

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

**FALL 2022-SPRING 2023**

**March 15, 2023**

## **“THE BRANCHING OF THE CHURCH” part 2**

### **I. CHURCH HISTORY AND THE BOOK OF ACTS**

*A. Most of what students of the Bible, especially the New Testament, is western in its viewpoint coming from the book of Acts.*

- 1. Paul’s missionary journeys went west toward Europe*
- 2. The information we most often read is that of Paul’s encounter with the western part of the Roman empire*
- 3. In brief, the church started in Jerusalem and moved out from there, though we are not told a lot about all the places believers went to create communities of believers one might call churches*
- 4. We know believers went to Antioch in Syria. This is where the believers were first called Christians Acts 13*
- 5. We know that some believers had gone all the way to Damascus, Syria, for Saul was going there to arrest believers there.*
- 6. We know also that whenever the persecution broke out in Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen, it sent believers everywhere preaching the Word Acts 8:4 How many locations would that have represented? We do know that many of these went to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. 11:19 What teachings might they have encountered as they preached? What practices from their former belief systems did the converts bring into their new found faith?*
- 7. We know that Philip carried the gospel into Samaria. Their faith had been close to Judaism but definitely not the same. How much of their religion was drawn into the new found, but not well-organized, faith in Christ?*
- 8. We know the faith was on the Mediterranean coast of Israel for the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, lived there and received the gospel with his whole house. What kind of church do you suppose formed there? He was devoted to God and full of good works but he had not church*

*structure there. Peter stayed with them for a few days; it could be presumed that Peter gave him some structure. What do you suppose the church in his household looked like? We know that Philip, the evangelist, one of the seven, came to live in Caesarea, Cornelius city. He had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. It is likely that a church had formed there. It may have been more in the form of a Christian community rather than simply a church. 21:7-16*

*9. It is obvious from the rest of the book of Acts that churches were being formed all over Turkey, Macedonia and Greece and at least as far as Rome. It is likely missionaries had gone west of Rome. They usually followed the path of finding communities with a Jewish synagogue.*

*10. Though we know the Ethiopian official was converted to Christ and was at least headed back to his home in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Coptic church traces its beginnings back to him. A rather large and influential Christian kingdom would form from this church and its teachings.*

## *II. CHURCH HISTORY OUTSIDE THE BOOK OF ACTS*

*A. Outside the book of Acts we know that a church known as the Syriac Orthodox Church formed in Antioch and went east. Eventually it was known as the Church in the East, East Syriac Church, the Nestorian Church, the Assyrian Church and the Babylonian Church. It would split away from the Roman Catholic church after the condemnation of the teachings of Nestorius over the person of Jesus Christ having one or two natures. We know they would encounter Zoroastrianism with its dualism. This was also the very fertile grounds of rabbinical Judaism that had no love for Christ or Christians. The very popular Babylonian Talmud was kept in these lands. These areas of Persian (Iranian and Iraqi) scholarship were very important educational and intellectual centers.*

*B. We also know that a large Christian community took up dwelling in Alexandria, Egypt. It became an influential library and training center of Christianity. This was also home to many Jewish scholars*

- C. The gospel spread across northern Africa at a pretty remarkable speed. Ultimately, one of the most influential of the church fathers came from North Africa where he was the Bishop of Hippo*
- D. We also know from history that Arabia, particularly Mecca and Medina, had large populations of both Jews and Christians. Here, these people of the book, would influence deeply a young man named Muhammed who would be the founder of the Judeo/Christian heresy of Islam*
- E. We also know from history that Thomas, the disciple is alleged to have made it to Hindu India and formed a church there.*
- F. The huge Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox church was founded in Turkey centered around Istanbul. The southwestern parts of this Turkish territory had been the center of much spiritual importance as the recent discoveries of places like Gobekli Tepe reveal. These were place of spiritual power and authority from many ages back. Missionaries of the Orthodox church would reach into China. They followed a pattern of building training centers near populated centers.*
- G. Much of the work of missionaries was in the heavily populated centers in whatever region they traveled.*
- H. The Eastern Orthodox Church split with the Roman Catholic church in 1054. It lost its political kingdom to the Ottoman Turks (Muslim) in 1453.*