christianity today, in which a lot of church leaders have become obsessed with building larger and grander buildings in order to impress their members, and outdo their religious competitors down the street, once she had forsaken the one true God of Heaven, Israel also became involved in building temples. Sadly, as I point out in the series "The Fruits of Disobedience", those temples were actually dedicated to the false gods of the heathen nations which the Israelites had failed to destroy, as per the commandment which the Lord had first given to Moses and Joshua. In the eighth chapter of the Book of Hosea, we find the following strong rebuke:

"They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off. Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces . . . For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples . . ."

Hosea 8:4-6, 14, KJV

In chapter eight of the first Book of Samuel, we find the story regarding how the Israelites petitioned the Prophet Samuel to anoint a king over them. Why? Because they were motivated by a desire to be just like the heathen nations around them. Even though it was not God's highest will for them -- He obviously desired to be their one true King -- because of their stubborn insistence, the Lord eventually granted them their request, and gave them stubborn King

Saul. I discuss this topic in more detail in the article entitled "The Children of God and Politics".

Less than one hundred years later, even though the Lord only wanted to dwell in the temple of their hearts, He again gave them their desire, and conceded in allowing King Solomon to build an elegant temple of stone, mortar and wood. Of course, the Lord was already fully aware of what this decision would eventually lead to. In other words, total abandonment of the one true God. As a result, not even four hundred and eighty years had passed since the time that they had been liberated from the bondage of Egypt, before the Israelites had gone astray.

However, the truth of the matter -- as I point out in other articles -- is that they had been going astray from the time when they had first left Egypt. Murmuring in the wilderness, constructing a golden calf, and choosing King Saul were just some of the more prominent manifestations of their ongoing rebellion against the Lord. Consider this verse:

"And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD."

1 Kings 6:1, KJV

From the moment that Saul became Israel's first king, things began to go wrong. By the end of Solomon's reign, Israel had totally gone astray, and was worshipping many false gods and building temples and altars to them. It was for this reason that the Lord rent the kingdom from Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and divided it in two, leaving only Judah and Benjamin in the south, while the remaining tribes became part of Israel -- or Ephraim -- to the north. This became the era of the Divided Kingdom.

From that point forward, even though there were a few worthy kings who still feared the Lord, and who endeavored to obey Him, Israel and Judah were constantly at war with each other, and both continued to slide deeper and deeper into apostasy. This development becomes quite evident in the writings of the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah, as well as in chapter two of the Book of Jeremiah, in chapter thirty-four of the Book of

Ezekiel, and in others where the Lord rebukes the religious elders of Israel for becoming selfish, fat and lazy, and for neglecting the spiritual needs of their flocks. For example, consider the following verses:

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock . . . Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them."

Ezekiel 34:1-3, 10, KJV

While many modern preachers fail or purposely refuse to talk about this issue in their comfortable church buildings, you should know that at the time that King David petitioned the Lord to build a Temple in His honor, the king was living in a cedar home, while the Ark of the Covenant was still kept in a tabernacle, or tent. Thus, while David's intentions were good in wanting to build a Temple to house the Ark, as we read in the following verses, this was not what the Lord wanted done. In fact, He questioned David regarding why he wanted to build a Temple when the Lord had never required it of him:

"Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?"

2 Samuel 7:5-7, KJV

It is rather clear from the above verses that the Lord only wanted to dwell in the midst of the people; that is, in the spiritual temple of their hearts. He wanted to be a living God to the Israelites, and not a dead god who is bound by

time and place in a physical structure, as was the custom of the heathen nations. Like other Prophets which had stood in Jerusalem and warned Israel of her whoredoms in worshipping false gods, the young Prophet Jeremiah declared these words in the seventh chapter of his book:

"Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these."

Jeremiah 7:4, KJV

About two hundred years earlier, the Lord had issued a very similar warning through the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah when He said the following:

"Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

Isaiah 66:1-2, KJV

As the previous verses make clear, God is more impressed by people who honor and fear Him, and who obey His Word, than by luxurious edifices which are built in His honor. Because quite often, such buildings house the spiritually dead who walk not in the ways of the Lord. This applies just as much today as it did thousands of years ago. God continues to be more interested in the condition of our hearts than in the place we choose to worship. In the verses from the Book of Isaiah, the Lord informs us that He honors "him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." It is interesting to note that several hundred years before during a time of great repentance, after he had murdered Uriah the Hittite and committed adultery with Uriah's beautiful wife, Bathsheba, King David wrote the very same thing, as we see here:

"For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Psalms 51:16-17, KJV

So again we see that God does not delight in our own burnt offerings. He does not delight in our self-righteous works which are no better than the sacrifice of Cain. Rather, the Lord delights in a broken, contrite and obedient heart and spirit. That was the lesson that blundering King Saul never learned. Saul trusted in his own instincts and abilities, in his own works, and in his own strength and wisdom. By doing so, he failed to obey the Lord; and that is precisely why he was rejected by the Lord and lost the kingdom, as we see by the following verses:

"And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel."

1 Samuel 15:22-26, KJV

It wasn't long after Solomon's Temple was constructed, that its beauty and luxury actually became quite a hindrance and a great distraction. The daily Temple sacrifices and rituals became meaningless, hollow traditions long before Jesus had even been born. The prayers and supplications of the Temple priests were reduced to vain repetitions. In short, now that the Israelites had their own king and a physical Temple, they were content and they soon became self-satisfied. Before long they abandoned the one true God, and were just going through the motions of pretending to be holy, just like so many of the churches today.

Please go to part two for the continuation of this series.

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## RISE OF THE FALSE CHURCH : PART TWO

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Letter Of The Law But No Spirit, Written Law Oral Tradition And Period Of Prophetic Silence, The Spirit Of Commercialism, Jesus Prophecies Destruction Of Jerusalem And Second Temple, General Titus And First Jewish-Roman War, Second Temple Is Destroyed In 70 AD, Jesus Is The Rejected Cornerstone, Jesus Prophesied Wrath Of God Against The Jews, First Temple Period Ended With Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's Destruction Of Solomon's Temple, Seventy Years Of Captivity In Babylon, King Cyrus Liberates The Jews, If God Allows A Third Temple What Will Happen?, Jesus The Great Liberator, Ministry Of John The Baptist, Jesus The Light Of The World, Children Of Darkness, False Church Persecutes God's True Church, Messianic Jews And Legalism, Stephen's Martyrdom, Unbelieving Jews Are Children Of Hell And The Synagogue Of Satan, True Jews Of The Spirit

Continuing our discussion from part one, tragically, it seems that the Israelites became no better than all the heathen nations around them, whom God had commanded them to destroy. As if the widespread idolatry which pervaded the land wasn't already a serious enough problem, Israel's religious leaders at that time -- the Scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees -- became overly legalistic, and were simply following the letter of the Law, instead of really being led by the Spirit. Adhering to and preserving rituals and traditions became the order of the day. Several hundred years later, Jesus would quote from the Prophet Isaiah, and tell them that they had made the Laws of God of none effect by their many traditions, as we see by the following verses:

"Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the

tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition."

Matthew 15:1-6, KJV

"He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

Mark 7:6-13, KJV

Following the ministry of the Prophet Malachi, tradition holds that there was a period of several hundred years during which the Gift of Prophecy was shunned upon by the religious leaders of Israel. Similar to what occurred during Jesus' own time, it seems that those self-satisfied false shepherds simply did not want to be reminded of their waywardness from and sins against the Lord. This occurred during the latter part of the Second Temple Period at the time of the Maccabee brothers. I will be explaining why it is referred to as the Second Temple Period later on in this series.

As we learn in the Book of Jubilees -- which is an apocryphal work that was written by a Pharisee in approximately 100 BC -- during this period, greater emphasis was placed upon the Written Law and Oral Tradition, which was esteemed as being eternal and unchangeable. It is because of this censorship of God's true Prophets by the legalistic religious leaders of Israel, that we have this period of silence which endured for several centuries prior to Christ's arrival on Earth. Some theologians suggest that God was simply tired of speaking to

a nation which had hardened its ears and heart to the Truth. Others point to the apocryphal Pseudonymous Writings, and propose that due to pressure and the threat of persecution and excommunication from the Temple, God's Prophets, while they continued to record their prophecies, were forced to write under assumed names. I am not certain which of these two schools of thought is the correct one. Perhaps it is a little of both. I do not believe, though, that the Prophets kept quiet out of fear of being ousted from the Temple.

However, one thing that we do know with absolute certainty, is that Jesus was very much opposed to the greedy spirit of commercialism which had corrupted and pervaded the religious worship which occurred at the Temple in Jerusalem. I delve more into this topic in articles such as "Money-Making Bible Hucksters and Mammon" and "MP3s, Commercialized Christianity and Christian Hypocrisy". As you probably know, Jesus did not hesitate to rebuke and expose the Jewish elders who knowingly polluted the Temple of God, by turning it into a house of merchandise. Furthermore, as I explain in the aforementioned articles, I am convinced that Jesus is just as upset about the rampant commercialism which has polluted our faith today, as He was two millennia ago. The following verses clearly reveal His displeasure with such practices:

"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."

Matthew 21:12-13, KJV

"And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."

John 2:13-16, KJV

Jesus was paraphrasing a rebuke He had first spoken by the Spirit through the mouth of the young Prophet Jeremiah over

six hundred years before. Just as Jesus stood in the Temple and rebuked the Jewish religious elders and the merchants, Jeremiah had done the same thing prior to the invasion of Jerusalem by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, when he said the following:

"Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD."

Jeremiah 7:11, KJV

The Apostle Peter would later write about this same topic, as we see by the following verses. Please notice the phrase "through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you":

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."

2 Peter 2:1-3, KJV

As you can see, the Lord strongly disapproved of the greedy commercial spirit which pervaded the Temple compound, and it saddened Him that Judaism had become such a cold, spiritless and very legalistic religion which emphasized self-righteous works over the Love, Grace and Mercy of God. In his bid to win the favor of his subjects, Herod the Great undertook a project to greatly enhance the Temple at Jerusalem. When His Disciples became awed by the beauty of this symbol of man's pride and vanity, Jesus was quick to point out their error by declaring to them what would be the terrible fate of this religious center of Israel, as we see by these verses:

"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Matthew 24:1-2, KJV

Just as the First Temple had been destroyed in about 587 BC by the forces of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, after the Old Testament Prophets had warned Judah for years to repent of her idolatry and whoredoms, Jesus' prophetic words were also fulfilled some forty years later when Titus -- who was the son of Emperor Vespasian, and also a future emperor of Rome himself -- invaded Jerusalem. After an extended siege, he totally destroyed the city and the Temple at the height of the First Jewish-Roman War -- 66-73 AD -- which is also known as The Great Revolt.

According to some historical records -- such as "The Annals" of the Roman historian Tacitus -- over 600,000 Jews dwelt in the city of Jerusalem at that time. It is said that many of them fled into the Temple compound seeking refuge, believing that God was going to protect them there. Instead, many Jews were burned alive as the Temple burned to the ground. It has been said that in order to retrieve all of the gold which had melted as a result of the intense fire, the Romans tore down the Temple stone by stone -- in fulfillment of Jesus' very words -- in order to scrape off the gold that had seeped down between the blocks. Furthermore, during the time of the siege, thousands of Jews were crucified on the siege walls that were built around Jerusalem when they tried to escape. Many others died from starvation and disease inside the city. I discuss these events in more detail in articles such as "Abomination of Desolation: Explained!".

With the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple compound in 70 AD, God graphically emphasized in a very clear way, His rejection of the false, legalistic, self-righteous religion of the Scribes and the Pharisees; just as they had rejected His Son -- Jesus -- and refused to acknowledge Him as the one true Foundation Stone of God's eternal Spiritual Temple. Of course, the fact that Jesus would be rejected by many of His own Jewish brethren, was revealed by many of the Prophets of the Old Testament period, was announced by Jesus Himself, and was later preached by the Apostles, as we see by the following verses:

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Isaiah 53:3, KJV

"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?"

Matthew 21:42, KJV

"And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."

Mark 8:31, KJV

"Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day."

Luke 9:22, KJV

"But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation."

Luke 17:25, KJV

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

John 1:11, KJV

"This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner."

Acts 4:11, KJV

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed."

1 Peter 2:4-8, KJV

Because of their knowingly rejecting Him -- they obviously

were familiar with the prophecies regarding the Messiah who was to come -- Jesus warned the Jews of the coming Wrath of God against them, as we can determine by verses such as the following:

"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Luke 21:20-24, KJV

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

John 3:36, KJV

Thus, with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple at the height of the First Jewish-Roman War, what is referred to as the Second Temple Period came to an abrupt end; just as the First Temple Period had met its end by the invading forces of King Nebuchadnezzar, when he destroyed the First Temple -- or Solomon's Temple -- in approximately 587 BC.

For those of you who may be a little confused, allow me to offer a brief explanation. As I explain in other articles, following the various Babylonian sieges and invasions that ultimately resulted in the destruction of Solomon's Temple, in accordance with the prophecies of Jeremiah, thousands of the Jews were taken as captives to Babylon where they were forced to endure seventy years of servitude. In fulfillment of other Old Testament prophecies, when the time of their punishment came to an end, the Lord used Persian King Cyrus -- or Koresh -- to liberate the Jews, so that they would be able to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and the Temple. It was at this time that the Second Temple Period began. The Second Temple compound was later expanded by King

Herod the Great.

There is a certain irony in these two catastrophic historic events which relates to our present time. As we have already seen, the destruction of Solomon's Temple -- the first Temple -- in 587 BC was the result of God's Wrath against the Jews in Jerusalem. The reasons for this Wrath were various. The Jewish political leaders were corrupt; the Jewish religious leaders were corrupt; and the common people themselves were also corrupt, because they were worshipping and sacrificing to the heathen gods. In short, basically everyone in Judah had abandoned the one true God.

Regarding the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, the level of corruption was just as bad, if not worse, because both the Jewish political leadership, as well as the Jewish religious leadership, were in bed with the Romans. But what made it even worse is the fact that they really poked God in the eye when they murdered His own dear Son in cold blood, and then proceeded to persecute His followers as well. On top of all of that, the self-righteous religionists of that day oppressed the common people by using the Mosaic Law as a bludgeon, and took financial advantage of them as well by way of mandatory Temple offerings and sacrifices.

The irony lies in the fact that today, not quite two thousand years later, the vast majority of the Jews still reject Jesus Christ. Furthermore, as many of you may already know, radical Orthodox Jewish groups -- such as the Temple Mount and Eretz Yisrael Faithful Movement -- are intent on regaining control of the Temple Mount -- or Mount Moriah -- in East Jerusalem, and building a Third Temple there. This they are committed to doing, despite the obviously very serious problems that such events would create with the Palestinians, as well as with other Muslims. This is because Muslims view Mount Moriah -- or "Haram Ash-Sharif"; that is, the "Noble Sanctuary" -- as the third holiest site within the Islamic religion, and they will not easily surrender it to the Jews.

Whether or not God will actually allow the Orthodox Jews to build a third and final Temple on Mount Moriah is a heavily debated topic in both Jewish and Christian circles, and the position that one adopts is influenced in large part by his personal understanding of the Scriptures. However, allow me to remind you of something that the Apostle Paul wrote in

his first Epistle to the Corinthians:

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

1 Corinthians 10:11, KJV

My point in sharing the previous Scripture with you is this: If God destroyed the Jewish Temple two times in the past due to the gross disobedience of the Jews, it doesn't take much logic to figure out what would happen if they were to attempt to build a Third Temple; particularly while most modern Jews remain in denial of Jesus Christ.

But let us momentarily return to events of two thousand years ago. Taking into consideration the dismal spiritual condition that existed in Israel during the First Century, is it any wonder that the Jewish elders hated Jesus and sought to kill Him when He arrived preaching spiritual freedom from the Law, and from the oppressive system of the Temple priests? As you may recall, when Jesus first began His public ministry, this is exactly some of the things He said He had come to do. In fact, the Lord read from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, and informed His listeners that, that day, the prophecy had been fulfilled in their very ears. The Gospel of Luke records the following:

"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Luke 4:17-21, KJV

As John the Baptist had proclaimed, Jesus was like a bright Light shining upon the sins of the world. Some people were able to accept that Light, while others stubbornly rejected it, preferring instead to walk in spiritual darkness, and

thus condemning themselves. Speaking of John the Baptist's ministry to prepare the way for Jesus, John the Beloved had this to say in his Gospel:

"The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name:"

John 1:7-12, KJV

Several chapters later in the same Gospel, Jesus revealed the ongoing spiritual battle that occurs between the Children of Light and the Children of Darkness when He made the following comments concerning those people who reject the truth, light and freedom which He freely offers to everyone:

"And this is the condemnation, that Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than Light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the Light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

John 3:19-21, KJV

From the Old Testament clear through the New Testament, it is plain to see that the false church has always persecuted the True Church of God. The jealous, legalistic children of Satan have persecuted and killed the true Children of Light. In one of His final denunciations of the false religious hierarchy which held power in Jerusalem, the Lord ended His fiery discourse by saying the following to the hard-hearted Scribes and Pharisees:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is

he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Matthew 23:37-39, KJV

As we saw earlier, this is exactly what happened forty years later when their house was indeed left unto them desolate. In other words, God's Wrath was felt when Jerusalem -- as well as their glorious Temple -- were utterly destroyed by General Titus and the Roman legions. God was sick and tired of their false, oppressive, religious system which enslaved people, instead of liberating them.

As I mentioned a moment ago, to this very day, the majority of the Jews continue to reject their one true Savior, Jesus Christ. Thankfully, at least a small minority of Jews have begun to see the Light, and are coming to the knowledge of the Truth, due in part to the work of such organizations as the Messianic Jews and the Jews for Jesus. However, even that is not without its own problems. Because as I explain in such series as "Welcome to Greater Israel, USA!" and "Jesus Christ or Yeshua Messiah?: More Christian Zionist Legalism", many of the Jews who do come to Christ are very legalistic. But what is worse is the fact that they have made serious inroads into our faith, and they have begun to place a legalistic yoke of bondage on the necks of many Christian believers, who allow this to happen to themselves because they become deceived.

Continuing our discussion regarding the persecution of God's True Church by the false church and its false religionists, following Jesus's Death on the Cross, the jealous leaders of the false religious system of the Jews continued to persecute the true Children of God. The reason why they pursued such a violent course, is simply because they could not bear being exposed for the hypocrites and deceivers that they were, by the powerful truths that were being openly preached by God's true Children of Light. For example, consider the final words of the martyr Stephen, as the angry Jewish mob stoned him to death in the seventh chapter of the Book of Acts:

"But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things? Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."

Acts 7:47-58, KJV

Stephen's words continue to ring true today just as they did two thousand years ago when he first spoke them. As Jesus so clearly pointed out in the twenty-third chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, the blame fell squarely on the shoulders of the religious leaders of Israel; because they were the ones who were promoting a false religious system that not only led men astray, but which also denied them entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Consider these powerful verses that were spoken by the Lord:

"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in . . . Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."

Matthew 23:13, 15, KJV

While discussing how the Israelites were unable to enter the Promised Land of Canaan as a result of their lack of faith, the Apostle Paul notes the following. This same truth can be applied to their New Testament counterparts who also failed to enter the Kingdom of God due to their lack of faith:

"So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

Hebrews 3:19, KJV

If you are at all familiar with the various interactions that Jesus had with the Jewish religious authorities, then you will no doubt know that He had absolutely nothing good to say about them. Time and time again He referred to them as hypocrites, serpents, vipers, blind leaders of the blind, the children of Hell, children of the Devil, the spiritually dead and more. Similar to His remark in Matthew 23, perhaps Jesus' strongest rebuke of the unbelieving Jews is found in the following words that are recorded in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John:

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

John 8:44, KJV

In the last Book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, the Lord again very pointedly exposes the lies and hypocrisy of the false religious system of the Jews. In his letters to the Seven Churches which were in Asia Minor, John was moved by the Spirit of the Lord to write the following concerning the Body of Believers which was in Smyrna:

"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

Revelation 2:9, KJV

In the very next chapter, in his letter to the Church which was located at Philadelphia, John was again led of the Lord to expose the subtle deception which pervaded the false religion of his own Jewish brethren. Thus John wrote:

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

Revelation 3:9, KJV

As I explain in the series entitled "Is God a Racist?", the Apostle Paul, as well as other writers of the Epistles, also shed significant light on this issue. In his Epistle to the Christians who resided at Rome, Paul very clearly wrote the

following concerning the nature of the true Jews:

"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

Romans 2:28-29, KJV

Please go to part three for the conclusion of this series.

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RISE OF THE FALSE CHURCH : PART THREE

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True Believers vs The False Religionists, Primary Criteria Is Faith In Jesus Christ, Not Everyone Is Really A Child Of God God Is Not Interested In Physical Buildings, The Vanity Of Building Beautiful Places Of Worship, Nature Of Early Church, Temple Priests Join Christian Ranks, Powerful Evangelization And Soul-Winning Leads To Persecution By Jewish Religionists, Saul Of Tarsus Persecutes Early Christians, Beginning Of The Great Commission, Road Teams Sent Out From Jerusalem, Deacons And Bishops, Spirit Of Compromise And Apostasy Plague Early Church, False Brethren Preaching A Legalistic False Gospel, Rise Of False Church, America's Spiritual Decline, America's Violent Nature, American Civil War, A War Boom Bust Economy, Dangers Of Materialism, True Church Within Us, Exclusive And Divisive Denominations, Members Of God's Household, Christian Martyrdom In The Circus Of Nero, The Obelisk And St. Peter's Basilica, The Vatican And Rome's Subtle Boast, The Compromise With Rome: Fourth Century Whoredoms Of The Christian Church, Pagan Gods And Christianized Roman Holidays And Traditions,

## Doctrinal Compromise And False Churches And Daughter Harlots Power Over The People, Church Wealth, Suggested Reading List

Continuing our discussion from part two, as should be rather clear to you by now, there exists a very marked distinction between the true Body of Believers, and those individuals who claim to be the church, temple or religion of God. This, of course, includes those people who make the pretentious boast that their brand of religion is the "one truth faith". Let me again remind you that while in this series I have emphasized the sharp contrast between ancient Judaism and Jesus' own teachings, the inadequacies of organized religion with its man-made buildings, dry spiritless ceremonies, and wayward doctrines and traditions is not limited to Judaism alone.

The primary criteria for being a member of the Lord's true spiritual Church, is that a person has accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. Any religion which does not embrace the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for the sins of the world, cannot possibly claim to be the true religion of God. Obviously, this includes not only Judaism, but also Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, and so many other false religions which exist in the world today.

Likewise, any individual who does not embrace Jesus Christ as the Son of God and only Savior of the world, cannot possibly claim to be a true child of God. Contrary to the false belief which has become so popular in the world today, as Jesus made abundantly clear, not everyone is a child of God. If we were all already children of God, then obviously there would be no need for us "to become the sons of God" as we are told in the verse John 1:12. Please think about this carefully. We cannot become that which we already are. Therefore, we must conclude that we do not truly "become the sons of God" until we choose to accept Jesus Christ. As the verse states, "But as many as received him . . ." Now doesn't that make perfect sense? You will find this topic discussed in more detail in articles such as "Not Everyone is a Child of God", "All Are Given a Chance, But . . ." and "Is the Message of Salvation Meant for All Men?".

In like manner, it should also be understood that dedicating millions of dollars to the construction of beautiful temples, churches, cathedrals and mosques which will elicit the praise

of man is not what true religion is about in the least. As I mentioned earlier, when the Apostles became mesmerized by the beauty of the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus was quick to inform them regarding what would be its ultimate fate. We have seen that God simply is not the least bit interested in physical buildings. From Isaiah to Hosea to Jesus to Stephen, we see that the message is exactly the same. God desires to dwell in the temple of our hearts, and not in a cold, stone building.

If the truth be told, being caught up in a contest to see who can build the more awesome place of worship really amounts to nothing more than a religion of dead works. It is the worship of the creations of man and man's accomplishments. It is not that much different from the worship of mammon -- or material wealth -- as Jesus points out in the Gospel of Matthew, as we see here:

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Matthew 6:24, KJV

In his first Epistle, the Apostle John likewise exposes the dangers of being seduced by the pleasures of the world when he writes the following:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

1 John 2:15-16, KJV

Obviously, beautiful places of worship -- regardless of the particular religion that happens to be involved -- appeal to the lust of the eyes; and they certainly appeal to the pride of life; particularly for those people who design and build such structures, and who ultimately receive the praises of men.

As I point out in the series "Where Are the First Century Churches?", as well as in "Is the KJV Bible the Inerrant Word of God?", we can conclude then that the first Churches which were established by the original Apostles in the Book of Acts were not physical buildings. Rather, they actually consisted

of the Bodies of Believers who had accepted the free Gift of Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. There is absolutely no indication to be found anywhere in the New Testament that the Apostles and their early followers were involved in, or had any interest in, building church buildings or temples to house their new converts. They were the "ekklesia"; that is, "the called out ones" who were called out from the world to follow Christ, who is the one true Rock and Cornerstone.

The simple truth of the matter is that the Scriptures make it rather clear that the First Century Christians met privately in small groups in people's homes, as well as in some public places; just as Jesus had preached in people's homes, in the streets, and on the hills and mountains of Israel. Please refer to the aforementioned series for additional Scriptures concerning this topic.

While it is true that Jesus did preach in the Temple and in the synagogues of His native land, as did His Disciples in the formative years of our Christian faith, it is important that we realize that this was in order to fulfill a purpose. That purpose was to first offer Salvation to the religious leadership of Israel, as well as to the common people. After all, the Temple and the synagogues is where everyone met in order to hear the Word of God. So it was only natural that the First Century Christians would also use such places to share the Good News concerning Jesus Christ; at least until the jealous Jewish religionists orchestrated persecution against them.

We discover in Acts chapter six that the testimony of the early Disciples was so powerful, that even many of the Temple priests joined their ranks. As you may realize, during the Temple period, the priests would perform their duties in the Temple on a rotating basis, according to a schedule that had first been established by King David. Priestly duties were organized into twenty-four classes -- or courses -- and each of the priests would serve in the Temple for a period of one week. This was precisely what Zacharias -- the father of John the Baptist -- was doing at the time that the Angel Gabriel announced the birth of his son, John, to him. At any rate, in Acts chapter six we find the following verse:

"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great

company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

Acts 6:7, KJV

The fact that "a great company" of the Temple priests joined the Disciples, as well as many of the common Jewish people, obviously outraged the pharisaical keepers of the Law. The result was that a great persecution arose against the Early Church; and they were finally forced to flee from Jerusalem in obedience to Jesus' own commandment, which He issued in chapter one of the Book of Acts, as we see here:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Acts 1:8, KJV

As I explain in articles such as "A Biblical Cafeteria, or the Whole Course?", against the wise counsel of his mentor, Gamaliel, who advised that the Apostles be left alone, this persecution was spearheaded in part by Saul of Tarsus, who later became the Apostle Paul. You can read all about Saul's conversion to the young, new, Christian faith beginning at the end of Acts chapter seven, and continuing through Acts chapter nine. Both the Biblical and the historical record verify that with this persecution which began at Jerusalem, the early Disciples eventually travelled as far as northern Africa, India, Russia, Southern Europe and beyond.

Allow me to bring an interesting Bible verse association to your attention. We find Jesus' commandment to take the Gospel to all the known world of their day -- what is commonly known as the Great Commission -- in Acts 1:8. By simply reversing the verse reference, we also find the beginning of the actual fulfillment of this verse in Acts 8:1. Consider these two verses next to each other:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Acts 1:8, KJV

"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was

at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."

Acts 8:1, KJV

While the actual Twelve Apostles remained in Jerusalem, they apparently realized that the only way that they would be able to continue their work of ministering to the thousands of pilgrims who arrived in Jerusalem each year in order to fulfill their obligations at the Temple -- just as Joseph and Mary had done decades before -- would be by appearing as less of a threat to the Jewish elders. One way in which they accomplished this was by reducing their numbers, and sending out road teams to evangelize the rest of Israel.

One point which is worthy of note, is that when the writers of the Epistles spoke of Deacons and Bishops, they were not referring to an established system of church buildings such as characterizes Christendom today. Similar to their modern counterparts, these men were Elders who were responsible for overseeing the Bodies of Believers which were established in the towns that were visited by Paul, Luke, Philip, Peter, Thomas, Barnabas, Silas and others. These Believers lived in their homes and likewise congregated in their homes. This is where these Deacons and Bishops ministered to them. Allow me to again refer you to my companion series entitled "Where Are the First Century Churches?".

From the very start, Satan was determined to destroy the new Christian Church. While he attacked from without by way of serious persecution, he also attacked from within as well. By the middle of the Book of Acts, we discover that a spirit of compromise had already begun to creep into the ranks of the Disciples at Jerusalem, as well as elsewhere. A close reading of the Epistles will reveal that the Elders of the Church had already begun to issue warnings concerning the false brethren who had crept in unawares, in order to try to pressure the new Disciples into conforming to the harsh laws of Judaism.

The Apostle Paul was particularly aware of the evil which was brewing in Jerusalem; an evil which had also begun to spread to some of the Churches which he had helped to establish in regions outside of Israel as well. This becomes apparent in verses such as the following where Paul warns his young new converts to beware of the false brethren who were arriving

from Jerusalem, and poisoning them with their false gospel of legalism, and bondage to the Mosaic Law:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

Acts 20:28-30, KJV

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."

Romans 16:17, KJV

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him . . . For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."

2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-14, KJV

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

Galatians 1:6-9, KJV

"But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection,

no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."

Galatians 2:3-5, KJV

"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."

1 Timothy 6:3-5, KJV

"But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."

Titus 3:9-11, KJV

"Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision."

Philippians 3:2, KJV

Despite efforts by the Apostle Paul and other First Century leaders to contain the damage that was being inflicted by these false brethren who were preaching another gospel, only several centuries after the initial explosive events which had occurred at Jerusalem, we discover that the Christian Church -- at least some of her leadership -- appears to have cooled off in a spiritual sense to a significant degree. But was this really the true Christian Church, or was it perhaps something else?

As I point out in articles such as "Pontifex Maximus: Pagan High Priest to Roman Catholic Pope", what actually occurred is that a new church rose to power which claimed to be the original Church which had been founded by Jesus Christ and His First Century followers. This new church, rather than being spiritually-oriented with a sincere interest in the well-being of men's souls, became completely obsessed with establishing a physical kingdom on Earth. This new, false church became drunk on wealth and power, and it embraced a misguided preoccupation with constructing church buildings

and grand cathedrals. It was, and is, everything that Jesus said we are not to be.

While it may be difficult for some of you to understand how this could possibly occur, consider what has happened in our current times with modern-day America. The simple truth of the matter is that not even two and a half centuries have passed since her founding, and she has already gone astray, and has in large part abandoned the Christian heritage which she received from the Founding Fathers, many of whom were God-fearing men. Yes, many people like to claim that America is still a Christian nation -- and indeed there yet remain a lot of Bible-believing Christians within the nation -- but if the hard truth be told, she is nominally Christian at best. Even former US President Barack Obama noted that America is no longer just a Christian nation, but rather a multicultural nation.

The actions of the American government clearly reveal her true spiritual condition. The oppression, war and violence which the United States of America has meted out to other countries over the decades, has clearly put her real heart on display for the world to see. Her actions are not the actions of a God-fearing, Christian nation, and they do not reflect Christian principles and values.

We must honestly recognize that America was founded upon war; war against Britain's tyranny, as well as war against the natives of North America who dwelt in the land many centuries before the white Europeans ever arrived. As if that was not enough, Americans eventually fought against each other during the Civil War as a result of the southern states' desire to secede from the Union so that they could continue the practice of slavery. To this present time, the American Civil War remains the deadliest war which has ever been fought on American soil. It resulted in the deaths of an estimated 750,000 soldiers, as well as an undetermined number of civilians. Furthermore, from that time until now, America and the American economy have continued to depend heavily upon war, and the sale of weapons of war, in order to survive as a nation. This is the sad, inescapable truth which cannot be denied.

As I point out in articles such as "Robot Wars, Skynet, the Beast and the False Prophet" and "Communism: The Raging Bear

Out of Control", history proves that when times are rough, when economies fail, when the populace becomes dissatisfied and begins to revolt against the government, one very common tactic which is employed by governments is to start another war. Not only do external wars inspire deep patriotism and unite people under a common cause, but they also stimulate national industry, because people must be employed to work in the war factories where they build bombs, aircraft, and other devilish toys of destruction. Wars also tend to take people's minds off of troubles at home. This pattern is referred to as a war, boom bust economy, and it works until the economy goes stale again -- or busts -- or else until people get tired of fighting another war.

If you are interested in acquiring a deeper understanding of my views regarding the spiritual decline of the United States of America, as well as my position regarding war and violence, please consider reading articles such as "What is Wrong with Modern America?", "Killing, Murder, War and Military Duty", "Killing and the Phinehas Priesthood", "America: Land of the Free . . . and Hypocrisy!" and "The Fruits of Disobedience".

Given this fact regarding how swiftly Christian America has become so spiritually polluted and corrupted, and turned so violent -- a few hundred years is really nothing compared to the overall historical timeline -- it should not surprise us in the least that within the matter of a few hundred years, out of the roots of the First Century Church likewise arose a false, corrupt church which, rather than choosing to store up Eternal Rewards in Heaven, foolishly chose to lay up for itself treasures upon Earth instead. That this false church would do this is in direct disobedience to Jesus' very own commandment, as we see by these verses:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Matthew 6:19-21, KJV

Please note that the appearance on the world stage of this false church does not mean that the true Christian Church which was founded by Jesus Christ and His first Apostles has

disappeared. It was -- and still is -- here; but one must know where to look in order to find it, and it is not very far away at all. Why? Because as we learned in part one of this series, God's true Church is not a temple that is made with human hands. Rather, it is we the people in whom the Spirit of God resides when we receive Jesus Christ.

We the people are in fact His living temples, living stones, and pillars in God's spiritual Temple. Jesus informed us of this truth in the Gospels, and the Apostles Peter, John and Paul also wrote about it in their Epistles, as well as in the Book of Revelation. Consider the following additional verses:

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body."

John 2:19-21, KJV

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, KJV

"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

2 Corinthians 6:16, KJV

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

2 Corinthians 5:1, KJV

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name."

Revelation 3:12, KJV

It is also important to realize that God's true Church is not

limited by, controlled or monopolized by, or identified with, one particular denomination. If any church, denomination or Christian organization attempts to convince you otherwise, I urge you to steer clear of them. Not only are they deceived, but they are liars as well. If you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and if you are endeavoring to please Him in your daily life, then whether or not you belong to or participate in any particular church or denomination, you are still a saved Child of God. You are a part of His true Church, and a member of the household of God. Consider this verse:

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;"

Ephesians 2:19, KJV

While ancient Israel compromised with the pagan nations and peoples around and within her, and adopted their false gods and traditions as her own, in similar fashion, as the years and centuries passed, some of the early Christians likewise began to lose their spiritual fire. As I point out in other articles, even though Jesus clearly taught that we are not a part of this world, ultimately, these Christians -- powerful bishops and such -- compromised with the pagan Roman Empire; that is, with the very people who had previously persecuted and slaughtered our Christian brethren in their coliseums.

It may interest you to know that the most infamous of these horrible places of slaughter was known as the Circus of Nero. Begun by Emperor Caligula, it was completed by Emperor Nero, and became the site of the first organized, state-sponsored martyrdoms of Christians in about 65 AD. Equally disturbing is the fact that St. Peter's Basilica sits on some of the very same property that was previously occupied by the Circus of Nero. When Emperor Constantine built the original basilica during the Fourth Century -- which is now referred to as Old St. Peter's -- he used some of the existing structure of the Circus of Nero.

If you find that information alarming, then consider the fact that the world famous Obelisk which is situated in the plaza in front of St. Peter's Basilica -- St. Peter's Square -- was originally located at the center of the Circus of Nero. This monolith was brought to Rome by Caligula. During the Sixteenth Century, the Obelisk was re-erected in Saint Peter's Square by

the architect Domenico Fontana. If you doubt the validity of this information, then consider examining the information and images that you will find at the URL's below:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero%27s\\_Circus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero%27s_Circus)

<http://saintpetersbasilica.org/Plans/Circus-basilicas-plans.jpg>

In light of this rather unsettling historical evidence, the fact that St. Peter's Basilica sits on some of the very same property as the Circus of Nero, and the fact that the Obelisk was re-erected in its current location in St. Peter's Square, it makes me wonder if perhaps in some strange, sick way, Rome and the Vatican are purposely broadcasting a subtle message to the world, and may be boasting about the evil deeds which they committed against God's true children centuries ago.

It was in fact this deadly compromise with the world power of the day which resulted in the false church's spiritual marriage to -- and whoredom with -- the Roman beast. In short, just as Israel abandoned her true spiritual Husband and King, and chose to spiritually prostitute herself with pagan gods and lovers, these weak, power-hungry Christians of the Fourth Century Church did the very same thing, and this compromise has been ongoing ever since. In fact, sad to say, many of her daughter harlots are now following in her footsteps and doing the very same thing.

Being as I also discuss this issue in other articles such as "Pontifex Maximus: Pagan High Priest to Roman Catholic Pope", I won't be going into great detail here. Suffice it to say that it was a common practice for the Romans to adopt or to absorb the many gods and goddesses and customs of the nations which they conquered. This is what corrupted the Church of the Fourth Century when she compromised with Rome. In other words, in order to extend her power and influence over the masses of the Roman Empire, this false church "Christianized" many of the pagan gods, traditions, feast days and festivals, as a means of enticing Roman citizens, so that they would be more willing to embrace this new perverted version of our Christian faith. It was a form of Fourth Century ecumenism, but in a pagan sense.

Furthermore, it is a verifiable fact that this is precisely how certain so-called "Christian" holidays such as Christmas

and Easter -- and the traditions which are associated with them -- became associated with our Christian faith. Please refer to articles such as "Our Pagan World: The Easter Myth Exposed!" and "Happy Hanukkah and Merry Christmas?" for an in-depth look at these subjects. You may also wish to visit the "Non-BBB Articles" section of the Bill's Bible Basics website for additional information regarding pagan-based "Christian" holidays.

In light of this verifiable historical information, we must honestly ask ourselves if modern, organized Christianity, in its current corrupt state, is much better than the corrupt religious system of the Jews which first rejected Christ and His early Disciples. While many modern denominations embrace Jesus Christ as both Lord and Savior, have they too become lost in a suffocating sea of doctrinal legalism, meaningless rituals and materialistic worship without the true Spirit of God? Has their doctrinal compromise with abortion, the gay and lesbian agenda, evolution and other issues neutralized their effectiveness as true representatives of Jesus Christ and the things which He taught us? Have they in fact become false churches and daughter harlots?

Just as ancient Judaism held great power over the people of Israel by way of its interpretation of the Mosaic Law, and bathed in its wealth which poured in annually through the pilgrimages to its Temple, today, this modern false church likewise controls the lives of approximately 1.3 billion people around the world with its unscriptural doctrines. It too is extremely rich, while many of its congregants are poorer than poor. While I have described the rise of this false church to you in this current series, this is only the tip of the ice berg. I hope that you will continue reading my articles in order to learn more about this false church.

With these thoughts, I will bring this series to a close. I trust that you have enjoyed it, learned something from it, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your life. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Tumblr, or with any other social networks, I would really appreciate if you would take the time to click on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thank you so very much! May God bless you abundantly!

For additional information, you may want to refer to the list

of reading resources below which were also mentioned in this series, or which contain topics which are related to this series. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics website:

Cardinal Ratzinger's Rebellion  
Churchianity or Christianity: Which Do You Practice?  
Gargoyles: Satan Loves Church Buildings!  
Lies and Deceptions of the Roman Catholic Church  
Mary Worship, Christianity and Roman Catholicism  
Pontifex Maximus: Pagan High Priest to Roman Catholic Pope  
Roman Catholicism, Water Baptism and the Holy Trinity

Other Mentioned Articles:

A Biblical Cafeteria, or the Whole Course?  
Abomination of Desolation: Explained!  
Abundant Life Doctrine: Scripturally Exposed!  
All Are Given a Chance, But . . .  
America: Land of the Free . . . and Hypocrisy!  
Are Christians Obligated to Keep the Sabbath?  
Civil Disobedience and Christian Persecution  
Communism: The Raging Bear Out of Control  
Happy Hanukkah and Merry Christmas?  
Is God a Racist?  
Is the KJV Bible the Inerrant Word of God?  
Is the Message of Salvation Meant for All Men?  
Jesus Christ or Yeshua Messiah?: More Christian Zionist Legalism  
Killing and the Phinehas Priesthood  
Killing, Murder, War and Military Duty  
Money-Making Bible Hucksters and Mammon  
MP3s, Commercialized Christianity and Christian Hypocrisy  
Not Everyone is a Child of God  
Our Pagan World: The Easter Myth Exposed!  
Robot Wars, Skynet, the Beast and the False Prophet  
The Children of God and Politics  
The Fruits of Disobedience  
Welcome to Greater Israel, USA!  
What is Wrong with Modern America?  
Where Are the First Century Churches?  
Who is the Real Terrorist?

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