

# **“JERUSALEM MEETS ROME AND FINDS BABYLON: A STUDY IN CHURCH PURITY”**

**FALL 2022-SPRING 2023**

**April 12, 2023**

**“DEALING WITH CORRUPTION” Part 1**

## **I. DOCTRINAL DISPUTES – THE PRESERVATION OF TRUTH**

*A. As we have attempted to show in previous lessons, understanding and formulating the information received by the Apostles from Jesus was a major undertaking! How would they remember everything He had said and done? To our knowledge, no one was taking notes during that time.*

- 1. On the night in which our Lord was betrayed, He had promised the disciples (now Apostles) that He would send them the Holy Spirit to teach them, make them witnesses and to bring back to their minds the things which Jesus said and did.*
- 2. They had the written record of the TANAKH from which Jesus had taught them from the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, how to see the things written about them. They would refer to them and quote them in their writings and speaking opportunities.*
- 3. They, of course, had the remarkable 3 years with Him before His death in which they witnessed many miraculous things that only God can do; they heard Him speak with divine authority; they had been privately taught the meanings of things that others did not get. Those things became a part of their lives, indelibly etched into their memories. Aided by the Holy Spirit, it would be a good recall.*
- 4. Added to those days were the 40 days after His resurrection when they were taught by Him personally even more in depth than they had received before. They could see now that their imaginations of the way things “should” work out were small and insufficient after they learned from Him the truth. They would see things differently now.*
- 5. Jesus had promised to be with them so they had His ongoing presence to guide them into what was true.*

*God's presence was with them to aid them in the preservation of truth and accuracy of remembrance.*

- 6. The promised Holy Spirit HAD come and now that supernatural, superintendence was operating in them showing them with whom to speak, what to say and when to speak it. He was giving them boldness with this effective memory.*
- 7. Jesus had already taught them the principal of togetherness especially going two by two to reinforce what they spoke and did. They would have helped each other with their differing perspectives and details about what Jesus had said and done.*
- 8. Everywhere they went, they selected "disciples" like Jesus had done with them. They then taught these disciples the truth over and over until they could accurately teach what they had been taught. With it there was true reliance upon the Holy Spirit as the true teacher and developer of gifted men to lead. This is just good discipleship. These faithful men then became faithful teachers who would protect the local assemblies of believers like sheepdogs keeping the wolves and other predators out of the church and feeding the sheep good truth.*
- 9. By the time they are recording their memories and lessons learned in writing, those thoughts are pretty firmly established. The letters and documents were exchanged with others around the Roman empire and in other regions as well. Those documents are close enough in textual agreement that the textual "problems" or variations seldom if ever affect any significant doctrinal issue.*
- 10. Their writings are going to be copied and re-copied with a relatively wide distribution. Even with that, the copies when compared with each other have remarkably few variations by comparison with other copies of works of antiquity. They are treasured copies and are preserved very well.*

*B. What about after the Apostles were all removed from the scene?*

1. *The people whom they had faithfully taught preserved that truth within the church bodies of believers through continued discipleship and church structure i.e. elders*
2. *Following the guidance given them by the apostles such as Peter, Jude, John, Paul and others whose writings have been preserved, they used spiritual and informational tests to determine whether the information being given by certain teachers rang true to the Word of God. For example the Bereans and the Ephesians (Acts 17:11, Acts 20:28-31, Revelation 2:1)*
3. *Those who copied manuscripts of writings sent or delivered by the apostles were carefully copied. There was variation sometimes from one geographical region to the next, but most of the variations are explainable and very few affect doctrinal integrity.*
4. *As Pastor Al has been showing us, regional church councils were called to settle doctrinal disputes. These councils issued judgments, sometimes as creeds, that churches today still abide with. Those groups that did not accept the church councils formed separate assemblies and went their own direction. Some, over time, just disappeared due to attrition in membership.*
5. *But even that did not stop false teachers from teaching doctrines contrary to the clear teaching of Christ and the apostles. Christ is the cornerstone and the apostles laid the foundation. That is the greatest test of all - does it match that which has been laid down by Christ and the Apostles?*

## *II. DISPUTES OVER STRUCTURE AND CHURCH POLITY*

*A. From the reading of Scripture, the apostles, especially Paul, created a pretty simple, reliable and workable church government likely based on what the experience of the synagogue had been:*

1. *Elders to serve the congregation with reliable truth in a plurality of leadership. They provided orderly structure to the church services and ministries. They would carry on much of the apostolic ministry after the apostolic gifts began to wane. For instance, they were to be the discerners and teachers of truth; they were to be those*

*that administered church discipline and they were to be the agency through which the healing ministry of apostles continued.*

- 2. Deacons, church servers, who would meet the actual needs of the congregation, especially those physical ones. Gifts of hospitality, service, benevolence and counsel were especially employed and appreciated.*
  - 3. Spiritually gifted people were free to use their spiritual gifts in an orderly, faithful, Spirit-led manner. The Spirit worked through them to edify the church members and develop new ways to live and give the gospel.*
- B. But some churches/pastors could not handle the freedom that such structure provided and took advantage of its simplicity. They preferred a more military style of hierarchy. This was especially true among those who would be bishops or elders. Strong personalities often led to stifled ministry and frustrated Spirit-gifted people*
- C. Other churches permitted, what appeared to be, gifted women to teach and actually seduce members of the church.*
- D. Sometimes the free structure of the church permitted false teachers to beguile the members into eating forbidden foods or to sell their faith out to the culture like Baalam had done for Balak and Israel.*
- E. As in all human endeavors involving groups power struggles, financial corruption, moral defilement and political manipulation turned the church into wicked centers of deceit.*
- F. When churches left the biblical values and absorbed the culture's values they turned their spiritual centers into weapons of the enemy without even realizing it. It took on a pharisaical demeanor wrapped in its self-righteousness*
- G. Probably the church's biggest mistake was in abandoning its true God-given, Spirit-driven birthright and sold it for a "mess of pottage" to become the tool of the state and merchants. THIS IS THE CHURCH'S BABYLON ADULTERY. Compare it with Revelation 17*