

SIMON MAGUS the HERESIARCH

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Simon Magus

Foreword

Simon Magus was a major influence against the Church in the 1st Century, and his influence continued into the 5th Century through his followers. He was so influential that Emperor Claudius, with the approval of the Roman Senate, erected a statue of Simon in Rome along the Tiber River with the inscription, “To Simon, the Holy God”. Thus Simon is not just a minor character that appeared once (Acts 8:9-25) in a small backwater of the Empire, but he was among the Roman pantheon of gods.

For someone this influential, one would expect to see some references to him or to his teachings in the Scriptures. This is, in fact, the case, but references to Simon’s teachings are easy to miss if one doesn’t know what they were. In this study, we will first delve into Simon’s background to see what sort of person he was, then go into what he taught, and finally examine references to Simon’s teaching that appear in most of the books of the New Testament.

The Early Life of Simon

Simon was born in the Samaritan village of Gettai¹, the son of Antonius and Rachel². He was by profession a magician, which he learned³ in Alexandria, Egypt, but he didn’t begin his self-promotion until after the death of John the Baptist in c. 28 AD. He was even referred to⁴ as a disciple of John the Baptist for a while. He was a very learned man, and was exceedingly well-trained in Greek literature. From the works⁵ attributed⁶ to Clement, the third Bishop of Rome (d. 97 AD):

“Simon was desirous of glory, and boasted above all the human race, that he wished himself to be believed to be an exalted power (Acts 8:9), which is above God the Creator, and to be thought to be the Christ, and to be called “The Standing One”. And he used this name as implying that he can never be dissolved, asserting that his flesh is so compacted by the power of his divinity, that it can endure to eternity. Hence, therefore, he is called “The Standing One”, as though he cannot fall by any corruption”.

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¹ There are various spellings of the town of Simon’s birth, each phonetically similar to Gettai.

² Roberts and Donaldson, “Recognitions of Clement”, II, 7, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8. Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 22, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

³ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 22, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 23, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁵ Roberts and Donaldson, “Recognitions of Clement”, II, 7, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶ Jerome, in his “Preface to the Books of Recognitions of St. Clement”, stated that Clement was indeed the author of the “Recognitions”, but that two different editions of this work existed in his day. The bulk of the narrative was the same however. The only text extant today is the translation by Rufinus. Many parts are common to both the “Recognitions” and the “Homilies”.

As a magician, Simon was very much like Jannes and Jambres, Pharaoh's magicians who opposed Moses (2 Timothy 3:8). Just as Jannes and Jambres were able to duplicate some of Moses' miracles, so Simon was very powerful in magic, and Simon learned the black arts from similar sources in Egypt as Jannes and Jambres. The Clementine Homilies describe⁷ him as follows:

“Simon disciplined himself greatly in Alexandria, and being very powerful in magic, and being ambitious, wished to be accounted a certain supreme power, greater even than the God who created the world. And sometimes intimating that he is Christ, he styles himself “The Standing One”. And this epithet he employs, intimating that he shall always stand, and have no cause of corruption that would cause his body to fall. He says that the God who created the world is not Supreme, and he does not believe that the dead will be raised. He rejects Jerusalem, and substitutes Mount Gerizim for it (Compare John 4:20-23). Instead of our Christ, he proclaims himself”.

Clement of Rome described⁸ some of Simon's “miracles” as follows:

“He makes statues walk, and he rolls himself on the fire, and is not burned; and sometimes he flies. He makes loaves of bread out of stones; he becomes a serpent; he transforms himself into a goat; he becomes two-faced. He changes himself into gold; he opens locked gates; he melts iron. At banquets he produces images of all manner of forms. In his house he makes dishes be seen as borne of themselves to wait upon him, no bearers being seen. I wondered when I heard them speak thus; but many bore witness that they had been present, and had seen such things”.

“The Apostle Peter stated, ‘Those are useless signs, which you say that Simon did. But I say that the making statues walk, and rolling himself on burning coals, and becoming a dragon, and being changed into a goat, and flying in the air, and all such things, not being for the healing of man, are of a nature to deceive many. But the miracles of compassionate truth are philanthropic, such as you have heard that the Lord did, such as being freed from all kinds of diseases, and from demons, some having their hands restored, and some their feet, some recovering their eyesight, and some their hearing”’.

John Cassian (4th Century) classified⁹ healing into three different classes, where Simon's “miracles”, if they can be called such, are of the third class.

“The first class is indeed for the sake of healing when the grace of signs accompanies certain elect and righteous men on account of the merits of their holiness. For example, the Lord said, ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely you have received, freely give”’ (Matthew 10:8).

“The second is for edification of the Church and proceeds from either the faith of those who bring the sick or from those who are to be cured. “The virtue of health proceeds even from sinners and men unworthy of it. Of whom the Savior says, ‘Many shall say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not

⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 22, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 32-34, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁹ John Cassian, Conferences, XV, i.

prophesied in Your Name, and in Your Name cast out devils, and in Your Name done many mighty works? And then I will confess to them, I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity' (Matthew 7:21-23). If the faith of those who bring the sick or if the faith of the sick is lacking, it prevents those on whom the gifts of healing are conferred from receiving the healing. For example, Mark said, 'And Jesus could not do any mighty works there because of their unbelief.' (Mark 6:5-6). The Lord Himself said, 'Many lepers were in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian'" (Luke 4:27).

"The third (class) of healing is copied by the deceit and contrivance of devils. When a man who is enslaved to evident sins is, out of admiration for his miracles, regarded as a saint and a servant of God, men may be persuaded to copy his sins. Thus an opening is made for trivializing and the sanctity of religion may be brought into disgrace. Or else he who believes that he possesses the gift of healing may be puffed up by pride of heart and so fall more grievously. Hence it is when the names are invoked of those who, as they know, have no merits of holiness or any spiritual fruits, they (the devils) pretend that by their merits they are disturbed and made to flee from the bodies they have possessed. Of which it says in Deuteronomy, 'If there rise up in the midst of you a prophet, or one who says he has seen a dream, and declare a sign and a wonder. And that which he has spoken comes to pass, and he says to you: Let us go and follow after other gods whom you do not know, and let us serve them. You shall not hear the words of that prophet or of that dreamer, for the Lord your God is tempting you that it may appear whether you love Him or not with all your heart and with all your soul' (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). And in the Gospel it says, 'There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall give great signs and wonders, so that, if it were possible, even the elect should be led astray'" (Matthew 24:24).

Justin Martyr referred¹⁰ to Simon's magic and influence as being very prominent in the 1st Century. Simon was not some obscure sorcerer operating in one remote corner of the Empire. He had the favor of the Emperor and could have pre-eminence wherever he chose. In addressing the Emperor (2nd Century) Justin stated:

"After Christ's ascension into heaven the devils put forward certain men who said that they themselves were gods. There was a Samaritan, Simon, a native of the village called Gitto, who in the reign of Claudius Caesar, and in your royal city of Rome, did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him. He was considered a God, and as a God was honored by you with a statue, which statue was erected on the river Tiber, between the two bridges, and bore this inscription, in the language of Rome: 'Simoni Deo Sancto', 'To Simon the holy God'".

Irenaeus (in the mid 2nd Century) stated that Peter had some unusually keen insight into Simon's motives when Simon tried to purchase the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus had this¹¹ to say about Simon:

"This Simon, who pretended faith, supposed that the apostles themselves performed their cures by the art of magic, and not by the power of God. With

¹⁰ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, XXVI

¹¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, xxiii, 1.

respect to their filling with the Holy Spirit, through the laying on of hands, Simon suspected that even this was done through a kind of greater knowledge of magic. Offering money to the apostles, Simon thought he, too, might receive this power of bestowing the Holy Spirit on whomsoever he would, and was addressed in these words by Peter: ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity’” (Acts 8:20-23).

“He, then, not putting faith in God at all, set himself eagerly to contend against the apostles, in order that he himself might seem to be a wonderful being. He applied himself with still greater zeal to the study of the whole magic art, that he might the better bewilder and overpower multitudes of men. Such was his procedure in the reign of Claudius Caesar, by whom also he was honored with a statue on account of his magical power. Many, then, glorified this man, as if he were a god; and he taught that it was himself who appeared among the Jews as the Son, but descended in Samaria as the Father while he came to other nations in the character of the Holy Spirit. He represented himself, in a word, as being the loftiest of all powers, that is, the Being who is the Father over all, and he allowed himself to be called by whatsoever title men were pleased to address him”.

How could Simon do this? To get an idea of how far Egyptian-trained magicians could go, it is worthwhile to examine the encounter between Jannes and Jambres and Moses. In their first encounter, Aaron’s staff turned into a snake. Pharaoh then called in Jannes and Jambres and they turned their staffs into snakes also using their secret arts. Aaron’s staff (snake) then swallowed those of Jannes and Jambres (Exodus 7:9-12).

But Pharaoh’s heart had hardened and he wouldn’t listen to Moses and Aaron; and thus began the ten plagues. Jannes and Jambres were able to duplicate the first two plagues, but not the third and following. They reported to Pharaoh that the third (and following) was “the finger of God” (Exodus 8:19). But Pharaoh wouldn’t listen. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote¹², “Magic arts were taught among them, and oracles in diverse places led men astray, and all men ascribed the influences of their birth and existence to the stars, having no thought of anything beyond what was visible. And God alone, and His word, was unknown, albeit He had not hidden Himself out of men’s sight, but had unfolded the knowledge of Himself to them in many forms and many ways”. Even though Jannes and Jambres recognized the Lord as a Power beyond their secret arts, they did not repent and they did not wish to serve the Lord. As a result, the plagues affected them as well as the rest of the Egyptians (Exodus 9:11).

TABLE I
Egyptian Plagues Duplicated by Jannes and Jambres

PLAGUE/EVENT	MOSES & AARON	JANNES & JAMBRES
Initial Meeting	Staff became snake	Staff became snake
1 st Plague	Nile became blood	Nile became blood
2 nd Plague	Frogs came	Frogs came

¹² Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation of the Word, XI, 6-7, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 4.

3 rd Plague	Dust became gnats	See Exodus 8:19
4 th Plague	Insect swarms	
5 th Plague	Pestilence on livestock	
6 th Plague	Soot became skin boils	Magicians got boils also
7 th Plague	Thunder, hail and fire	
8 th Plague	Locusts	
9 th Plague	Thick darkness (3 days)	
10 th Plague	The first born	

Simon had a moment of recognition similar to Jannes and Jambres when he saw the miracles performed by Philip and the giving of the Holy Spirit by Peter and John (Acts 8:13-16). Simon “believed” (Acts 8:13), but “his heart was not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21), because he was “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” (Acts 8:23). He simply did not wish to serve the Lord.

Peter’s recognition of Simon’s heart was very insightful, and this attitude was common to other heretics that the Early Church had to deal with. Paul commented that people would come into contact with Timothy who are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God and who have a form of piety but deny its power. Like Jannes and Jambres, they would have corrupt minds [having the characteristics described in 2 Timothy 3:2-4, 1 Timothy 6:3-5] and will resist the Truth. Paul referred to them as “evil men and impostors...deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13). Yet, Paul said, they will advance no farther, for their folly will be manifest to all as was that of Jannes and Jambres when Egypt was destroyed by the plagues and in the Red Sea (2 Timothy 3:9).

One technique of these heretics that Paul warned Timothy about was the leading captive of the gullible, especially those loaded down with sins (2 Timothy 3:6-7). Jerome wrote¹³ that it was common for Simon and the heretics that followed him to use women for fornication and other purposes:

“What object is served by ‘Gullible women laden with sins, carried about with every wind of doctrine, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth?’ (2 Timothy 3:6-7, Ephesians 4:14) Or how is the cause helped by the men who dance attendance upon these men with itching ears (2 Timothy 4:3)? They know neither how to hear nor how to speak? They confound old mire with new cement and, as Ezekiel says, daub a wall with untempered mortar; so that, when the truth comes in a shower, they are brought to naught” (Ezekiel 13:10-16).

As examples of this, Jerome noted, “It was with the help of the harlot Helena that Simon Magus founded his sect. Bands of women accompanied Nicolas of Antioch (Revelation 2:14-15) that deviser of all uncleanness. Apelles possessed in Philumena an associate in his false doctrines. Montanus, that mouthpiece of an unclean spirit, used two rich and high born ladies Prisca and Maximilla first to bribe and then to pervert many churches”.

Just as Jesus began His public ministry, so Simon began to make his move for power by taking over the leadership of a group of the disciples of John the Baptist in Samaria. At the end

¹³ Jerome, Letter to Ctesiphon, CXXXIII, 4.

of His public ministry, Jesus had warned His followers about the coming influence of Simon and his cohorts in the following words:

“Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe *it*. For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand” (Matthew 24:23-25).

The Clementine Homilies describe¹⁴ Simon’s move for power in trying to take over after the death of John the Baptist as follows:

“John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord Jesus had thirty chief men, as the Lord had twelve apostles. But of these thirty, the first and the most esteemed by John was Simon; and the reason of his not being chief after the death of John was as follows:”

“While Simon was absent in Egypt for the practice of magic, John was beheaded; Dositheus desiring the leadership, lied and said that Simon was dead, and thus succeeded to the seat. But Simon returned not long after. When he met with Dositheus, he did not demand the first place. Instead, with pretended friendship, he gave himself for a while to the second place, under Dositheus. But after a few days among the thirty fellow-disciples, he began to malign Dositheus as not delivering instructions correctly. Simon said that Dositheus did this, not through unwillingness to deliver them correctly, but through ignorance. On one occasion, Dositheus, perceiving that this artful accusation of Simon was dissipating many peoples' opinion of him, came in a rage to the usual place of meeting, and finding Simon, struck him with a staff. But it seemed to pass through the body of Simon as if he had been smoke. Thereupon Dositheus, being confounded, said to him, ‘If you are “The Standing One”, I also will worship you.’ Then Simon said that he was; and Dositheus, knowing that he himself was not “The Standing One”, fell down and worshipped Simon. Associating himself with the twenty-nine chiefs, Dositheus raised Simon to his own place of repute; and thus, not many days after, Dositheus himself, while he (Simon) stood, fell down¹⁵ and died”.

“Simon then went about in company with Helena¹⁶ stirring up the people. He said that he had brought down this Helena from the highest heavens to the world. Being queen, she was the all-bearing being, and wisdom, for whose sake the Greeks and barbarians fought, having before their eyes but an image of truth; for she, who really is the truth, was then with the chief God”.

Regarding Helena, Irenaeus stated that Helena was the first conception of Simon’s mind, by which, in the beginning, he conceived in his mind the thought of forming angels and archangels. She, he said, created the angels, who were responsible for the Law of Moses. Simon stated that these laws only bring men into bondage, but he saves men by his grace. Therefore men can disregard the Law of Moses once they have accepted Simon’s grace. As a result, there was flagrant disregard for the Mosaic Law among Simon’s followers, who in some places were

¹⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 23-26, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

¹⁵ One might wonder whether Simon had a hand in Dositheus’ death, such as by poison.

¹⁶ This Helena is sometimes also called “Luna”. Roberts and Donaldson, “Recognitions of Clement”, II, 8, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

called “Gnostics”, and who were condemned by the Apostles for such lawless practices (Revelation 2:14-15). Irenaeus stated¹⁷:

“For this Helena came forth from him, and comprehending the will of her father, descended (from heaven) to the lower regions of space, and generated angels and powers. But after she had produced them, they detained her through motives of jealousy, because they were unwilling to be looked upon as the progeny of any other being. She suffered all kinds of scorn from them, so that she could not return upwards to her father, but was even shut up in a human body, and for ages passed in succession from one female body to another, as from vessel to vessel. She was, for example, in that Helen on whose account the Trojan War was undertaken. Thus she, passing from body to body, and suffering insults in every one of them, at last became a common prostitute; and she it was that was meant by the lost sheep”.

“For this purpose, then, he had come that he might win her first, and free her from slavery, while he conferred salvation upon men, by making himself known to them. Since the angels ruled the world in an evil manner, because each one of them coveted the principal power for himself, he had come to amend matters. He had descended and transfigured so that he might appear among men to be a man, while yet he was not a man. And thus he was thought to have suffered in Judea by being crucified, when he had not suffered. Moreover, the prophets uttered their predictions under the inspiration of those angels who formed the world; for which reason those who place their trust in him and Helena no longer regarded them, but, as being free, live as they please. For men are saved through his grace, and not on account of their own righteous actions. For such deeds are not righteous in the nature of things, but by mere accident, just as those angels who made the world, have thought fit to constitute laws and precepts, to bring men into bondage. On this account, he pledged himself that the world should be dissolved, and that those who are his should be freed from the rule of them who made the world”.

“Thus, then, the mystic priests belonging to this sect both lead profligate lives and practice magical arts, each one to the extent of his ability. They use exorcisms and incantations. Love-potions, too, and charms, as well as those beings who are called familiars and dream-senders, and whatever other curious arts can be had recourse to, are eagerly pressed into their service. They also have an image of Simon fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter, and another of Helena in the shape of Minerva; and these they worship. They are called Simonians; and from them ‘knowledge (Greek: *gnosis*), falsely so called’, received its beginning (as in the Gnostic sects), as one may learn even from their own assertions”.

Simon revealed his heresy¹⁸ to fellow members of the Thirty, where he claimed to be God, and born of a virgin, just like Christ. The other members of the Thirty, including Aquila and Niceta, did not go along with Simon in his heresy, but instead inquired of him as to the extent of his opinions:

“Simon stated to the Thirty, ‘Do not think that I am a man of your race. I am neither magician, nor lover of Helena, nor son of Antonius. For before my

¹⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, xxiii, 2-4.

¹⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, “Recognitions of Clement”, II, 14-15, *PseudoClementine Literature*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

mother Rachel and he came together, she, still a virgin, conceived me, so that I might appear as a man among men. Therefore I have chosen you first as my friends, for the purpose of trying you, that I may place you first in my heavenly places when I shall have proved you. Therefore I have pretended to be a man, that I might more clearly ascertain if you cherish affection towards me.’ When Aquila heard that, he judged Simon indeed to be a wretch, yet wondering at his impudence. Aquila blushed for him, and at the same time feared lest he should attempt some evil against the Thirty. So Aquila beckoned to Niceta to pretend for a little along with him, and said to Simon, ‘Do not be angry with us corruptible men, O incorruptible God, but rather accept our affection, and our mind willing to know who God is. For we did not know till now who you are, nor did we perceive that you are he whom we were seeking’”

“As we spoke these and such like words with looks suited to the occasion, this most vain fellow believed us. And being thereby the more elated, he added also this, ‘I shall now be propitious to you for the affection which you bear towards me as God. For you loved me while you did not know me, and were seeking me in ignorance. Now, then, I shall begin to unfold to you what is true. By my power, I once turned air into water, and water again into blood, and solidified it into flesh, forming a new human creature — a boy — and produced a much nobler work than God the Creator. For He created a man from the earth, but I from air — a far more difficult matter; and again I unmade him and restored him to air, but not until I had placed his picture and image in my bed-chamber, as a proof and memorial of my work.’ Then we understood that he spoke concerning that boy, whose soul, after Simon had slain him by violence, he made use of for those services which he required”.

The rest of the Thirty were aghast at what Simon rushed headlong into, and they were ashamed of their association with him¹⁹, and counseled him to change. Unlike Simon, they were not after personal glory and honor. All their efforts were to no avail however.

“When Aquila had thus spoken, his brother Niceta said, ‘It is necessary, O Clement our brother, for me to mention what has been left out by Aquila. For, in the first place, God is witness that we assisted Simon in no impious work, but that we looked on while he worked. As long as he did harmless things, and exhibited them, we were also pleased. But when, in order to deceive the godly, he said that he did, by means of godhead, the things that were done by magic, we no longer endured him, though he made us many promises. He said especially that our statues should be thought worthy of a place in the temple; that we should be thought to be gods and should be worshipped by the multitude; that we should be honored by kings; and that we should be thought worthy of public honors and enriched with boundless wealth’”.

“These things, and things greater than these, he promised us, on condition only that we should associate with him, and keep silence as to the wickedness of his undertaking, so that the scheme of his deceit might succeed. But still we would not consent, but even counseled him to desist from such madness, saying to him: ‘We remember our friendship towards you from our childhood, and out of affection for you, give you good counsel. Desist from this attempt. You cannot

¹⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 27-28, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

be a God. Fear Him who is really God. Know that you are a man, and that the time of your life is short. Though you should get great riches, or even become a king, few things accrue to the short time of your life for enjoyment, and things wickedly gotten soon flee away, and procure everlasting punishment for the adventurer. Wherefore we counsel you to fear God, by whom the soul of every one must be judged for the deeds that he hath done here”.

Simon thus was quite a contrast to the followers of John the Baptist. John’s preaching awed people coming to him. Tax collectors, soldiers and other people were so blown away that they simply asked, “What shall we do?” (Luke 3:10-14) When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John, he stated:

“Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as *our* father’. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:7-10).

All this did not move Simon. As Peter correctly observed, his heart was not right in the sight of God (Acts 8:21), and everything he did with John was a pretense.

When Peter came to Caesarea to visit Cornelius (Acts 10:1-8), he also spoke to a number of the Thirty, including Aquila and Niceta. Just as Paul, Aquila (of the Seventy) and Priscilla updated Apollos and the twelve followers of John the Baptist in Ephesus and Corinth (Acts 18:24-19:7), so Peter did so for many of the Thirty. Details of this will be covered in the chapter on Peter’s debate with Simon.

Simon’s Extensive Influence in Samaria

Justin Martyr, born in 114 AD in Flavia Neapolis, a city of Samaria (the modern Nablous) addressed the Emperor and the Roman Senate regarding²⁰ the influence held by Simon Magus and his followers, and how they were called ‘Christians’, but were not persecuted as the true Christians were:

“After Christ’s ascension into heaven the devils put forward certain men who said that they themselves were gods; and they were not only not persecuted by you, but even deemed worthy of honors. There was a Samaritan, Simon, a native of the village called Gitto, who in the reign of Claudius Caesar, and in your royal city of Rome, did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him. He was considered a god, and as a god was honored by you with a statue, which statue was erected on the river Tiber, between the two bridges, and bore this inscription, in the language of Rome: ‘Simoni Deo Sancto’, ‘To Simon the holy God’. And almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him, and acknowledge him as the first God; and a woman, Helena, who went about with him at that time, and had formerly been a prostitute, they say is the first idea generated by him”.

“And a man, Menander, also a Samaritan, of the town Capparetaea, a disciple of Simon, and inspired by devils, we know to have deceived many while he was in Antioch by his magical art. He persuaded those who adhered to him

²⁰ Justin Martyr, First Apology, XXVI, LVI.

that they should never die, and even now there are some living who hold this opinion of his”.

“And there is Marcion, a man of Pontus, who is even at this day alive, and teaching his disciples to believe in some other god greater than the Creator. And he, by the aid of the devils, has caused many of every nation to speak blasphemies, and to deny that god is the maker of this universe, and to assert that some other being, greater than He, has done greater works. All who take their opinions from these men are called Christians. And whether they perpetrate those fabulous and shameful deeds — promiscuous intercourse, and eating human flesh — we know not; but we do know that they are neither persecuted nor put to death by you, at least on account of their opinions”.

Justin also wrote²¹ that the Jewish leaders of his day, besides deleting and changing parts of the Scriptures that had obvious reference to Christ, had attitudes similar to Simon Magus. The error of both stemmed from a misperception of Christ.

“And a vast multitude in your nation (i.e. the Jewish leaders of the 2nd Century) are convicted of being of this kind, imbibing doctrines of bitterness and godlessness, but spurning the word of God. He speaks therefore in the passage relating to Judah, ‘A prince shall not fail from Judah, nor a ruler from his thighs, till that which is laid up for him come; and He shall be the expectation of the nations’ (Genesis 49:10 LXX). And it is plain that this was spoken not of Judah, but of Christ. For all we out of all nations do expect not Judah, but Jesus, who led your fathers out of Egypt. For the prophecy referred even to the advent of Christ, ‘Till He come for whom this is laid up, and He shall be the expectation of nations’. Jesus came, therefore, as we have shown at length, and is expected again to appear above the clouds; whose name you profane, and labor hard to get it profaned over all the earth. What follows indicates that the reference is to Christ (for it is, ‘and He shall be the expectation of nations’). Therefore I do not proceed to have a mere verbal controversy with you, as I have not attempted to establish proof about Christ from the passages of Scripture, which are not admitted by you, which I quoted from the words of Jeremiah the prophet, and Esdras, and David. But I have quoted from those which are even now admitted by you, which had your teachers comprehended, be well assured they would have deleted them, as they did those about the death of Isaiah, whom you sawed asunder with a wooden saw. And this was a mysterious type of Christ being about to cut your nation in two, and to raise those worthy of the honor to the everlasting kingdom along with the holy patriarchs and prophets. But He has said that He will send others to the condemnation of the unquenchable fire along with similar disobedient and impenitent men from all the nations. ‘For they shall come,’ He said, ‘from the west and from the east, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness’” (Matthew 8:11-12).

²¹ Justin Martyr, Dialog with Trypho, CXX.

Justin continued to say²² that the Samaritans not only trusted Simon, but also believed that he was a god above all power, and authority, and might.

“And I have mentioned these things, taking nothing whatever into consideration, except the speaking of the truth, and refusing to be coerced by any one, even though I should be forthwith torn in pieces by you. For I gave no thought to any of my people, that is, the Samaritans, when I had a communication in writing with Caesar. I stated that they were wrong in trusting to the magician Simon of their own nation, who, they say, is god above all power, and authority, and might”.

The 4th Century Church historian, Eusebius, also wrote²³ of the influence that Simon Magus had in the 1st Century:

“Simon was at that time so celebrated, and had acquired, by his jugglery, such influence over those who were deceived by him, that he was thought to be the great power of God. But at this time, being amazed at the wonderful deeds wrought by Philip through the divine power, he pretended faith in Christ, even going so far as to receive baptism. And what is surprising, those who follow his most impure heresy do the same thing even to this day. For they, after the manner of their forefather, slipping into the Church, like a pestilential and leprous disease greatly afflict those into whom they are able to infuse the deadly and terrible poison concealed in themselves. The most of these have been expelled as soon as they have been caught in their wickedness, as Simon himself, when detected by Peter, received the merited punishment”.

That Simon was well known is evident, even during the three years of Jesus’ public ministry. Since Simon began his move for power following the death of John the Baptist, he was performing his phony “miracles” in Samaria at the same time that Jesus was performing His real miracles in Judea and Galilee. But yet, Jesus and the Twelve never came into contact with Simon, even though Jesus traveled through Samaria (John 4:3-43, Luke 17:11-19). Their contact with the Samaritans seems to have been limited to the poor and the sick. When Jesus sent the Twelve out two-by-two to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out demons, He instructed them not to go to Samaria, but to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-8), thus postponing conflict with Simon until after they had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. When He sent the Seventy out two-by-two “before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go” (Luke 10:1), they went to Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia and to cities in Northern Galilee (Luke 10:13), but we have no record of their contact with Samaritans. Perhaps they had already returned from their mission (Luke 10:17) before Jesus made His last journey through Samaria on His way to the Cross in Jerusalem.

About a year before Jesus was crucified, the Jewish leaders got very angry with Him over all the things He was saying. He claimed to be the Source of living water during a solemn occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:37-39). He claimed to be the Light of the world (John 8:12). He also claimed to be God, Who had come down from heaven (John 8:23-30, 3:13, 6:51-58). Simon had also been saying that he was God who had come down from heaven. When the Jewish leaders were debating with Jesus, they said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (John 8:48) What they were implying was that they

²² Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, CXX

²³ Eusebius, Church History, II, i.

thought that Jesus was just another follower of Simon Magus, who had recently been exalting himself a few miles away in Samaria.

About a year earlier, the Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons (Matthew 12:24). Simon, using his magic arts, did many miraculous signs. The Pharisees may have recognized Simon's power as coming from Satan, and therefore they accused Jesus as being linked to Simon.

Simon Tries to Purchase the Holy Spirit

At the time that Simon encountered the Apostle Philip of the Seventy, he had been actively using his sorcery for a long time in Samaria. And just like the magicians who opposed Moses at the Exodus, Simon recognized a power greater than his own. In trying to obtain that power, Simon went through the motions of conversion, but all accounts indicate that no change of heart took place. The account in the Scripture regarding Simon's attempt to purchase the Holy Spirit reads as follows:

“But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God’. And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorcery for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done”.

“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. As yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit”.

“And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit’. But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity’. Then Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me’” (Acts 8:9-24).

John Chrysostom compared²⁴ the receipt of the Faith by the Magi that visited the infant Christ with the rejection of the Faith by Simon. Both had been trained in similar magical arts. But the Magi had a pure heart and vision beyond their secret arts. Chrysostom commented as follows:

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Sermon for the Epiphany, cited by Holy Apostles Covent, “The Lives of the Holy Apostles”, p. 202

“The Magi sought the Lord Christ, born King of the Jews, among those from whom they knew that Balaam, a prophet from the Gentiles, had prophesied that He would come. The faith of the Magi is the condemnation of the Jews. The Magi believed on the authority of their one soothsayer Balaam and the Prophet Daniel; but the Jews, from the testimony of many prophets, refused to believe. Whereas the Magi acknowledged that the coming of Christ would terminate their profane knowledge and magical acts, the Jews would not accept the Lawgiver’s doing away with their sacrifices and refused to accept the mysteries of the divine dispensation. The Magi confessed a stranger; the Jews rejected their own”

Origen noted²⁵ that Simon and his followers were not subject to persecution like the members of the various Churches, since Satan does not persecute his own (Matthew 12:23-29). Origen also compares Simon and Dositheus to earlier false messiahs like Theudas²⁶ and Judas of Galilee²⁷, who rose up during the days of the census (Acts 5:36-37). This occurred at the time of the birth of Christ (Luke 2:2), or c. 4 BC.

“But even at the beginning of their existence the followers of Simon were not exposed to persecution. For that wicked demon that was conspiring against the doctrine of Jesus, was well aware that the teaching of Simon would weaken none of his own maxims. The Dositheans even in former times did not rise to any eminence, and now they are completely extinguished, so that it is said their whole number does not amount to thirty. Judas of Galilee wished to call himself some great personage, as did Theudas before him. But as their doctrine was not of God, they were destroyed, and all that obeyed them were immediately dispersed” (Acts 5:35-38).

John Chrysostom had some insightful comments on the circumstances surrounding Simon’s encounter with Philip, Peter and John:

“If great signs had been done²⁸, how then had they not received the Spirit? They had received the Spirit, namely, of remission of sins; but the Spirit of miracles they had not received. ‘As yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 8:16-17). For, to show that this was the case, and that it was the Spirit of miracles they had not received, observe how, having seen the result, Simon came and asked for this. ‘And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 8:18-19).

²⁵ Origen, Against Celsus, VI, 11.

²⁶ Josephus mentioned another Theudas, who was a magician like Simon, and who was slaughtered along with his followers when Cuspius Fadus was procurator of Judah before Tiberius Alexander. Josephus, Antiquities, XX, v, 1.

²⁷ Josephus wrote that two sons of Judas of Galilee created a revolt during the great famine (Acts 11:27-29). Tiberius Alexander, the procurator of Judah, had them both crucified. Josephus, Antiquities, XX, v, 2.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XVIII.

“Why didn’t Philip’s converts receive the Holy Spirit, when baptized? It was Providentially ordered that these should go forth and those should be lacking, because of the Holy Spirit. For they had received power to work miracles, but not also to impart the Spirit to others; this was the prerogative of the Apostles. And observe how they sent the chief ones, not any others, but Peter and John”.

“Observe the execrable conduct of Simon. ‘He offered money’, with what object? And yet he did not see Peter doing this for money. And it was not out of ignorance that he acted thus; it was because he would tempt them, because he wished to get matter of accusation against them. After Peter denounced Simon for the depraved condition of his heart, Simon mouthed words of repentance. But even this he did only formally, as words of course, when he ought to have wept and mourned as a penitent”.

Early Christian tradition states that, in going through the motions, Simon seemed to do what everyone else was doing, except that he only pretended to accept Christ. The Church compared him with Judas Iscariot.

“Simon himself, when²⁹ he saw the signs and wonders which were done without any magic ceremonies, fell into admiration, and believed, and was baptized, and continued in fasting and prayer”.

“Every one shall give³⁰ account of himself, and God will not destroy the righteous with the wicked; for with Him it is a constant rule, that innocence is never punished. For neither did He drown Noah, nor burn up Lot, nor destroy Rahab’s company. And if you desire to know how this matter was among us, Judas was one of us, and took the like part of the ministry, which we had; and Simon the magician received the seal of the Lord. Yet both the one and the other proving wicked, the former hanged himself, and the latter, as he flew in the air in a manner unnatural, was dashed against the earth. Moreover, Noah and his sons with him were in the ark; but Ham, who alone was found wicked, received punishment in his son”.

John Chrysostom continued³¹:

“After Simon was baptized, he continued with Philip not for faith’s sake, but in order that he might become such as he. But why did Peter and John not correct him instantly? They were content with his condemning himself. For this too belonged to their work of teaching. When he had no power to do anything else, he played the hypocrite, just as did the magicians who said, ‘This is the finger of God’ (Exodus 8:19). In order that he might not be driven away, therefore he ‘continued with Philip’, and did not part from him”.

“Do you see that it was not done in any ordinary manner, but it needed great power to give the Holy Spirit? For it is not the same to obtain remission of sins, and to receive such a power. It was a twofold sign: both the giving to those, and the not giving to this man. Whereas Simon ought, on the contrary, to have asked to receive the Holy Spirit; because he did not care for this, he asked power to give it to others. And yet Philip did not receive this power to give; but Simon

²⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, VI, ii, 7, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

³⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, II, iii, 14, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XVIII.

wished to be more illustrious than Philip, he being among the (Seventy) disciples!”

John Chrysostom pointed out a second similar occurrence that happened to Paul and Barnabas on their First Missionary Journey while they were on Cyprus. At Paphos, a Jewish sorcerer named Bar-Jesus (also called Elymas) tried to turn the Proconsul Sergius Paulus away from the Faith. When Paul pronounced blindness on the sorcerer, the proconsul believed. Chrysostom stated:

“Again a Jewish sorcerer³², as was Simon. And observe this man, while they preached to the others, he was not bothered, but only when they approached the proconsul. And then regarding the proconsul, the wonder is that although prepossessed by the man’s sorcery, he was nevertheless willing to hear the Apostles. So it was with the Samaritans; from the competition the victory appears, the sorcery being defeated”.

Chrysostom pointed out³³ a third similar expression of sorcery that occurred as Paul and Silas came to Philippi (Acts 16:16-24).

“A certain damsel was possessed with a spirit of Python³⁴. What is this demon? The god, as they call him, Python, from the place he is so called. And the demon wished to bring them into temptation, to provoke them, so the demon followed us and cried out saying, ‘These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation’. O you accursed one! If then you know that it is ‘His way of salvation that they show’, why do you not come out of him freely? But just what Simon wished, when he said, ‘Give me, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 8:19), the same did this demon. Since he saw them becoming famous, he also played the hypocrite; by this means he thought to be allowed to remain in the body, if he should preach the same things. But if Christ did not need to ‘receive testimony from man’, (John 5:34), meaning John, much less from a demon. ‘Praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner, for it was not sent him of the Lord’ (Ecclesiasticus 15:9), much less from a demon. For what they preach is not of men, but of the Holy Spirit”.

Ambrose stated³⁵ that Simon had become depraved due to a long history of practice of magic, and consequently had no clear consciousness of faith:

“When Simon, depraved by long practice of magic, had thought he could gain by money the power of conferring the grace of Christ and the infusion of the Holy Spirit. We see that Peter by his apostolic authority condemns him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit through magic vanity, and all the more because he had not the clear consciousness of faith. And yet Peter did not exclude him from the hope of forgiveness, for he called him to repentance”.

Tertullian stated³⁶ that magic and astrology, such as Simon practiced, was a form of idolatry, and was taught to men by the fallen angels.

³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXVIII.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXXV.

³⁴ Pytho was the former name for Delphi, Greece which was the seat of the Oracle of Delphi that used divination.

³⁵ Ambrose, “Two Books Concerning Repentance”, II, iv, 23, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 10.

“We observe among the arts that some professions are liable to the charge of idolatry. Of astrologers this should be obvious. Since one of these has challenged us, defending his profession, I will use a few words. I allege not that he honors idols, whose names he has inscribed on the heaven, to whom he has attributed all God’s power. Presuming that we are influenced by the immutable alignment of the stars, men think on that account that God is not to be sought after. Consider those angels, the deserters from God (Ezekiel 28:14-17, Isaiah 14:12-15), the lovers of women (Genesis 6:4), were likewise the discoverers of this curious art (Genesis 11:1-9), and on that account condemned by God. The astrologers are therefore expelled just like their angels. There is the same penalty of exclusion for disciples and masters”.

“But the Scripture states that Magi and astrologers came from the East (Matthew 2:1-3). We know the mutual alliance of magic and astrology. The interpreters of the stars were the first to announce Christ’s birth, the first to present Him gifts (Matthew 2:9-11). By this bond, are we forced to say that they put Christ under obligation to themselves? No! Shall the religion of those Magi act as patron now also to astrologers? No! Astrology treats of Christ and is the science of the stars of Christ. Astrology has been allowed until the Gospel, in order that after Christ’s birth no one from then on should interpret anyone’s nativity by the heaven. For the Magi offered to the then infant Lord frankincense and myrrh and gold to be the close of worldly sacrifice and glory, which Christ was about to do away with. Their dream sent doubtless of the will of God, suggested to the same Magi that they should go home, but by another way, not that by which they came (Matthew 2:12). It means this: that they should not walk in their ancient path. Just so we ought to understand the right Way and Discipline. And so the precept was that from then on, they should walk otherwise”.

“So, too, that other species of magic which operates by miracles, used in opposition to Moses (Exodus 7:8-8:20), tried God’s patience until the Gospel. For Simon Magus, just turned “believer”, was cursed by the apostles, and ejected from the faith. He was still thinking of his juggling sect, that among the miracles of his profession he might buy even the gift of the Holy Spirit through imposition of hands (Acts 8:18-20). Both he and that other magician, who was with Sergius Paulus, since he began opposing himself to the same apostles, was struck with the loss of eyes (Acts 13:6-12). The same fate would astrologers, too, have met, if any had fallen in the way of the apostles”.

“After the Gospel, you will nowhere find either sophists, Chaldeans, enchanters, diviners, or magicians, except as clearly punished. ‘Where is the wise, where the grammarian, where the disputer of this age? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this age?’ (1 Corinthians 1:20) You know nothing, astrologer, if you do not know that you should be a Christian. If you did know it, you ought to have known this also, that you should have nothing more to do with that profession of yours which, of itself, might instruct you of its own danger. There is neither part nor lot for you in that system of yours. He cannot hope for the kingdom of the heavens, whose finger or wand abuses heaven”.

³⁶ Tertullian, “On Idolatry”, I, ii, 9, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.3.

Regarding Simon's baptism, Cyril of Jerusalem stated that he came for baptism in hypocrisy to spy out what the faithful were doing, and was therefore condemned. This was a characteristic of later heretics also.

"Even Simon Magus once came³⁷ to the Laver (Acts 8:13); he was baptized, but was not enlightened. Though he dipped his body in water, he enlightened not his heart with the Spirit; his body went down and came up, but his soul was not buried with Christ, nor raised with Him (Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12). Now I mention the statements of men's falls, that you may not fall; for these things happened to them by way of example, and they are written for the admonition of those who to this day draw near (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Let none of you be found tempting His grace, *lest any root of bitterness³⁸ spring up and trouble you* (Hebrews 12:15). Let none of you enter saying, 'Let us see what the faithful are doing; let me go in and see, that I may learn what is being done'. Do you expect to see, and not expect to be seen? And do you think that while you are searching out what is going on, God is not searching your heart?"

"But perhaps there is³⁹ among you some hypocrite, a man-pleaser, and one who makes a pretense of piety, but believes not from the heart, having the hypocrisy of Simon Magus. One, who has come in, not in order to receive of the grace, but to spy out what is given, let him also learn from John! 'And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bring forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire' (Matthew 3:10). The Judge is unyielding; put away your hypocrisy".

"Beware lest like Simon⁴⁰ you come to the dispensers of Baptism in hypocrisy, while your heart is not seeking the truth. (As Bishops), it is ours to protest hypocrisy, but it is yours to secure the true Faith. If you stand in faith, blessed are you; if you have fallen in unbelief, from this day forward cast away your unbelief, and receive full assurance. For, at the season of baptism, when you have come before the Bishops, or Presbyters, or Deacons, approach the Minister of Baptism, but think not of his face that you see, but remember this Holy Spirit of whom we are now speaking. For He is present in readiness to seal your soul, and He shall give you that Seal at which evil spirits tremble, a heavenly and sacred seal, as also it is written, 'In whom also you believed, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise'" (Ephesians 1:13).

"Why was Simon the sorcerer⁴¹ condemned? Was it not that he came to the Apostles, and said, 'Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit?' (Acts 8:19) For he said not, 'Give me the fellowship of the Holy Spirit', but 'Give me the power'; that he might sell to others that which could not be sold, and which he did not himself possess. He offered money to them who had no possessions (i.e. the Apostles). And this, though he saw men bringing the prices of the things sold, and laying them at the Apostles' feet (Acts 4:35). And he didn't consider that they who trod under foot

³⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, "Prologue to the Catechetical Lectures", 2.

³⁸ This root of bitterness is exactly what the Apostle Peter discerned regarding Simon. "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" (Acts 8:23).

³⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, III, 7.

⁴⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVII, 35.

⁴¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVI, 10.

the wealth, which was brought for the maintenance of the poor, were not likely to give the power of the Holy Spirit for a bribe. But what did they say to Simon? ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money’ (Acts 8:20). For you are a second Judas for expecting to buy the grace of the Spirit with money”.

“For the heretics⁴², who are most profane in all things, have sharpened their tongue (Psalm 140:3) against the Holy Spirit also, and have dared to utter impious things; as Irenaeus the interpreter has written in his injunctions against heresies. For some of them have dared to say that they were themselves the Holy Spirit; of whom the first was Simon the sorcerer spoken of in Acts. For when he was cast out, he taught such doctrines. And they who are called Gnostics, impious men, have spoken other things against the Spirit. And the wicked Valentinians, something else; and the profane Manes dared to call himself the Paraclete sent by Christ. Others again have taught that the Spirit is different in the Prophets and in the New Testament, and great is their error, or rather their blasphemy. Abhor these, and flee from them who blaspheme the Holy Spirit and have no forgiveness (Matthew 12:31-32). For what fellowship have you with the desperate, you who are now to be baptized into the Holy Spirit? If he who attaches himself to a thief, and consents with him, is subject to punishment, what hope shall he have, who offends against the Holy Spirit?”

John Cassian stated⁴³ that Simon received saving grace, but in vain because he never repented in response to Peter’s command.

“The reception of saving grace was of no profit to Simon doubtless because he had received it in vain. For he would not obey the command of the blessed Peter who said, ‘Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity’” (Acts 8:22-23).

The Apostle Peter’s Debate with Simon Magus

In documents attributed to Clement of Rome, Clement records a debate⁴⁴ in his “Recognitions” between the learned Simon Magus and the Apostle Peter, who had little formal education (Acts 4:13). This debate over some of Simon’s teaching took place in Caesarea (Acts 10:1-8, 12:19) after Simon’s baptism, but before he left Samaria for Antioch and Rome. The following is a summary of the debate including some of the major points and some of the people present. This debate is an interesting expose of Simon’s lies. As he keeps getting cornered in one lie after another, he adroitly changes the subject and moves on, presenting a very slippery target.

⁴² Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVI, 6.

⁴³ John Cassian, Conferences, II, xiii, 12.

⁴⁴ According to Johannes Quasten, Patrology, Volume 1, p. 61, the only complete copy of the “Recognitions” that is extant today is the translation into Latin that was done by Rufinus in the 4th Century. Jerome wrote a Preface to the “Recognitions”, also in the 4th Century, where he referenced two different Greek versions that existed in his day. Both Rufinus and Jerome attributed the original document to Clement, Bishop of Rome in the late 1st Century. Other early Christian tradition also refers to this debate, such as Roberts and Donaldson, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, VI, ii, 7-8, Ante-Nicean Fathers, v. 7.

Zacchaeus, the former tax collector (Luke 19:2), and later Bishop of Caesarea in Samaria, wrote⁴⁵ to James, the Bishop of Jerusalem, requesting help in combating Simon. Simon had been subverting many people in Samaria, asserting that he was the Christ, and the great power of the high God (Acts 8:9-10), which is superior to the Creator of the world. At the same time Simon showed many miracles that made some doubt the Faith and that made others fall away from the Faith. Somehow Simon knew of Peter's arrival without anyone telling him, and he took the initiative and challenged⁴⁶ Peter to a public debate.

Two former disciples of Simon named Niceta and Aquila, who had been converted to the Faith by Zacchaeus, advised⁴⁷ Peter regarding Simon's skills and methods, and about his wickedness. They felt that Simon might overmatch Peter. Before their conversion, Simon had told Niceta and Aquila that he had made a boy out of air⁴⁸ and claimed that this was a much nobler work than God the Creator when He made a man from the earth (Genesis 2:7). Because he had done a work that was far more difficult, Simon claimed to be greater than God the Creator. What Simon had actually done was create illusions. First he murdered a boy, and then he used the boy's body as part of his system of illusions to make it appear that the boy was alive. So that no one could catch him in this trick, he claimed that he sent the boy back to the air. Niceta and Aquila advised Peter of this, and this bit of information would become a key facet toward the end of the debate

As the debate began, there were many supporters of Simon attending. Peter began⁴⁹ the debate by addressing the people present, saying: "Peace be to all of you who are prepared to give your right hands to truth, and to walk in His paths of righteousness". Peter then defined what righteousness is. Simon refused Peter's concept of peace⁵⁰, preferring the peace that comes when "two fight with each other; then there will be peace when one has been defeated and has fallen". Peter countered by saying that truth should be sought for with quietness and order. Simon quoted⁵¹ Christ's words, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Peter reminded Simon that Christ also said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). Since Simon had been a follower of John the Baptist, it is not surprising that he knew what Christ had said. The Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew had also been in circulation for a while also; those with the means could have a scribe copy it.

Simon was bothered by Peter's continually returning to the subject of peace. Peter responded⁵² by saying, "Why are you afraid of hearing frequently of peace? Do you not know that peace is the perfection of Law? For wars and disputes spring from sins; and where there is no sin, there is peace of soul; but where there is peace, truth is found in disputations, righteousness in works."

⁴⁵ Clement, "Recognitions", I, 72, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁴⁶ Clement, "Recognitions", I, 74, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁴⁷ Clement, "Recognitions", II, 5-6, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁴⁸ Clement, "Recognitions", II, 13-15, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁴⁹ Clement, "Recognitions", II, 16-19, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁵⁰ Clement, "Recognitions", II, 23-24, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁵¹ Clement, "Recognitions", II, 26-27, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁵² Clement, "Recognitions", II, 36, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

Peter then challenged Simon to define who is his god. Simon began⁵³ by stating that the Scriptures say that there are many gods. A god in the form of a serpent⁵⁴ said, “On the day you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5), that is, as those who made man. After they had tasted of the tree, God Himself testifies, saying to the rest of the gods, “Behold, Adam is become as one of us” (Genesis 3:22). One of these gods, Simon said, was chosen to be the god of the Jews. We notice here that Simon quotes freely from the Law (the first five books of Moses).

Peter responded⁵⁵, “There are indeed many gods, but they are subject to the God of the Jews, to whom no one is equal. ‘The Lord your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of lords, the great God’ (Deuteronomy 10:17). Thus, although there are many, that are called gods, yet He who is the God of the Jews is alone called the God of gods. Moses is called a god to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:16, 7:1, Psalm 82:6), and it is certain that he was a man; and judges were called gods, and it is evident that they were mortal. The idols also of the Gentiles are called gods (Jeremiah 44:1-15), and we all know that they are not; but this has been inflicted as a punishment on the wicked, because they would not acknowledge the true God. Because they refused to receive the knowledge of the One who is God of all, therefore it is permitted to them to have as gods those who can do nothing for their worshippers (Deuteronomy 4:28). For every nation has an angel, to whom God has committed the government of that nation (Deuteronomy 32:8 LXX); and when one of these appears, although he be thought and called God by those over whom he presides, yet he does not give such testimony to himself. ‘Behold, to the Lord your God belong the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, the earth, and all things that are in them. Nevertheless I have chosen your fathers, that I might love them, and you after them’ (Deuteronomy 4:37). You will doubtless remember the penalty that was visited upon the serpent, which had first named gods. It was condemned to feed on dirt (Genesis 3:14), and is judged worthy of such food, for causing the introduction of the name of gods into the world. But if you also wish to introduce many gods, see that you partake not the serpent’s doom.

Simon replied⁵⁶ that he would refute Peter from the words of Christ. Jesus said, ‘No one knows the Son, but the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son has been pleased to reveal Him’ (Matthew 11:27). Thus, therefore, even your Jesus confesses that there is another God, incomprehensible and unknown to all.

Then Peter said⁵⁷, “You do not perceive that you are making statements in opposition to yourself. For if our Jesus also knows Him whom you call the unknown God, then you do not know Him alone, as you claim. If our Jesus knows Him, then Moses also could not himself be ignorant of Him. For he was a prophet; and he who prophesied of the Son doubtless knew the Father. It is evident that the Father has been known to all of the prophets. But how could the Father be revealed to you, who do not believe in the Son, since the Father is known to none except him to whom the Son is pleased to reveal Him?”

⁵³ Clement, “Recognitions”, II, 39, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁵⁴ There was a Gnostic sect in the 1st Century called the “Ophites”, named after the Greek word for snake. Part of their cultic worship was snake worship, and they kept and bred large poisonous snakes.

⁵⁵ Clement, “Recognitions”, II, 41-44, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁵⁶ Clement, “Recognitions”, II, 47, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁵⁷ Clement, “Recognitions”, II, 48, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

Simon then changed the subject and replied⁵⁸ that this other god that he knows is a power of immense and ineffable light, whose greatness may be held to be incomprehensible, of which power even the maker of the world is ignorant, and Moses the lawgiver, and Jesus your master are also ignorant of him. Peter replied that it is madness to assert that there is a god greater than the God of all who no one but Simon has been able to know. If this god is so great, why doesn't he confer upon us some sense of himself beyond our five senses? And if you know things beyond the heavens, you should also easily know the thoughts of all men. Tell us what we're thinking! Then Simon answered: "Since all things that exist are in accordance with the five senses, that power which is more excellent than all cannot add anything new." Peter replied that this is false because there is a sixth sense, namely that of foreknowledge, and the prophets possessed this. How can you know a God who is unknown to all that have the prophetic sense? Simon replied, "This power of which I speak is incomprehensible and more excellent than even the Creator. How could that Creator's Law teach me that which the Creator Himself did not know, since neither did the Law itself know it, that it might teach it?"

Then Peter said⁵⁹: "This is amazing that you have been able to learn more from the Law than the Law was able to know or to teach. Yet you have used proofs from the Law of those things which you are pleased to say, when you declare that neither the Law, nor He who gave the Law knows those things of which you speak! But what is more amazing is that you should be standing here now with us all, enclosed by the limits of this small courtyard" (i.e. as opposed to being enthroned in heaven!). Then Simon, seeing Peter and all the people laughing, said, "Do you laugh, Peter, while so great and lofty matters are under discussion?" Then said Peter: "Don't get mad, Simon, for we are doing no more than keeping our promise; for we are listening carefully as we hear you propound your unutterable things".

To gain some respect⁶⁰ in the face of the laughter, Simon stated that God the Creator was weak and weakness was not compatible with a Supreme God. He formed a man in the Garden, but couldn't keep him as He intended. He condemned man to death for eating in order to know good and evil, and cursed the serpent that had shown man these things. Simon continued that God the Creator's weakness is evident by looking at those evils, which are done in this world and are not corrected. Either its Creator is powerless, if He cannot correct what is done amiss; or else, if He does not wish to remove the evils, that He is Himself evil. This Law doesn't know or teach.

Peter responded⁶¹ to this private interpretation of the Law by saying that people who read the Law without the instruction of masters tend to conceive absurdities such as these. If God the Creator is impotent and evil, then Simon's power is also, since it does not correct those things, which are done amiss; or if it can and will not, it is evil. Further, if people believe that Simon's power exists and it doesn't, then Simon's fraud is worse than the knowledge of a weak Creator. Just in describing his power, Simon copies and borrows terms from God the Creator such as light and substance and goodness, but this is not something new.

⁵⁸ Clement, "Recognitions", II, 49-51, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁵⁹ Clement, "Recognitions", II, 52, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶⁰ Clement, "Recognitions", II, 53-54, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶¹ Clement, "Recognitions", II, 55-56, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

Simon replied⁶², “Peter, don’t you know that our souls were made by that good God, but they have been brought down as captives into this world? He sent God the creator to make the world; and he, when he had made it, gave out that himself was God.” Peter then cornered Simon in a logical inconsistency and said: “Then he is not, as you said earlier, unknown to Him who made the world; nor are souls ignorant of him, if indeed they were stolen away from him. To whom, then, can he be unknown, if both the Creator of the world knows him, as having been sent by him; and all souls know him, as having been violently withdrawn from him? Then, further, I wish you would tell us whether he who sent the creator of the world knew that he would not keep faith? For if he did not know it, then he has no foreknowledge. While if he foreknew it, and allowed it, he is himself guilty of this deed, since he did not prevent it. But if he could not prevent it, then he is impotent. Your good god is weak enough. For you say he is more powerful than all, but who can believe the weaker of your gods wrenched the spoils from the stronger?”

Simon then changed the subject again and began⁶³ to speak of all the visions he has had of heavenly places, and how all these things have been revealed to him. Peter replied that people, who are beginning to be possessed with a demon, or to be disturbed in their minds, begin with similar visions. They are first carried away by fancies to some pleasant and delightful things, and then they are poured out by vain motions towards things, which have no existence. For example, those who are in distress through thirst, when they fall asleep, seem to themselves to see rivers and fountains, and to drink; but these are just mirages. To debunk Simon’s exalted claims, Peter said, “If you can, declare the thoughts of the heart of any one of us, who is not pre-engaged in your favor, we shall perhaps be able to believe you, that you are able to know those things that are above the heavens”.

Simon dodged this direct challenge again and replied⁶⁴, “You have woven a web of many frivolities. Anything, which comes into a man’s thoughts, must also subsist in truth and reality. For things that do not subsist, have no appearances; and things that have no appearances, cannot present themselves to our thoughts”. [This is false!] Peter replied, “If everything that can come into our thoughts has a subsistence, then, with respect to that place of immensity which you say is outside the world, if one person thinks in his heart that it is light, and another that it is darkness, how can one and the same place be both light and darkness?” Cornered with this contradiction, Simon challenged Peter to explain what he thought was above the heavens. Peter stated that the Law teaches us about the heavens, if we are willing to listen. Simon stated, “It is a great thing which you promise, that the eternity of boundless light can be shown from the Law”. Simon then postponed the discussion until the next day and abruptly left with about 1000 of his followers.

As the second day of the debate dawned⁶⁵, Simon sensed the crowd had turned in Peter’s favor. Peter explained that the people are merely seeking the Truth, but that Simon is a seducer and doesn’t speak the truth. Simon said, “Don’t detain me with long speeches; just come through on your promise of yesterday. You said that you could show that the Law teaches concerning the immensity of the eternal light, and that there are only two heavens, and these created, and that the higher is the abode of that light, in which the ineffable Father dwells alone forever. After the pattern of that heaven is made this visible heaven, which you asserted is to

⁶² Clement, “Recognitions”, II, 57-60, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶³ Clement, “Recognitions”, II, 61-65, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶⁴ Clement, “Recognitions”, II, 66-70, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶⁵ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 12-14, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

pass away. You said that the Father of all is one, because there cannot be two infinities. Since then you are able to show it from the Law, leave off other matters and set about this.”

Peter expressed concern that he would just be throwing pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6), since Simon appeared⁶⁶ to be convicted and wishing to escape politely from the contest. Simon then re-directed the debate away from a discussion of that boundless light toward the question, “Where does evil come from?” Peter began by saying that Simon had framed his question unskillfully. Instead of asking “If God has created all things, where does evil come from?” you should have asked:

1. Whether there is evil? Not everyone admits this.
2. What is evil? A substance, an accident, or an act?
3. To whom is evil; toward God, angels, or men? And from whom is it? From God, or from nothing? Has it always been, or did it have its beginning in time?

Simon replied, “Oh you most unskillful and unlearned, is there any man who does not confess that there is evil in this life?” Peter replied, “The whole Hebrew nation denies its existence!”

Simon said⁶⁷: “I don’t know whether I know where evil comes from; for every one, according as it is decreed to him by fate, either does, or understands, or suffers.” Then Peter said: “See, my brethren, into what absurdities Simon has fallen. Before my coming, he was teaching that men have it in their power to be wise and to do what they will, but now, driven into a corner by the force of my arguments, he denies that man has any power either of perceiving or of acting. I know why you have spoken thus. You wished to avoid inquiry, lest you should be openly confuted. And therefore you say that it is not in the power of man to perceive or to discern anything. But if this had really been your opinion, you would not surely, before my coming, have professed yourself before the people to be a teacher”.

Simon then began to be contentious⁶⁸ about everything Peter said in order to generate confusion and avoid being overcome by Peter’s arguments. This animosity continued for the rest of the day, where Simon changed his views on several matters, including a denying that evil exists and an accepting of fate⁶⁹.

Simon then asked⁷⁰ why God did not create everyone to be good. Peter replied that this was an absurd question. If men could only do good, it would not be their own goodness because it would not have been done on purpose. They would be robots!

Simon changed the subject again⁷¹ and asked Peter about the heavens. Earlier Peter had said that the visible heaven veils the invisible heaven beyond it and would be dissolved at the Second Coming. Simon asked why the visible heaven was made in the first place if it was going to be dissolved. Peter said that it was made for this present life to veil the abode of God so that only those with a pure heart might see into it. Peter likened this to the shell of an egg. It is necessary to be broken and opened that the chick might come forth.

⁶⁶ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 15-20, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶⁷ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 22, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶⁸ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 21-22, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶⁹ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 21-22, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁷⁰ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 26, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁷¹ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 27-28, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

Simon replied⁷² that the dissolving of the visible heaven is contrary to the Law, which states that ‘None shall see my face and live’ (Exodus 33:20). Peter said that one must read the Law according to the Tradition of Moses and not according to private interpretation. Angels, who are spirits, see God all the time and live. After the resurrection of the body, men will be like the angels (Matthew 22:30) and will be able to see God and live. Jesus had said, ‘Blessed are they of a pure heart, for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). After this exchange, Simon closed the debate for the day and left with only a few of his associates. All the rest stayed to listen to Peter. Peter, in turn, healed everyone who was sick or demon possessed, and they departed rejoicing for having obtained the doctrine of the true God.

Simon began⁷³ the next day’s discussion by challenging Peter on the immortality of the soul. Peter laid a foundation for his teaching by first speaking on the righteousness and justice of God. Simon said: ‘Many well-doers perish miserably, and again many evil-doers finish long lives in happiness’, and because of this, he rejected any notion of a Judgment Day. Peter replied that it is just this that convinces us that there will, in fact, be a Judgment Day. For if God is just, it is a necessary consequence. Simon replied that Peter was trying to ‘persuade many to embrace his religion, and to submit to the restraint of pleasure, in hope of future good things; to whom it happens that they lose the enjoyment of things present, and are deceived with hopes of things future. For as soon as they die, their soul shall at the same time be extinguished. This didn’t prove that the soul was immortal’.

Remembering what Niceta and Aquila had told him about the “boy made of air”, Peter pretended⁷⁴ to be angry at Simon’s blasphemy, and Simon used Peter’s appearance of anger as an excuse to end the debate. Peter then said, ‘I am able to prove to you in a single sentence that the soul is immortal. I shall ask you with respect to a point, which all know; answer me, and I shall prove to you in one sentence that it is immortal. Simon replied, ‘Ask me then’. Peter asked, ‘Which of the two can better persuade an incredulous man: seeing or hearing?’ Simon replied, ‘Seeing!’ Then Peter said, ‘Why then do you wish to learn from me by words, what is proved to you by the sight?’ Then Simon, ‘I don’t know what you mean’. Peter said, ‘If you do not know, go now to your house, and entering the inner bed-chamber you will see an image placed, containing the figure of a murdered boy clothed in purple; ask him, and he will inform you either by hearing or seeing. For what need is there to hear from him if the soul is immortal, when you see it standing before you? For if it were not in being, it assuredly could not be seen. But if you do not know what image I speak of, let us go immediately to your house, with ten other men, of those who are here present.’

Hearing this, Simon turned pale⁷⁵. If he denied it, he was afraid that his house would be searched or that Peter would expose him more openly, and that all would learn the secrets of his heart and the secrets of his magic. Therefore Simon, in pretense, mouthed words of repentance in front of the crowd, and asked to become Peter’s disciple. Peter addressed the crowd, ‘You see, brethren, Simon is seeking repentance; in a little while you shall see him returning again to his infidelity. For, thinking that I am a prophet for disclosing his wickedness, which he supposed to be secret and hidden, he has promised that he will repent. But I spoke not by a prophetic spirit what I said. I learned from some, who once were his associates in his works, but have now been

⁷² Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 29-30, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁷³ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 39-42, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁷⁴ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 43-44, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁷⁵ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 45, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

converted to our Faith, what things he did in secret. Therefore I spoke what I knew, not what I foreknew’.

When Simon heard this⁷⁶, he began to attack Peter with blasphemies, reproaches and curses. In his tirade, he admitted a pretense of repentance in order to learn Peter’s secret of foreknowledge. Launching into a speech intended to create a riot to force Peter to leave, Simon claimed,

1. He was born of a virgin.
2. He has flown through the air, from mountain to mountain, borne by angels.
3. He was made one body with fire.
4. He has made statues move.
5. He had made stones to become bread.
6. These prove that he is the eternal Son of God.
7. The One who sent you (i.e. Christ) is a magician who couldn’t deliver Himself from the Cross.

Peter stood his ground, unmoved, and the crowds, in indignation, violently picked Simon up and threw him out of the courtyard where the debate was held.

All this was a perfect illustration of what the Apostle Paul wrote about the “Word of the Cross”. Simon represented the “wisdom of this world”. But the wisdom of the world was unwilling to discover God. Therefore Chrysostom said⁷⁷ that

“God employed what seemed to be foolishness, i.e. the Gospel, to persuade men; not by reasoning but by faith. For to believe on Him that was crucified and buried, and to be fully persuaded that this Person Himself both rose again and sat down on high; this did not need wisdom, nor reasoning, but faith. For the Apostles themselves came in not by wisdom, but by faith, and surpassed the heathen wise men in wisdom and loftiness. This transcends all human understanding, since they were uneducated fishermen”.

This is what Paul meant by “destroying the wisdom of the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:19, Isaiah 29:14). Chrysostom continued⁷⁸,

“The wise are not profited at all by wisdom, nor the unlearned injured at all by ignorance. For the shepherd and the rustic will more quickly receive this, repressing all doubting thoughts and delivering himself to the Lord. In this way then, He destroyed wisdom”.

Similarly He “made foolish the wisdom of this world” (1 Corinthians 1:20). Chrysostom stated⁷⁹ it this way,

“He has shown wisdom to be foolish in regards to receiving the faith. For since they prided themselves on it, He lost no time in exposing it. For what sort of wisdom is it, when it cannot discover the chief things that are good?”

Peter then addressed⁸⁰ the crowd saying that we should bear with wicked men patiently, knowing that God Himself bears patiently with them right up until Judgment Day. From this

⁷⁶ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 46-49, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 4.

⁷⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 4.

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 4.

viewpoint, Simon should be mourned over since he has become a choice vessel for the evil one. Peter gave a benediction and instructed everyone to meet again the next day.

That evening, Niceta and Aquila asked Peter⁸¹ how Simon as an enemy of God could do such great miracles. Peter spoke at length about why God allows this in order that the desire of peoples' hearts may be revealed through their choice of good or evil. By choosing evil, people choose their own destruction in order to please the evil one. Peter's contest with Simon was similar to Moses' contest with Pharaoh's magicians. Pharaoh had a choice, but did not choose wisely. It should have been obvious which of the two were speaking truth, Moses or the magicians, but Pharaoh chose the magicians of his own free will. Similarly those from among the nations, that do not use sound judgment and willingly follow Simon, may be made manifest; but those, who rightly distinguish signs from signs, may be saved." This is quite an insight into the ways God moves in His creation.

Niceta said⁸², 'In what respect did the Egyptians sin in not believing Moses, since the magicians performed similar signs, even although they were done rather in appearance than in truth?' Peter replied that God has veiled His Truth, but reveals it to those who faithfully follow Him. The signs that Simon performs have their purpose in exalting Simon, whereas the signs that Peter does are profitable to men and glorify God. 'For tell me, what is the use of showing statues walking, dogs of brass barking, mountains dancing, of flying through the air, and such like things, which Simon did? But those signs which are of the Good One, are directed to the advantage of men, who gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, raised up the feeble and the lame, drove away sicknesses and demons, raised the dead, and did other like things, as you see also that I do'. For people to recognize this, they rightly distinguish signs from signs.

As the next day dawned⁸³, a disciple of Simon came to Peter begging forgiveness. The day before, Simon had the man help him dump in the ocean some of the implements used in his black magic, before everyone found out just what Simon really did. Simon then wanted him to leave his wife and young children and follow him to Rome; there Simon promised to please the people so much, that he should be reckoned a god, and publicly gifted with divine honors. Simon promised to make the man very wealthy. But the man had bad feet and couldn't comply even if he wanted to. As Peter spoke to the crowds that day, he had the man himself to testify to everyone about what Simon had done.

Peter resolved⁸⁴ to follow Simon to Rome to prevent the Romans from being swallowed up with his evil. First, Peter ordained Zacchaeus, the former tax collector (Luke 19:1-10), as Bishop of the Church in Caesarea. Then Peter stayed with them for three months to confirm them in the Faith.

John Chrysostom noted⁸⁵ that Paul and the other Apostles had the power and authority to punish people who were hopelessly entrenched in sin in order to try to save them. But they didn't like to use this power. Sometimes using this power was necessary, such as with Sapphira

⁸⁰ Clement, "Recognitions", III, 49-50, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸¹ Clement, "Recognitions", III, 51-56, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸² Clement, "Recognitions", III, 58-60, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸³ Clement, "Recognitions", III, 63-64, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸⁴ Clement, "Recognitions", III, 65, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXIX, 5.

and with Simon Magus. Paul and the other Apostles preferred to be thought of as weak by not having to use their power, so long as their Churches lived in repentance.

“Paul was despised, spit on, ridiculed, mocked, as low class, contemptible, a braggart, as boastful in his words but in his deeds unable to make even a little show. Although seeing so great a necessity for showing his own power, he not only puts it off, not only shrinks back, but even prays that he may not fall into such a position. He says, ‘I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified’ (2 Corinthians 13:7). What does he mean? He entreats God that he may find no one that has not repented. Not only this, but that none may have sinned at all. Paul says, ‘that you do no evil’, but if you have sinned, then that you may have changed your conduct, and may have been with me in reforming, and stopping all wrath as a consequence of your deeds. I am not eager about punishment, that we should be approved in this way, but exactly the opposite. If you should continue sinning and not repenting, it will be necessary for us to chastise, to punish, to maim your bodies, as happened in the case of Sapphira and of Simon Magus, where we have given proof of our power. But we don’t pray for this, but the contrary; we don’t wish to be approved in this way, exhibiting the proof of the power which is in us, by chastising and punishing you as sinning and as incurably diseased. But ‘that you should do what is honorable’; we pray for this, that you should always live in virtue, always in repentance; ‘and we may seem disqualified’, never displaying our power of punishing.”

“We rejoice when we are weak and you are strong, and we pray for your perfecting. Most certainly we cannot do anything against the truth; that is, punish you if you are well pleasing to God. Because we cannot, we therefore do not wish it, and desire the opposite. We are particularly glad when we find you giving us no occasion to show that power of ours for punishment. Doing such things shows men to be glorious and strong; still we desire the opposite, that you should be approved and blameless, and that we should never reap the glory arising from that. Therefore he says, ‘For we are glad when we are weak’ (2 Corinthians 13:9). That is when we are thought to be weak, for they were thought to be weak by their enemies, because they didn’t display their power of punishing. But still we are glad, when your behavior is such as to give us no pretense for punishing you. It is a pleasure to us to be in this way considered weak.”

Peter Follows Simon to Antioch

After Simon Magus left Caesarea⁸⁶, he began to speak evil about Peter lying to people everywhere he went. This was documented in a letter from the brethren that had gone ahead detailing the crimes of Simon. “But in those days a letter was received from the brethren stating that Simon has been going from city to city deceiving multitudes, and everywhere maligning Peter, so that, when he should come, no one might afford him a hearing. For Simon asserted that Peter was a magician, a godless man, injurious, cunning, ignorant, and professing impossible things. For he asserts that the dead shall rise again, which is impossible. But if any one attempts to confute him, he is cut off by secret snares through means of his attendants. Wherefore, I also

⁸⁶ Clement, “Recognitions”, III, 73, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

when I had triumphed over him, fled for fear of his snares, lest he should destroy me by incantations, or achieve my death by plots”.

Peter first went to Tripoli⁸⁷ accompanied by Clement, Niceta, Aquila and twelve others, stopping at Ptolemais, Tyre, Sidon and Beirut. When Simon Magus heard⁸⁸ that Peter had arrived in Tripoli, he left for Syria during the night. Meanwhile a huge crowd thronged around Peter at the house of a man named Maro, and Peter spoke to them in Maro’s garden. Some Peter healed, and some he cast demons out of. Speaking at length, Peter explained how sin was the cause of mankind’s suffering and the origin of idolatry and the means by which demons can get power over men. While the Gospel is the solution to men’s problems, the Lord has allowed pretenders, using magic, to come forward beginning with Ham, the son of Noah, and Mizraim, Ham’s son, the father of the Egyptians, from whom Simon learned his art. Peter encouraged the crowd to withdraw from the pollution of Simon’s teachings and to be joined to Christ.

Leaving Tripoli, Peter and company moved⁸⁹ up the coast to Ortosias and Antharadus, accompanied by large crowds. While there, they took a side trip to the small island of Aradus to see an architectural marvel. While there, they met a grief-stricken woman begging alms. She had been a noble woman with three sons, was married to a relative of Caesar in Rome, but her husband’s brother tried to begin an affair with her. To avoid setting brother against brother over her, she pretended to have a vision for her twin sons’ education, and left for Athens. On the way, she was shipwrecked and assumed her twin sons had drowned. In fact, the twins were captured by pirates, who changed their names to Niceta and Aquila, and sold them as slaves to a kind woman, who adopted them and educated them. Her husband, Clement’s father, not hearing from his wife, left Clement in the care of a relative, and went to search for his wife and sons, and never returned. Thus Clement, who didn’t know Niceta and Aquila were his brothers, was reunited with his mother in a very emotional and dramatic reunion. Clement’s mother, along with a woman who had cared for her for many years, was baptized and joined the entourage. Niceta and Aquila, who had gone ahead to Laodicea to prepare lodging, were similarly overjoyed to see their mother again when everyone arrived.

In Laodicea, a poor old man⁹⁰ happened to observe Peter, Clement, Niceta and Aquila as they met in a private place for prayer. When they finished, he inquired for a long time about why they do this, since he was convinced that the alignment of the stars and fate determine how everyone’s life will proceed. As evidence for this⁹¹, he gave an example from his own life. His wife’s horoscope indicated that she would be an adulteress, fall in love with her slave, and end her days in foreign travel and in water. This happened, he said, and she perished in a shipwreck. Peter asked how he knew that this happened. The old man said that his brother told him the whole story. The brother said that he had been unwilling to engage in incest from the advances of the old man’s wife, and that she had pretended to have a vision and had left for Athens with their twin sons. Clement and his brothers began to weep openly, perceiving that the old man was their father, but Peter restrained them.

⁸⁷ Modern Tripoli in Northern Lebanon.

⁸⁸ Clement, “Recognitions”, IV, 1-37, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 8.

⁸⁹ Clement, “Recognitions”, VII, 1-29, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 8.

⁹⁰ Clement, “Recognitions”, VIII, 1-62; IX, 1-31, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 8.

⁹¹ Clement, “Recognitions”, IX, 32-33, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 8.

Bringing the old man before the entire crowd⁹², Peter recounted his life, and challenged his notion that his horoscope told the truth. When Peter introduced his three sons to him, the old man, named Faustinianus, passed out and had to be revived by Peter. Further, Peter told him that his wife, Matthidia, was the chaste one who had left to escape his brother's incest, and had just recently been reunited with the three boys in Antharadus. Matthidia, hearing of this recognition rushed into the middle of the crowd in breathless haste, crying out, and saying, 'Where is my husband, my Lord Faustinianus?' As they embraced with a flood of tears, Peter dispersed the crowd to give them some privacy.

The next day⁹³, the three boys wanted to instruct their father immediately in the ways of the Lord. But Peter cautioned them in this regard, and in this, we see a difference between 1st Century evangelism and 20th Century evangelism. 'You should permit him to live for a year according to his own judgment; and during that time let him travel with us, and while we are instructing others he may hear with simplicity. And as he hears, if he has any right purpose of acknowledging the truth, he will himself request that he may take up the Faith; or if he does not please to take it, he may remain a friend. For those who do not take it up heartily, when they begin to find it unbearable, not only cast off that which they had taken up, but by way of excuse for their weakness, they begin to speak evil of the Way'. So Faustinianus sat and listened⁹⁴ while his sons taught the crowds regarding the errors of the history of the pagan gods, and how God has been long-suffering with them even when they say that there is no evil and no Judgment.

At dinner that evening⁹⁵, two great friends of Faustinianus, Appion and Anubion, who had lodged with Simon Magus in Antioch, arrived. Faustinianus asked Peter's permission to go greet them and ask them if they would consent to dispute with his son, Clement, the next day. Peter gave his permission; but when Faustinianus returned, his sons and his wife were horrified that his face appeared to be that of Simon, and not his own. They recognized his voice, but not his face. As they were speaking, one of their company returned from Antioch to report that Simon had been doing many signs in Antioch, stirring up hatred against Peter, such that the people in Antioch wanted to kill Peter.

Simon had done this⁹⁶ to escape from the Roman authorities, which had been ordered to hunt down and destroy sorcerers throughout the Empire. Once Faustinianus had been killed in his place, Simon would be free to move about as before. Peter first asked Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10:22-48) to send out rumors that he was about to come to Antioch on official business to hunt for Simon. Hearing rumors of this, Simon left for Judea. Peter then asked Faustinianus to do one thing, after which he would restore his face. He asked him to travel to Antioch and address the multitudes as if he were Simon, making public confession for wrongdoing, and telling the people to invite Peter to come and speak to them the words of Life. This Faustinianus did, and his face was restored that evening.

⁹² Clement, "Recognitions", IX, 34-37, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁹³ Clement, "Recognitions", X, 1, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁹⁴ Clement, "Recognitions", X, 2-51, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁹⁵ Clement, "Recognitions", X, 52-54, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁹⁶ Clement, "Recognitions", X, 55-67, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

The people of Antioch responded⁹⁷ very kindly to the words of Faustinianus and greatly desired Peter to come. Peter quickly ordained one of their company as Bishop of Laodicea and prepared to leave for Antioch. When he arrived, the people of Antioch met him with all the sick, the lame and the paralyzed lining the streets (Acts 5:15). Peter address them by saying, 'Do not suppose that you can recover your health from me, but through Him who, coming down from heaven, has shown to those who believe in Him a perfect medicine for body and soul'. And all were healed! More than 10,000 men were baptized and consecrated within seven days. There was such an outpouring of grace on the people that Theophilus, the governor of Antioch (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1), consecrated the great palace of his house under the name of a Church for people to come to hear Peter speak.

Meanwhile⁹⁸ the restored Faustinianus fell down at Peter's feet requesting that he be baptized also, and be received at the Lord's Table. Peter presented Faustinianus to his sons and said, 'As God has restored your sons to you, their father, so also your sons restored their father to God'. Proclaiming a fast, Peter baptized Faustinianus the next Lord's Day, and related the whole adventure of Faustinianus seeking his sons to all the people. The whole city received him as an angel, and paid him no less honor than they did to the Apostle.

Simon Magus Encounters the Apostle Peter in Rome

In order to understand Simon's influence in Rome, one needs to understand the political intrigue that had developed there and the perversion of the emperors themselves. Simon had come to Rome in about the late 40's AD, when Claudius was emperor, and stayed there until his death in c. 67 AD. He had so impressed Claudius and the Roman Senate with his magic that Claudius, with Senate approval, erected a statue of Simon along the River Tiber with an inscription, "To Simon, the holy God".

In the center of the political intrigue⁹⁹ was Nero's mother, Agrippina the Younger, who was the great-granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus. She gave birth to Nero in 37 AD, but Nero's father died when he was a child. In 39 AD, Agrippina was banished from Rome by Emperor Caligula for her part in a conspiracy, but she returned in 41 AD when her uncle Claudius became emperor. She then married a wealthy senator and became known as the richest and most beautiful woman in Rome.

In 49 AD, Claudius' wife was executed, and Agrippina married her uncle Claudius. This presented quite a contrast: the richest and most beautiful woman in Rome married to a man who was lame and who stuttered so badly that he was hidden from public view as a child. Claudius adopted Nero as his eldest son. In 53 AD, Nero married Claudius' daughter, Octavia.

In 54 AD, Claudius died and Nero became emperor at the age of 17. Many historians believe that Agrippina poisoned her husband so that Nero could become emperor. At first, Nero permitted two advisors to direct state affairs, where Agrippina had a major influence in directing state affairs through her son. In 59 AD, Nero had his mother murdered and began to assume his own power in state affairs. Shortly after Nero began directing affairs for himself, Paul arrived in Rome as a result of his appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11-12).

⁹⁷ Clement, "Recognitions", X, 68-71, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁹⁸ Clement, "Recognitions", X, 72, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁹⁹ "Nero", "Claudius", "Agrippina", The World Book Encyclopedia, World Book, Inc., Chicago, 1987.

In 62 AD, Nero divorced Octavia, and then had her killed. Shortly after, he married Poppaea Sabina, the wife of a Roman military officer, but had her killed also a few years later. At about this time also, Paul was acquitted, and left Rome to visit Spain (Romans 15:22-28), Crete (Titus 1:5), Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), etc. In 64 AD, after Paul left Rome, Nero burned a large part of Rome to the ground in order to make room for his new palace, called “The Golden House”. He blamed the Christians for the fire, and thus started the first major persecution of the Christians by the Roman government.

Following the fire, Nero had many senators and aristocrats executed also because they questioned his actions. A plan to overthrow Nero in 65 AD failed, and many more aristocrats were killed. In the late 60’s, Nero’s military commanders revolted, in reaction to Nero’s cruelty and wild suspicions, and drove him from power.

The Church Historian, Eusebius stated¹⁰⁰:

“To describe the greatness of Nero’s depravity does not lie within the plan of the present work. As there are many indeed that have recorded his history in most accurate narratives, every one may at his pleasure learn from them the coarseness of the man’s extraordinary madness. After he had accomplished the destruction of so many myriads without any reason, he ran into such blood-guiltiness that he did not spare even his nearest relatives and dearest friends. He destroyed his mother and his brothers and his wife, with very many others of his own family as he would private and public enemies”.

The Church Historian, Severus, also referred¹⁰¹ to the beginning of Nero’s persecution of the Christians after the fire. To make his point of the Christians being the cause of the fire, Nero even illumined his garden at night with the burning bodies of crucified Christians.

“In the meantime, the number of the Christians being now very large, it happened that Rome was destroyed by fire, while Nero was stationed at Antium. But the opinion of all cast the odium of causing the fire upon the emperor, and he was believed in this way to have sought for the glory of building a new city. And in fact, Nero could not escape from the charge that the fire had been caused by his orders. He therefore turned the accusation against the Christians, and the cruelest tortures were accordingly inflicted upon the innocent. Many were crucified or slain by fire, and not a few were set apart for this purpose, that, when the day came to a close, they should be consumed to serve for light during the night. In this way, cruelty began to be manifested against the Christians. Afterwards, too, laws were enacted, which prohibited their religion; and edicts were openly set forth proclaiming it unlawful to be a Christian.

Justin Martyr, in his defense of Christianity to the Emperor Antoninus¹⁰², wrote about how the followers of Simon Magus are mistaken for Christians by those who don’t know Christians well. This was due to the influence and perversions of Simon, and how Simon was so revered in Rome that his statue was erected along the river Tiber. This statue was still there in the mid 2nd Century when Justin Martyr wrote his First Apology.

¹⁰⁰ Eusebius, *Church History*, II, 25.

¹⁰¹ Philip Schaff, “The Sacred History of Sulpitius Severus”, II, 28-29, *Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series*, v. 11.

¹⁰² Antoninus was Emperor from 138-161 AD.

“After Christ’s ascension¹⁰³ into heaven the devils put forward certain men who said that they themselves were gods; and they were not only not persecuted by you, but even deemed worthy of honors. There was a Samaritan, Simon, who in the reign of Claudius Caesar, and in your royal city of Rome, did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him. He was considered a God, and as a God was honored by you with a statue, which statue was erected on the river Tiber, between the two bridges, and bore this inscription, in the language of Rome: ‘To Simon the holy God’. And a man, Menander, also a Samaritan, of the town Capparetaea, a disciple of Simon, and inspired by devils, we know to have deceived many while he was in Antioch by his magical art. He persuaded those who adhered to him that they should never die, and even now there are some living who hold this opinion of his”.

“Wherefore we pray¹⁰⁴ that the sacred senate may be arbiters of this our memorial. If any one were entangled by that man’s doctrines, he may learn the truth, and so be able to escape error. And as for the statue, if you please, destroy it”.

Toward the end of Nero’s reign, about 67 AD, Simon had a major confrontation with the Apostles Peter and Paul. The Church Historian Eusebius summarized¹⁰⁵ the need for this as follows.

“Because Christianity was becoming so widespread, Satan used Simon Magus to try to seize Rome for himself. Aided by his deceitful arts, Simon led many of the inhabitants of Rome astray, and thus brought them into his own power. Justin in his *First Apology*¹⁰⁶, which he addressed to Antoninus (emperor 138-161 AD) in behalf of the Christians, states this. Irenaeus also agrees with him in the first book of his work, *Against Heresies*¹⁰⁷, where he gives an account of the man and of his profane and impure teaching. We have understood that Simon was the author of all heresy from his time down to the present¹⁰⁸. Modest men even refrain to utter with the lips those matters, which they keep secret, on account of their excessive baseness and lewdness. This most abominable sect makes a sport of those miserable females that are literally overwhelmed with all kinds of vices”.

“The evil power, who hates all that is good and plots against the salvation of men, constituted Simon at that time the father and author of such wickedness, as a mighty antagonist of the great, inspired Apostles of our Savior. But neither the conspiracy of Simon nor that of any of the others who arose at that period could accomplish anything in those Apostolic times. For everything was conquered and subdued by the splendors of the truth and by the divine word itself which had begun to shine from heaven upon men, and which was then flourishing upon earth, and dwelling in the Apostles themselves. Coming to the city of Rome, Simon was in a short time so successful in his undertaking that those who

¹⁰³ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, XXVI. Justin’s account was also quoted by Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, VI, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, LVI.

¹⁰⁵ Eusebius, *Church History*, II, 13-14.

¹⁰⁶ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, XXVI.

¹⁰⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, xxiii.

¹⁰⁸ Eusebius wrote in the 4th Century.

dwelt there honored him as a God by the erection of a statue. But this did not last long. Immediately, during the reign of Claudius, the all-good and gracious Providence led Peter to Rome against this great corrupter of life. He, like a noble commander of God, carried the costly merchandise of the light of the understanding from the East to those who dwelt in the West, proclaiming the light itself, and preaching the kingdom of heaven”.

While many of the Church Fathers and Church historians give an account of Simon’s encounter with Peter and Paul in Rome, we are given the most details of this encounter from one of the New Testament Apocryphal works¹⁰⁹.

After Paul appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:8-12) and headed for Rome, the Jews in Rome heard that he was coming. Informing Emperor Nero that Paul was a magician and that he was coming to Rome to destroy them as he had destroyed their brethren in Judea, they persuaded Nero, with many gifts, to ban Paul from Rome. Christians in Rome sent word to Paul warning him of this and Paul landed at Syracuse¹¹⁰ on Sicily instead (Acts 28:12). The Jews in Puteoli beheaded the shipmaster, who resembled Paul in appearance, and then sent his head to Caesar. Nero then rejoiced that the enemy of the Jews was dead.

When Paul arrived in Rome, great fear fell upon the Jewish leaders. When they met, the Jewish leaders, allied with Simon, tried to pit Paul against Peter, saying that while Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews (Philippians 3:5), Peter was bringing in new teachings to the Gentiles. Similarly, they tried to pit the Jewish Christians against the Gentile Christians, and an angry mob of both Jewish and Gentile Christians met Paul outside the door of his house the next day. Paul spoke to them saying that they ought not to make attacks upon each other, but that they should rather give heed to this, that God had fulfilled His promises which He swore to Abraham our father, that in his seed he should inherit all the (Gentile) nations (Genesis 12:3, 17:5). For God is not a respecter of persons. As many as have sinned in the Law shall be judged according to the Law, and as many as have sinned without the Law shall perish without the Law (Romans 2:11-12). But we, brethren, ought to thank God that, according to His mercy, He has chosen us to be a holy people to Himself. So that in this we ought to boast, whether Jews or Greeks; for you are all one in the belief of His Name (Ephesians 2:11-22). And Paul having thus spoken, both the Jews and they of the Gentiles were appeased.

As a result of Peter’s preaching in Rome, Nero’s wife, Octavia (also called Libia), and Agrippina, the wife of Agrippa the Prefect, felt that they could no longer live with their husbands because of their idolatry. Others were no longer willing to return to the army or to serve in the palace. Simon Magus used this occasion to say many evil things about Peter, saying that he was a wizard and a cheat. And they believed him, wondering at his miracles; for he made a brazen serpent move itself, and stone statues to laugh and move themselves, and himself to run and suddenly to be raised into the air.

This reached the ears of Nero, and Simon was summoned to appear before the Emperor. Using his magic, Simon changed himself both in face and stature into different forms, and was in frenzy, having the devil as his servant. When Nero saw this, he supposed Simon to be truly the Son of God.

¹⁰⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, “Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

¹¹⁰ While this is the same route that Paul took as he was being led to Rome as a result of his appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:8-12), the circumstances appear different from those described in Acts 28. This account probably represents Paul’s return to Rome in c. 67 AD after his release from house arrest (Acts 28:30).

Prior to Paul's arrival, Simon had "proved" to Nero that he was not a magician. Simon had said to Nero, 'Order me to be beheaded in a dark place, and there to be left slain; and if I do not rise on the third day, know that I am a magician; but if I rise again, know that I am the Son of God'. And Nero having ordered this, in the dark, by his magic art Simon managed that a ram should be beheaded. The ram appeared to be Simon until he was beheaded. And when he had been beheaded in the dark, he that had beheaded him, taking the head, found it to be that of a ram; but he would not say anything to the emperor, lest he should scourge him, having ordered this to be done in secret. Thereafter, accordingly Simon said that he had risen on the third day, because he took away the head of the ram and the limbs — but the blood had been there congealed. And on the third day he showed himself to Nero, and said, 'Order that my blood, that has been poured out, be wiped away; for behold, having been beheaded as I promised, I have risen again on the third day'. Thus Nero had developed a liking for Simon.

Speaking to Nero, Simon said, 'O good emperor: I am the Son of God come down from heaven. Until now I have endured Peter only calling himself an apostle; but now he has doubled the evil. For Paul also teaches the same things, and having his mind turned against me, is said to preach along with him. If you do not plan their destruction, it is very plain that your kingdom cannot stand. Then Nero, filled with concern, ordered to bring Peter and Paul speedily before him'.

Before Nero, Simon began attacking Peter and Paul. Nero replied to Simon that they were from a race of men that teach us to love every man. Why then was he persecuting them? Simon replied that they had turned all Judea away from believing that Simon was the Christ. Peter injected that Simon had been deceiving many people about who was the Christ. If Nero wished to know the truth about what happened to the Christ, he could read the letter written by Pontius Pilate to Claudius. Nero ordered that this letter be brought and read publicly. In the letter, Pilate documented the deceit of the Jewish leaders in plotting the death of an innocent man (the Christ), and after He rose from the dead, they bribed the soldiers to continue their lies. Pilate warned Claudius against trusting anything the Jewish leaders say.

Turning to Peter, Nero asked Peter if all the things stated by Pilate were true. Peter replied that they were, and that Simon is full of lies and deceit. Simon replied that he wonders that the Emperor would consider trusting the words of a poor, uneducated fisherman. To prove who he is, Simon promised to send his angels against Peter. Peter scoffed at Simon's angels.

To demonstrate that Simon was not a god, Peter challenged Simon to disclose what Peter was thinking, for God is He who searches the hidden things of the heart. As a test of this, Peter asked Nero to have a barley loaf brought to Peter secretly; Nero ordered this to be done. Peter blessed the loaf, broke it and then stuffed the two halves up his sleeves.

Simon then turned the challenge around and demanded that Peter disclose what he was thinking. Peter replied that he would do this by deeds and not just by words. Simon said, 'No one knows the thoughts of men, but God alone. Is not, therefore, Peter lying?' Peter said, 'You say that you are the Son of God; tell what I have in my mind; disclose, if you can, what I have just done in secret!'

Then Simon, enraged that he was not able to tell the secret of the apostle, cried out, saying, 'Let great dogs come forth, and eat him up before Caesar'. And suddenly there appeared great dogs, and rushed at Peter. But Peter, stretching forth his hands to pray, showed to the dogs the loaf, which he had blessed; when the dogs saw the blessed bread, they disappeared. Then Peter said to Nero, 'Behold, I have shown you that I knew what Simon was thinking of, not by words, but by deeds. For he, having promised that he would bring angels against me, has brought dogs, in order that he might show that he had not God-like but dog-like angels'.

And Peter said to Simon, ‘Certainly you pretend to be a god; why, then, don’t you reveal the thoughts of every man?’ Nero said, ‘And now, why do you delay, and not show thyself to be a god, in order that these men may be punished?’ Simon changed the subject again and said, ‘Give orders to build for me a lofty tower of wood, and I will go up upon it, call my angels, and order them to take me, in the sight of all, to my father in heaven. And these men, not being able to do this, will be put to shame as uneducated men’.

And Nero said to Peter, ‘From this will appear how much power either he or your God has’. Peter said, ‘O most mighty emperor, if you were willing, you might perceive that he is full of demons’. Nero was unwilling to perceive that Simon was dodging all the tough questions and said to Peter, ‘Why do you talk in circles? Tomorrow will prove you’.

Simon Claims that He Will Return to His Father in Heaven

The story continues with the events that lead to the death of Simon Magus as he claimed that he would ascend back to his father in heaven.

Simon said, ‘Listen, O Caesar Nero, that you may know that these men are liars, and that I have been sent from the heavens, tomorrow I will go up into the heavens, that I may make those who believe in me blessed, and show my wrath upon those who have denied me’. Peter and Paul said, ‘You are called by the devil and hasten to punishment’. Simon said, ‘Caesar Nero, listen to me. Separate these madmen from you, in order that when I go into heaven to my father, I may be very merciful to you. Nero said, ‘And when shall we prove this, that you go away into heaven? Simon said, ‘Order a lofty tower to be made of wood, and of great beams, that I may go up upon it, and that my angels may find me in the air; for they cannot come to me upon earth among the sinners’. Nero said, ‘I will see whether you will fulfill what you say’.

Then Nero ordered a lofty tower to be made in the Campus Martins, and all the people and the dignities to be present at the spectacle. And on the following day, all the multitude having come together, Nero ordered Peter and Paul to be present. Simon said, ‘In order that you may know, O emperor, that these are deceivers, as soon as ever I ascend into heaven, I will send my angels to you, and will make you come to me’.

Then Simon went up upon the tower in the face of all, and, crowned with laurels, he stretched forth his hands, and began to fly. And when Nero saw him flying, he said to Peter, ‘This Simon is true; but you and Paul are deceivers’. Peter replied, ‘Immediately shall you know that we are true Disciples of Christ; but that he is not Christ, but a magician, and a malefactor’. Nero said, ‘Do you still persist? Behold, you see him going up into heaven’. Then Peter, looking steadfastly upon Paul, said, ‘Paul, look up and see’. And Paul, having looked up, full of tears, and seeing Simon flying, said, ‘Peter, finish what you have begun; for already our Lord Jesus Christ is calling us’. And Nero hearing them smiled a little, and said, ‘These men see themselves beaten already, and are gone mad’. Peter said, ‘Now you shall know that we are not mad. Paul said to Peter, ‘Do it at once’.

And Peter, looking steadfastly against Simon, said, ‘I command you, angels of Satan who are carrying him into the air to deceive the hearts of the unbelievers, by the God that created all things, and by Jesus Christ, whom on the third day He raised from the dead, no longer from this hour to keep him up, but to let him go’. And immediately, he fell into a place called Sacra Via, that is, Holy Way, and was divided into four parts, having perished by an evil fate.

Then Nero ordered Peter and Paul to be put in irons, and the body of Simon to be carefully kept three days, thinking that he would rise on the third day. To whom Peter said, ‘He will no longer rise, since he is truly dead, being condemned to everlasting punishment’. And

Nero said to him, 'Who commanded you to do such a dreadful deed?' Peter said, 'His blasphemy against my Lord Jesus Christ has brought him into this gulf of destruction'. Nero said, 'I will destroy you by an evil death'. Peter said, 'This is not in your power, even if it should seem good to you to destroy us; but it is necessary that what our Master promised to us should be fulfilled'.

Then Nero, having summoned Agrippa, said to him, 'It is necessary that men introducing mischievous religious observances should die. Wherefore I order them to take iron clubs, and to be killed in the sea-fight¹¹¹. Agrippa said, 'Most sacred emperor, what you have ordered is not fitting for these men, since Paul seems innocent beside Peter'. Nero said, 'By what fate, then, shall they die?' Agrippa answered and said, 'As seems to me, Paul's head should be cut off, and Peter should be raised on a cross as the cause of the murder'. Nero said, 'You have most excellently judged'. Then both Peter and Paul were led away from the presence of Nero. And Paul was beheaded on the Ostesian road.

And Peter, having come to the cross, said, 'Since my Lord Jesus Christ, who came down from the heaven upon the earth, was raised upon the cross upright, and He has called me to heaven, my cross ought to be fixed head downward, so as to direct my feet towards heaven. I am not worthy to be crucified like my Lord. Then, having reversed the cross, they nailed his feet up.

And the multitude was assembled reviling Caesar, and wishing to kill him. But Peter, hanging on the cross, restrained them saying, "A few days ago, being exhorted by the brethren to leave, I was going away. And my Lord Jesus Christ met me, and having adored Him, I said, 'Lord, where are You going?' And He said to me, 'I am going to Rome to be crucified'. And I said to Him, 'Lord, weren't You crucified once for all?' And the Lord answered and said, 'I saw you fleeing from death, and I wish to be crucified instead of you'. And I said, 'Lord, I'm going; I will fulfill Your command'. And He said to me, 'Fear not, for I am with you'. On this account, then, children do not hinder my going; for already my feet are going on the road to heaven. Do not grieve, therefore, but rather rejoice with me, for today I receive the fruit of my labors". And thus speaking, he said, "I thank You, Good Shepherd, that the sheep which You have entrusted to me, sympathize with me. I ask, then, that with me they may have a part in Your kingdom". And having thus spoken, he gave up the Spirit.

And immediately there appeared men glorious and strange in appearance. And they said, "We are here on account of the holy and chief Apostles from Jerusalem". And they, along with Marcellus, an illustrious man, who left Simon and had believed in Peter's words, took up his body secretly, and put it under the terebinth near the place for the exhibition of sea-fights in the place called the Vatican.

And the men, who had said that they came from Jerusalem, said to the people, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, because you have been deemed worthy to have great champions. And know that Nero himself, after not many days, will be utterly destroyed, and his kingdom shall be given to another". And after these things the people revolted against him. And when he knew of it, he fled into desert places; through hunger and cold he gave up the spirit and his body became food for the wild beasts.

And some devout men of the regions of the East wished to carry off the relics of the saints, and immediately there was a great earthquake in the city; and those that dwelt in the city having become aware of it, ran and seized the men, but they fled. But the Romans took the relics, put them in a place three miles from the city, and there they were guarded a year and seven months, until they had built the place in which they intended to put them. And after these things, all having assembled with glory and singing of praise, they put them in the place built for

¹¹¹ The sea-fights were a favorite spectacle of the Roman emperors, where the combatants were persons condemned to death.

them. And the consummation of the holy glorious Apostles Peter and Paul was on the 29th of the month of June.

There are many accounts of Simon's death as a result of his encounter with Peter and Paul. Most agree that he died while trying to ascend to his father in heaven, but the manner of his actual death differs.

In Arnobius' description¹¹² of Simon's attempt to ascend to heaven, Arnobius refers to some man-made device that carried Simon aloft, where there were flames associated with the man-made device. It is possible that Simon used hot air balloon techniques for his flying. Arnobius implies that Simon might have committed suicide after this embarrassing incident.

“In Rome herself, the mistress of the world, where men are busied with the practices introduced by king Numa, and the superstitious observances of antiquity, they have nevertheless hastened to give up their fathers' mode of life, and attach themselves to Christian truth. For they had seen the chariot of Simon Magus, and his fiery car, blown into pieces by the mouth of Peter, and vanish when Christ was named. They had seen him trusting in false gods, and abandoned by them in their terror, borne down headlong by his own weight, lying prostrate with his legs broken. And then, when he had been carried to Brunda, worn out with anguish and shame, again cast himself down from the roof of a very lofty house”.

Other early Christian tradition also refers¹¹³ to Simon's fall as he was trying to ascend to heaven. In this account, Peter's prayer was to restrain the demons that carried Simon, to let him fall, but not to allow him to be killed by his injuries.

“Now when Simon was in Rome, he mightily disturbed the Church, and subverted many, and brought them over to himself, and astonished the Gentiles with his skill in magic. Once, in the middle of the day, he went into their theater, and commanded the people that they should bring Peter also by force into the theater, and promised he would fly in the air. And when all the people were in suspense at this, Peter prayed by himself. And indeed Simon was carried up into the air by demons, and did fly on high in the air, saying that he was returning into heaven, and that he would supply them with good things from thence. As the people made acclamations to him, as to a God, Peter stretched out his hands to heaven, and besought God through the Lord Jesus to throw down this pestilent fellow, to dash him against the ground, and bruise him, but not to kill him. Fixing his eyes on Simon, Peter said to him, ‘If I be a man of God, and a real apostle of Jesus Christ, I command the wicked powers, by whom Simon the magician is carried, to let go their hold, that he may be exposed to the laughter of those that have been seduced by him’. When Peter had said these words, Simon was deprived of his powers, and fell down headlong with a great noise, and was violently dashed against the ground, and had his hip and anklebones broken. And the people cried out, saying, ‘There is one only God, whom Peter rightly preaches in truth’. And many left him; but some that were worthy of perdition continued in his wicked doctrine. And after this manner the most atheistic heresy of the Simonians was first established in Rome”.

¹¹² Roberts and Donaldson, “The Seven Books of Arnobius Against the Heathen”, II, 12, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 6.

¹¹³ Roberts and Donaldson, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, VI, ii, 9, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

Jerome refers¹¹⁴ to Peter's arrival in Rome in the second year of the reign of Claudius or 42 AD. After his overthrow of Simon Magus, Jerome stated that Peter was crucified head-downward in the fourteenth year of Nero, or 67 AD.

John Cassian stated¹¹⁵ that the encounter with Simon in Rome was such an ordeal for the Apostle Peter that he fasted the day before in accordance with the Lord's teaching, "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21).

"Some people in some countries of the West think that a dispensation from fasting ought certainly not to be allowed on the Sabbath, because they say that on this day the Apostle Peter fasted before his encounter with Simon. But from this it is quite clear that he did this not in accordance with a canonical rule, but rather through the needs of his impending struggle. For the same purpose, Peter seems to have imposed on his disciples not a general but a special fast, which he certainly would not have done if he had known that it was to be observed by canonical rule. Similarly he would surely have been ready to appoint it even on Sunday, if the occasion of his struggle had fallen upon it. But no canonical rule of fasting would have been made general from this, because it was no general observance that led to it, but a matter of necessity, which forced it to be observed on a single occasion".

Cyril of Jerusalem also referred¹¹⁶ to Simon's claim to deity in Rome, and the statue that honored him as such. Cyril also mentioned that Simon's death resulted from his attempt to ascend to heaven, which was thwarted by Peter and Paul.

"As the delusion was extending, Peter and Paul, chief rulers of the Church, arrived and set the error right. And when the supposed God Simon wished to show himself off, they straightway showed him as a corpse. Simon promised to rise aloft to heaven, and came riding in a demons' chariot on the air. But the servants of God fell on their knees, and having shown that agreement of which Jesus spoke, that If two of you shall agree concerning anything that they shall ask, it shall be done unto them (Matthew 18:19). They launched the weapon of their concord in prayer against Magus, and struck him down to the earth".

"And marvelous though it was, yet no marvel. These brought the supposed God down from the sky to earth, thence to be taken down to the regions below the earth. In this man first the serpent of wickedness appeared; but when one head had been cut off, the root of wickedness was found again with many heads in his followers".

The Church Historian, Severus, also referred¹¹⁷ to the encounter of Peter and Paul with Simon Magus in Rome, which resulted in the death of Simon.

"At that time, our divine religion had obtained a wide prevalence in the city. Peter was there executing the office of bishop, and Paul, too, after he had been brought to Rome, on appealing to Caesar from the unjust judgment of the governor (Acts 25:8-12, 28:19). Multitudes then came together to hear Paul (Acts

¹¹⁴ Jerome, "Lives of Illustrious Men", II, 1, Jerome and Gennadius, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 3.

¹¹⁵ John Cassian, The Institutes of the Coenobia, III, 10.

¹¹⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VI, 14-15.

¹¹⁷ Philip Schaff, "The Sacred History of Sulpitius Severus", II, 28-29, Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series, v. 11.

28:30-31), and these, influenced by the truth, which they were given to know, and by the miracles of the apostles, which they then so frequently performed, turned to the worship of God. After that took place the well known and celebrated encounter of Peter and Paul with Simon. After he had flown up into the air by his magical arts, he was supported by two demons (with the view of proving that he was a god). The demons were put to flight by the prayers of the Apostles, and he fell to the earth in the sight of all the people, and was dashed to pieces”.

Hippolytus gives a different account¹¹⁸ of Simon’s death. In his account, Simon told his disciples to bury him alive, saying that he would rise on the third day, but never did. Since Hippolytus doesn’t mention Simon’s attempt to ascend to heaven, the “burial” could be connected with Simon’s injuries to give Simon a chance to escape and save face.

“This Simon, deceiving many in Samaria by his sorcery, was reproved by the Apostles, and was laid under a curse, as it has been written in the Acts. But he afterwards abjured the faith, and attempted these aforesaid practices. And journeying as far as Rome, he fell in with the Apostles; Peter offered repeated opposition to him since he was deceiving many by his sorcery. This man continued to give instruction in his doctrines. At last, when conviction was imminent, he stated that, if he were buried alive, he would rise the third day. And accordingly, having ordered a trench to be dug by his disciples, he directed himself to be interred there. They, then, executed the injunction given; whereas he remained in that grave until this day, for he was not the Christ. This constitutes the legendary system advanced by Simon, and from this Valentinus derived a starting-point for his own doctrine”.

Simon the Heresiarch and His Followers

We sometimes think that the explosive growth of the Church in the 1st Century came as a result of times of peace and calm. From the writings of the Church Fathers, however, we see that the 1st Century was a time of great turmoil and there were extreme heresies that the Church had to deal with. Simon Magus was referred to as the source of all these heresies, and he had many followers, where each added a little twist to make their own teachings unique. These followers are summarized by century below:

1st Century Followers:

Dositheus was contemporary with Simon as a disciple of John the Baptist.

Menander was Simon’s disciple and also a Samaritan magician.

Saturninus (also spelled Saturnilus) was a disciple of Menander and continued to teach into the early 2nd Century. Saturninus was also closely associated with the

Ophites (snake worshippers), who probably pre-dated Christ along with the **Cainites** and the **Sethites**.

Carpocrates was a contemporary of Menander and Saturninus, who was also a magician.

Nicolas of Antioch, the ex-deacon (Acts 6:5), took Simon’s teaching that God is the author of evil to its extreme, and ended up¹¹⁹ with “lechery that knew no rest by night or day”.

The Ebionites were a Jewish-Christian heretical group that rejected the writings of Paul and accepted only the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew. They were strict followers of the

¹¹⁸ Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, VI, 15.

¹¹⁹ Jerome, “Dialogue Against the Luciferians”, 23, *Treatises*, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 6.

Mosaic Law, and advocated a return to Judaism. Some practiced a strict form of asceticism, and abhorred certain foods.

Cerinthus was connected to the Ebionites and other Gnostics, and was opposed by the Apostle John in Asia Minor¹²⁰. Irenaeus stated¹²¹ that John wrote his Gospel specifically to oppose the heresy of Cerinthus.

2nd Century Followers:

Basilides of Alexandria was a disciple of Saturninus who was prominent in the early 2nd Century. Since Ignatius warned¹²² the Trallians about Basilides in c. 107 AD as he was being led to Rome and martyrdom, the implication is that Basilides got started before the end of the 1st Century.

Cerdo of Rome taught things similar to the Ebionites in the mid 2nd Century.

Marcion, a major figure in the mid 2nd Century, was a wealthy ship owner from Sinope of Pontus and was a disciple of Cerdo.

Valentinus of Egypt claimed to be taught by Theodas, a pupil of Paul, and proclaimed his heresy in Rome in the mid 2nd Century just after Cerdo.

Bardesanes of Edessa taught his heresy in the late 2nd Century and early 3rd Century.

Later Followers:

Arius of Libya taught his heresy in the late 3rd and early 4th Century, and it was his heresy that triggered the 1st Ecumenical Council in Nicea in the early 4th Century.

Eunomius was a late 4th Century figure following Arius, who also held some of Simon's views.

Simon Magus' Teachings

Many of the Church Fathers referred to Simon as the source of all the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Century heresies. Irenaeus stated¹²³ that the disciples and successors of Simon Magus of Samaria corrupted the truth, and injuriously affect the preaching of the Church. They do not confess the name of their master, in order all the more to seduce others, yet they do teach his doctrines. They use the name of Christ Jesus as a sort of lure to introduce the impieties of Simon; and thus they destroy multitudes.

They teach¹²⁴ that creation at large was formed after the image of their invisible Pleroma, and by the Demiurge, their supreme being. The multitude of those Gnostics sprang from him, and there are points of difference between them, in their several doctrines. All these heretics, taking their rise from Simon, have introduced impious and irreligious doctrines into this life.

“Simon Magus was the first¹²⁵ who said that he himself was God over all, and that the world was formed by his angels. Then those who succeeded him still further depraved his teaching through their impious and irreligious doctrines against the Creator. These heretics now referred to, being the disciples of those mentioned, render such as assent to them worse than the heathen”.

“You have indeed enjoined¹²⁶ upon me, my very dear friend, that I should bring this to light showing that they spring from Simon, the father of all heretics

¹²⁰ Eusebius, Church History, III, 28.

¹²¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xi, 1.

¹²² Ignatius, “To the Trallians”, 10-11, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

¹²³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxvii, 4.

¹²⁴ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, Preface, 1.

¹²⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, ix, 1.

¹²⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, Preface.

— to exhibit both their doctrines and successions, and to set forth arguments against them all”.

Cyril of Jerusalem also referred to Simon as the source of all the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Century heresies:

“The inventor of all heresy¹²⁷ was Simon Magus, who heard the words, ‘You have neither part nor lot in this matter’ (Acts 8:20-21). The rest, concerning whom it is written, ‘They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us’ (1 John 2:19). This man, after he had been cast out by the Apostles, was the first that dared with blasphemous mouth to say that it was himself who appeared on Mount Sinai as the Father, and afterwards appeared among the Jews, not in real flesh but in seeming, as Christ Jesus, and afterwards as the Holy Spirit whom Christ promised to send as the Paraclete. And he so deceived the City of Rome that Claudius set up his statue, and wrote beneath it, in the language of the Romans, ‘To Simon the Holy God’”.

Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, writing at the turn of the 1st Century (c. 107 AD) as he was being led to Rome to be fed to the lions, referred to Simon as the firstborn son of Satan. Ignatius also referred specifically to Simon’s claim to be Christ in appearance only, which was a major 1st Century heresy promoted by Simon and his followers.

“Some that are without God say¹²⁸ that He became man in appearance only, that He did not in reality take unto Him a body that He died in appearance merely, and did not in very deed suffer. Then does the prophet in vain declare, ‘They shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn over themselves as over one beloved’ (Zechariah 12:10). These men are as much unbelievers as were those that crucified Him. But as for me, I do not place my hopes in one who died for me in appearance, but in reality. For that which is false is quite abhorrent to the truth. Mary then did truly conceive a body, which had God inhabiting it. And God the Word was truly born of the Virgin, having clothed Himself with a body of like passions with our own. He who forms all men in the womb, was Himself really in the womb, and made for Himself a body of the seed of the Virgin, but without any intercourse of man. He was carried in the womb, even as we are, for the usual period of time; and was really born, as we also are; and was in reality nourished with milk, and partook of common meat and drink, even as we do”.

“Therefore flee from these ungodly heresies; for they are the inventions of the devil, that serpent that was the author of evil, and who by means of the woman deceived Adam, the father of our race”.

Vincent of Lerins (5th Century) stated¹²⁹ that Simon’s heresies had formed the basis for even the heretics of his own time. One of the foundations of Simon’s theology was that God was the author of evil. To them, then, practicing evil was part of godliness.

“From Simon Magus, that ancient sink of every thing vile has flowed by a secret continuous succession even to Priscillian (5th Century) of our own time. He dared to say that God, the Creator, is the author of evil, that is, of our wickedness

¹²⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, VI, 14.

¹²⁸ Ignatius, “To the Trallians”, 10-11, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 1.

¹²⁹ Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitory*, XXIV, 62-63.

and impieties. He asserts that He created with His own hands a human nature of such a description, that of its own motion, and by the impulse of its necessity-constrained will, it can do nothing else, can will nothing else, but sin. Seeing that it is tossed to and fro, and set on fire by the furies of all sorts of vices, it is hurried away by unquenchable lust into the utmost extremes of baseness”.

“There are innumerable instances of this kind, such that it is an established Law in the case of almost all heresies, that they evermore delight in profane novelties, scorn the decisions of antiquity, and, through oppositions of science falsely so called, make shipwreck of the faith. On the other hand, it is the sure characteristic of Catholics to keep that, which has been committed to their trust by the holy Fathers. They condemn profane novelties, and, in the apostle’s words, anathematize every one who preaches any other doctrine than that which has been received” (Galatians 1:8-9).

Hippolytus compared¹³⁰ Simon to Apsethus the Libyan, where he said Apsethus went about with greater wisdom and moderation. This is quite a condemnation of Simon when one considers the absurdity of Apsethus’ methods. This also shows Paul’s insight into how magicians like Jannes and Jambres, in performing their illusions, continue deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:8-13).

“It seems expedient to explain the opinions of Simon, a native of Gitta, a village of Samaria. His successors, taking a starting-point from him, have endeavored to establish similar opinions under a change of name. This Simon, a sorcerer, made a mockery of many, partly according to the art of Thrasymedes, and partly also by the assistance of demons, and attempted to deify himself. But the man was a cheat, and the Apostles reproved him (Acts 8:18-24). With much greater wisdom and moderation than Simon, did Apsethus the Libyan endeavor to have himself considered a god in Libya”.

“Apsethus the Libyan longed to become a god; when he failed to accomplish his desire, he wished to appear to have become *a god*. And he did appear, as time wore on, to have in reality become a god. The foolish Libyans used to sacrifice to him as to some divine power, supposing that they heard a voice that came down from heaven. Apsethus had collected a great number of parrots into the same cage. Now there are very many parrots throughout Libya, and very distinctly these imitate the human voice. This man nourished the birds and taught them to say, ‘Apsethus is a god’. After the birds had practiced this for a long period, he released the parrots, each in a different direction. While the birds were on the wing, their sound went out into all Libya, and the expressions of these reached as far as the Hellenic country. The Libyans, astonished at the voice of the birds and not perceiving the knavery of Apsethus, held Apsethus to be a god. One of the Greeks perceived the trick of the supposed god, recaptured many of the parrots, and re-taught them to say, ‘Apsethus caged us and compelled us to say he is a god’. Having heard the recantation of the parrots, the Libyans unanimously decided on burning Apsethus”.

¹³⁰ Hippolytus, The Refutation of All Heresies, VI, 2-3.

Menander

Tertullian stated¹³¹ that Menander, Simon's disciple and also a magician, was very much like his master.

I will speak of those heretics who have chosen to make the gospel the starting-point of their heresies. Of these the first of all is Simon Magus, who in the Acts of the Apostles earned a just sentence from the Apostle Peter. He had the audacity to call himself the Supreme God, and to assert that his angels had originated the universe. He claimed he had descended in quest of an erring demon, which was Wisdom; and in a phantasmal semblance of God, he had *not* suffered among the Jews, but was *as if he had suffered*. After him came Menander, his disciple, likewise a magician, saying the same as Simon. Whatever Simon had affirmed himself to be, this did Menander equally affirm himself to be, asserting that none could possibly have salvation without being baptized in his name. [Compare 1 Corinthians 1:13-15, where Paul reminded the Corinthians that no one was baptized in Paul's name.]

Eusebius¹³², quoting Justin Martyr (d. 165 AD) and Irenaeus (d. 202 AD), also stated that Menander was a Samaritan magician like Simon, and was a disciple of Simon.

“Menander, who succeeded Simon Magus, showed himself to be another instrument of diabolical power, not inferior to the former. He also was a Samaritan and carried his sorcery to no less an extent than his teacher had done, and at the same time reveled in still more marvelous tales than he. He said that he was himself the Savior, who had been sent down from invisible eons for the salvation of men. And he taught that no one could gain the mastery over the world-creating angels themselves unless he had first gone through the magical discipline imparted by him and had received baptism from him. Those who were deemed worthy of this would partake even in the present life of perpetual immortality, and would never die, but would remain here forever, without growing old. These facts can be easily learned from the works of Irenaeus.

Justin stated¹³³, ‘And a man, Meander, also a Samaritan, of the town Capparetaea, a disciple of Simon, and inspired by devils, we know to have deceived many while he was in Antioch by his magical art. He persuaded those who adhered to him that they should never die’. And it was indeed an artifice of the devil to endeavor, by means of such sorcerers, to defame the great mystery of godliness by magic art. Through them they tried to make ridiculous the doctrines of the Church concerning the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the dead”.

The part of the writings of Irenaeus¹³⁴ regarding Menander that Eusebius (above) quoted reads as follows.

“The mystic priests belonging to this sect both lead profligate lives and practice magical arts, each one to the extent of his ability. They use exorcisms and incantations. Love-potions, too, and charms, as well as those beings who are called ‘Paredri’ (familiaris) and ‘Oniropompi’ (dream-senders), and whatever

¹³¹ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

¹³² Eusebius, Church History, III, 26.

¹³³ Justin Martyr, First Apology, XXVI.

¹³⁴ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxiii, 4-5. See also Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, xxxii, 5.

other curious arts can be pressed into their service. They also have an image of Simon fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter, and another of Helena in the shape of Minerva; and these they worship. From them ‘knowledge (Greek: *gnosis*), falsely so called,’ received its beginning”.

“The successor of Simon was Menander, also a Samaritan by birth, and he, too, was perfectly adept in the practice of magic. He affirmed that the primary Power continues unknown to all, but that he himself is the person who has been sent forth from the presence of the invisible beings as a savior, for the deliverance of men. The world was made by angels, whom, like Simon, he maintains to have been produced by Ennoea. He gives, by means of that magic which he teaches, knowledge that one may overcome those very angels that made the world. His disciples obtain the ‘resurrection’ by being baptized into him, and can die no more, but remain in the possession of immortal youth”.

Irenaeus also wrote that the Gnostic heresy could be traced in concept back to Simon and his disciple, Menander.

“But the rest, who are called Gnostics¹³⁵, take rise from Menander, Simon’s disciple; and each one of them appeared to be both the father and the high priest of that doctrine into which he has been initiated”. All these heretics¹³⁶, taking their rise from Simon, have introduced impious and irreligious doctrines into this life.

Cerinthus and the Ebionites

The Ebionites take their name from the Hebrew word for “poor men”. The Church Historian Eusebius describes¹³⁷ the Ebionites as advocating a return to the practices of Judaism. Like Simon, they had an improper understanding of Christ.

“The evil demons, being unable to tear certain others from their allegiance to Christ, yet found them susceptible in a different direction. The ancients quite properly called these men Ebionites, because they held low opinions concerning Christ. They considered Him a plain and common man, who was justified only because of His superior virtue, and who was the fruit of the intercourse of a man with Mary. In their opinion the observance of the Law was necessary, on the ground that they could not be saved by faith in Christ alone and by a corresponding life. There were others besides them that were of the same name, but avoided the strange beliefs of the former, and did not deny that the Lord was born of a virgin and of the Holy Spirit. But they also refused to acknowledge that He pre-existed, being God, Word, and Wisdom, they turned aside into the impiety of the former, especially when they endeavored to observe the bodily worship of the Law. These men thought that it was necessary to reject all the epistles of the Paul, whom they called an apostate from the Law; and they used only the so-called Gospel according to the Hebrews (i.e. Matthew in its original language) and made small account of the rest. The Sabbath and the rest of the discipline of the Jews they observed just like them, but at the same time, they celebrated the Lord’s days as a memorial of the resurrection of the Savior. In consequence of such a course they received the name of Ebionites, which signified the poverty of

¹³⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, 4.

¹³⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, Preface, 1.

¹³⁷ Eusebius, Church History, III, 28.

their understanding. This is the name by which a poor man is called among the Hebrews”.

Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch and writing at the turn of the 2nd Century (c. 107 AD), referred to the Ebionites as followers of Simon and teaching destructive heresy.

“If any one confesses¹³⁸ Christ Jesus the Lord, but denies the God of the Law and of the prophets, saying that the Father of Christ is not the Maker of heaven and earth, he has not continued in the truth any more than his father the devil, and is a disciple of Simon Magus, not of the Holy Spirit. If any one says there is one God, and also confesses Christ Jesus, but thinks the Lord to be a mere man, and not the only-begotten God, and Wisdom, and the Word of God, and deems Him to consist merely of a soul and body, such a person is a serpent, that preaches deceit and error for the destruction of men. And such a man is poor in understanding, even as by name he is an Ebionite”.

Eusebius also wrote¹³⁹ about the heresy of Cerinthus. His whole theology focused on an earthly Kingdom of God where the pleasures of the flesh are prominent. As a framework for this, Cerinthus used things from the Mosaic Law like the Ebionites.

“Cerinthus made his appearance at the time of the Ebionites. Caius, whose words we quoted above, in the Disputation¹⁴⁰ which is ascribed to him, writes, ‘But Cerinthus also, by means of revelations which he pretended were written by a great apostle, brought before us marvelous things which he falsely claimed were shown him by angels. And he said that after the resurrection the kingdom of Christ will be set up on earth, and that the flesh dwelling in Jerusalem will again be subject to desires and pleasures. He asserts, with the purpose of deceiving men, that there is to be a period of a thousand years for marriage festivals’.

And Dionysius, who was bishop of the parish of Alexandria in our day, in the second book¹⁴¹ of his work ‘On the Promises’, where he says some things concerning the Apocalypse of John, mentions Cerinthus in the following words, ‘The doctrine which he taught was this: that the kingdom of Christ will be an earthly one. And as he was himself devoted to the pleasures of the body and was altogether sensual in his nature, he dreamed that that kingdom would consist in those things, which he desired, namely, in the delights of the belly and of sexual passion. People would continue in eating and drinking and marrying, and in festivals and sacrifices and the slaying of victims, under the guise of which he thought he could indulge his appetites with a better grace’. These are the words of Dionysius.

But Irenaeus, in the third book¹⁴² of his work ‘Against Heresies’, relates a story, which deserves to be recorded. He says, on the authority of Polycarp, that the apostle John once entered a bath to bathe; but, learning that Cerinthus was within, he sprang from the place and rushed out of the door, for he could not bear

¹³⁸ Ignatius, “To the Philadelphians”, 6, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 1.

¹³⁹ Eusebius, *Church History*, III, 28.

¹⁴⁰ Most of what we know of the writings of Caius (or Gaius) come from the quotes by Eusebius.

¹⁴¹ The quotes by Eusebius and Athanasius are all that we have of the writings of Dionysius in the mid 3rd Century.

¹⁴² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, iii, 4.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, xxvi, 1.

to remain under the same roof with him. And he advised those that were with him to do the same, saying, ‘Let us flee, lest the bath fall; for Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within’”.

Tertullian also describes¹⁴³ the teachings of the heretics Carpocrates, Cerinthus, and his successor Ebion, all of which also took their lead from Simon.

“**Carpocrates**, furthermore, introduced the following sect. He affirms that there is one Virtue, who created this world in the lower regions. They say that Christ was not born of the Virgin Mary, but was generated as a mere human being of the seed of Joseph, superior to all others in the practice of righteousness and in integrity of life. He suffered among the Jews, and His soul alone was received in heaven as having been hardier than all others. From heaven, He would confer only the salvation of souls, and that there is no resurrection of the body. After him broke out the heretic **Cerinthus**, teaching similarly. For he, too, says that those angels originated the world; and sets forth Christ as born of the seed of Joseph, contending that He was merely human, without divinity. He affirms also that the Law was given by angels (Acts 7:53); representing the God of the Jews as not the Lord, but an angel”.

“His successor was **Ebion**, not agreeing with Cerinthus in every point. He affirms the world to have been made by God, not by angels. Because it is written, ‘No disciple above his master, nor servant above his Lord’ (Matthew 10:24), he sets forth likewise the Law as binding, of course for the purpose of excluding the Gospel and vindicating Judaism”.

Carpocrates

Eusebius also wrote¹⁴⁴ of the relationship of the heretics Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, and Carpocrates, who was the father of the Gnostics.

“Irenaeus also writes that Carpocrates was a contemporary of these men, and that he was the father of another heresy, called the heresy of the Gnostics, who did not wish to transmit any longer the magic arts of Simon in secret, but openly. They boasted of love potions that were carefully prepared by them and of certain demons that sent them dreams and lent them their protection. In accordance with these things, they taught that it was necessary for those who wished to enter fully into their mysteries to practice all the worst kinds of wickedness, on the ground that they could escape the cosmic powers, in no other way than by discharging their obligations to them all by infamous conduct. The malignant demon, making use of these ministers, on the one hand enslaved those that were so pitiably led astray by them to their own destruction. On the other hand he furnished to the unbelieving heathen abundant opportunities for slandering the divine word, inasmuch as the reputation of these men brought infamy upon the whole race of Christians. He did not, however, long succeed in these artifices, as the truth established itself and in time shone with great brilliancy”.

¹⁴³ Tertullian, *Against All Heresies*, II, ix, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Eusebius, *Church History*, IV, 7.

Yet, Irenaeus said¹⁴⁵, the power behind Simon and his followers was not on a par with that of the Church. All of Simon's power was focused on destroying, misleading and deceiving.

Those who belong to Simon and Carpocrates and others perform miracles for the sake of destroying and misleading mankind, by means of magical deceptions, and with universal deceit. They render greater harm than good to those that believe them, and lead them astray. For they can neither confer sight on the blind, nor hearing on the deaf, nor chase away all sorts of demons except those that are sent into others by themselves, if they can even do so much as this. Nor can they cure the weak, or the lame, or the paralytic, or those who are distressed in any other part of the body, as has often been done in regard to bodily infirmity. Nor can they furnish effective remedies for those accidents, which may occur. And so far are they from being able to raise the dead, as the Lord raised them, and the apostles did by means of prayer, that they do not even believe this can be possibly be done.

The resurrection of the body did not fit into the theology of Simon and his followers because they believed in reincarnation. Tertullian explained¹⁴⁶ their view of reincarnation: one keeps coming back as a human being until one has sinned grossly enough and often enough.

“Carpocrates also makes equally good use of Simon's transmigration philosophy. He was a magician and a fornicator like Simon; only he had not a Helen. He asserted that souls are reinvested with bodies, in order to ensure the overthrow of divine and human truth. According to them, this life became consummated to no man until all those blemishes, which are held to disfigure it, have been fully displayed in its conduct. There is nothing, which is accounted evil by nature, but simply as men think of it. The transmigration of human souls, therefore, goes into any kind of heterogeneous bodies, whenever depravity has not been fully perpetrated in the early stage of life's passage. As the soul has fallen short in sin, it has to be recalled to existence, until it “pays the utmost farthing,” thrust out from time to time into the prison of the body”.

Hippolytus also stated¹⁴⁷ that Simon and his followers taught reincarnation of some form. The ultimate purpose of this philosophy was to slander the Church.

“If anyone despises earthly concerns more than did Jesus, Carpocrates says, such a one would he able to become superior to Him. They practice their magical arts and incantations, and spells and voluptuous feasts. They invoke the aid of subordinate demons and dream-senders, and resort to the rest of the tricks of sorcery, alleging that they possess power for now acquiring sway over the makers of this world, and over all the works that are in it”.

“Now these heretics have themselves been sent forth by Satan, for the purpose of slandering before the Gentiles the divine name of the Church. And the devil's object is that men may hear the doctrines of those heretics, and think that all of us are people of the same stamp. The aim is that they may turn away their ears from the preaching of the truth, or that they, looking upon all the tenets of those heretics, may speak hurtfully of us. The followers of Carpocrates allege that the souls are transferred from body to body, so far as that they may fill up the

¹⁴⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, xxxi, 2.

¹⁴⁶ Tertullian, A Treatise on the Soul, I, ix, 35.

¹⁴⁷ Hippolytus, The Refutation of All Heresies, VII, 20.

measure of all their sins. When none of these sins is left, the Carpocratians affirm that the soul is then emancipated, and departs unto that God above the world-making angels; and that in this way all souls will be saved. If some souls, during the presence of the soul in the body for one life, may become involved in the full measure of transgressions, they no longer undergo metempsychosis. Souls of this sort, on paying off at once all trespasses, will be emancipated from dwelling any more in a body”.

Saturninus

Tertullian also wrote¹⁴⁸ of these 1st Century heretics, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides and Nicolas and how they were related in their teachings.

Saturninus followed Menander. He, too, affirmed that God abided in the highest regions, and that those regions are infinite, and in the regions immediately above us. But angels far removed from Him made the lower world. Because light from above had flashed brilliantly in the lower regions, the angels had carefully tried to form man after the similitude of that light. Man lay crawling on the surface of the earth. This light and this higher virtue were the salvable spark in man, while all the rest of him perishes. Christ, according to Saturninus, had not existed in a bodily substance, and had endured a *quasi*-passion in a phantasmal shape; and there will by no means be a resurrection of the flesh.

Tertullian also stated¹⁴⁹ that the heretic Saturninus introduced a teaching that is similar to the modern theory of the evolution of man. These ideas the heretics got from the writings of Plato.

“Saturninus, the disciple of Menander, who belonged to Simon’s sect, introduced the opinion that angels made man. A futile, imperfect creation at first, weak and unable to stand, he crawled upon the ground like a worm, because he lacked the strength to maintain an erect posture. But afterwards, by the compassion of the Supreme Power (in whose image he was clumsily formed), obtained a slender spark of life. This roused and righted his imperfect form, and animated it with a higher vitality, and provided for its return, on its relinquishment of life, to its original principle”.

“Carpocrates, on the other hand, claims for himself so extreme an amount of the supernal qualities, that his disciples set their own souls at once on an equality with Christ (not to mention the apostles). Apelles tells us that our souls were enticed by earthly baits down from their super-celestial abodes by a fiery angel, Israel’s God and ours, who then enclosed them firmly within our sinful flesh”.

“Forasmuch, therefore, as the doctrines which the heretics borrow from Plato are cunningly defended by this kind of argument, I shall sufficiently refute the heretics if I overthrow the argument of Plato”.

The Ophites, Cainites and Sethites

The Ophites, Cainites and Sethites are interesting heretic groups, and they illustrate how twisted some of the heretic groups really were. They each take their starting point from Simon’s teachings, but through their own innovations, they increased in ungodliness (2 Timothy 2:16),

¹⁴⁸ Tertullian, *Against All Heresies*, II, ix Appendix, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, I, ix, 23.

but ended up deceiving and being deceived more and more (2 Timothy 3:13). They also illustrate the power (i.e. Satan) behind them. Tertullian describes¹⁵⁰ them as follows:

“The heretics, who are called **Ophites**, magnify the serpent to such a degree that they prefer him even to Christ Himself. For it was he, they say, who gave us the knowledge of good and of evil (Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7). His power and majesty, they say, Moses perceived and set up the brazen serpent; and whoever gazed upon him obtained health (Numbers 21:5-9). Christ Himself, they say further, in His gospel imitates Moses’ serpent’s sacred power, in saying, ‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so it behooves the Son of Man to be lifted up’ (John 3:14-15). Him they introduce to bless their Eucharistic elements”.

“Inferior Virtues and angels then man. And because man had been originated by weaker and mediocre powers, he lay crawling, worm-like. A higher Aeon, moved with envy, injected into man a certain spark, whereby he was able to understand the things above”.

“An inferior Virtue emitted out of himself the similitude of the serpent; and this had been the serpent whom Eve had believed as if he had been God the Son. He plucked from the fruit of the tree, and thus conferred on mankind the knowledge of things good and evil Genesis 2:15-17). Christ, moreover, did not exist in the flesh; salvation of the flesh is not to be hoped for at all”.

“The heresy of the **Cainites** magnifies Cain as if he had been conceived of some potent Virtue which operated in him; whereas Abel had been conceived of an inferior Virtue, and accordingly was inferior. They who assert this defend the traitor Judas. Judas, they say, observing that Christ wished to subvert the truth, betrayed Him, in order that there might be no possibility of truth’s being subverted. And others dispute against them, saying that because the powers of this world were unwilling that Christ should suffer, Judas betrayed Christ, in order that there might be no possibility at all of the salvation being impeded through the Virtues which were opposing Christ’s passion”.

“The heresy of the **Sethites** states that two human beings were formed by the angels: Cain and Abel. On their account arose great contentions and discords among the angels. For this reason, the ‘Mother’ Virtue willed Seth to be born in place of Abel as a pure seed (Genesis 4:25). For they say that there had been iniquitous mixtures of angels and human beings; for which reason that ‘Mother’ Virtue brought on the deluge for the purpose of vengeance. But they who had originated the former seed sent into the ark, together with those ‘eight souls’, the seed of Ham, in order that the seed of evil should not perish. Christ they call ‘Seth’, and say that He was instead of the actual Seth”.

Ex-Deacon Nicolas

The Apostle John had to deal extensively with Cerinthus and Nicolas. Irenaeus stated¹⁵¹ that John wrote his Gospel specifically to contradict what these heretics were saying, and that this is apparent in the words that John used to begin his Gospel.

“John, the disciple of the Lord, preached this faith, and sought, by the proclamation of the Gospel, to remove that error which Cerinthus had disseminated among men, and a long time previously by those termed Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans are an offset of that “knowledge” (Greek: *gnosis*)

¹⁵⁰ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix, 2.

¹⁵¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xi, 1.

falsely so called, that he might confound them, and persuade them that there is but one God, who made all things by His Word. They allege that the Creator and the Father were not the same; and that the Son and the Christ were not the same. They say that He descending upon Jesus, the Son of the Creator, and flew back again into His Pleroma”.

“The disciple of the Lord therefore desired to put an end to all such doctrines, and to establish the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one Almighty God, who made all things by His Word, both visible and invisible. He showed at the same time, that by the Word, through whom God made the creation, He also bestowed salvation on the men included in the creation. Thus John commenced His teaching in the Gospel, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made. What was made was life in Him, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not’. ‘All things’, he says, ‘were made by Him’. Therefore in ‘all things’ this creation of ours is included, for we cannot concede to these men that the words ‘all things’ are spoken in reference to those within their Pleroma”.

Tertullian also wrote¹⁵² of these 1st Century heretics, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides and Nicolas and how they were related in their teachings.

A brother heretic emerged in Nicolas. He was one of the seven deacons who were appointed in the Acts of the Apostles. He affirms that Darkness was seized with concupiscence after Light. Out of this mixture it is a shame to say what fetid and unclean combinations arose. The rest of his tenets, too, are obscene. He tells of certain Aeons, sons of turpitude, and of conjunctions of execrable and obscene embraces, and certain yet baser outcomes of these. He teaches that there were born seven demons, and gods, and spirits, and other things sufficiently sacrilegious alike and foul, which we blush to recount, and at once pass them by. Enough it is for us that this heresy of the Nicolaitans has been condemned by the Apocalypse of the Lord with the weightiest authority attaching to a sentence, in saying, ‘But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate’ (Revelation 2:6).

Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria contrasted the Apostle Matthias with Nicolas. Both were very strict in following Jesus’ command, “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). Both Matthias and Nicolas applied this to the pleasures of the flesh, but their methods were different. The Apostles at first rebuked Nicolas for jealousy concerning his wife. In giving up the pleasures of the flesh, Nicolas gave permission to anyone who wished to marry his wife. Nicolas’ followers took his words literally and practiced open fornication with her (Revelation 2:6, 15), and Nicolas was branded a heretic because he didn’t correct them. Eusebius stated¹⁵³:

“At this time the so-called sect of the Nicolaitans made its appearance and lasted for a very short time. They boasted that the author of their sect was Nicolas, one of the deacons who, with Stephen, were appointed by the apostles.

¹⁵² Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

¹⁵³ Eusebius, Church History, III, 29.

Clement of Alexandria¹⁵⁴, relates the following things concerning him. ‘They say that he had a beautiful wife, and after the Ascension of the Savior, being accused by the apostles of jealousy, he led her into their midst and gave permission to any one that wished to marry her. For they say that this was in accord with that saying of his, that one ought to restrict the flesh. And those that have followed his heresy, imitating blindly and foolishly that which was done and said, commit fornication without shame. But I understand that Nicolas had to do with no other woman than her to whom he was married, and that, so far as his children are concerned, his daughters continued in a state of virginity until old age, and his son remained uncorrupt. If this is so, when he brought his wife, whom he jealously loved, into the midst of the apostles, he was evidently renouncing his passion; and when he used the expression, ‘to restrict the flesh,’ he was inculcating self-control in the face of those pleasures that are eagerly pursued. For I suppose that, in accordance with the command of the Savior, he did not wish to serve two masters, pleasure and the Lord. But they say that Matthias also taught in the same manner that we ought to fight against and restrict the flesh, and not give way to it for the sake of pleasure, but strengthen the soul by faith and knowledge”.

Matthias, in his life, illustrated what the Apostle Paul later wrote down regarding restricting the flesh. Paul counseled his Churches that in our flesh nothing good dwells (Romans 7:18). If we set our mind on the things of the flesh and live according to the flesh, this is death. But to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Romans 8:5-6, 13). This happens because the fleshly mind is at enmity with God and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:7-8). Therefore, Paul counseled, do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:4), and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:14).

Doing this generates a conflict. “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” Galatians 5:17). For example, “The good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:19-25).

To deal with this conflict, Matthias taught a strengthening of the soul by faith and knowledge. Paul, in his eloquence, stated this as follows: “We do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. That you may be strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (Colossians 1:9-12). This strengthening, however, occurs in the inner man, not in the flesh (Ephesians 3:16).

¹⁵⁴ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, III, 4

While Nicolas worked at being “spiritual” by restricting the flesh, he did not do so as Paul stated, but as the Pharisees did.

Basilides and Early 2nd Century Followers of Simon

Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, writing at the turn of the 1st Century (c. 107 AD) linked together many of the major heretics of the late 1st and early 2nd Centuries, including Menander, Basilides, ex-Deacon Nicolas (Acts 6:5), Theodotus and Cleobulus.

“Avoid also those wicked offshoots of his, Simon his firstborn son, and Menander, and Basilides, and all his wicked mob of followers, the worshippers of a man, whom also the prophet Jeremiah pronounces accursed¹⁵⁵. Flee also the impure Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 15), falsely so called, who are lovers of pleasure, and given to calumnious speeches. Avoid also the children of the evil one, Theodotus and Cleobulus, who produce death-bearing fruit, whereof if any one tastes, he instantly dies, and that not a mere temporary death, but one that shall endure forever. These men are not the planting of the Father, but are an accursed brood. And says the Lord, ‘Let every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted be rooted up’ (Matthew 15:13). If they had been branches of the Father, they would not have been ‘enemies of the cross of Christ’ (Philippians 3:18-19), but rather of those who ‘killed the Lord of glory’ (1 Corinthians 2:8). But now, by denying the cross, and being ashamed of the passion, they cover the transgression of the Jews, those fighters against God, those murderers of the Lord; for it were too little to style them merely murderers of the prophets”.

Tertullian also wrote¹⁵⁶ of this early 2nd Century heretic, Basilides and how he was connected to earlier heretics in his teachings.

After Menander and Saturninus broke out the heretic Basilides. He affirmed that there is a supreme Deity, by name Abraxas, by whom was created Mind; that thence sprang the Word. Of Him issued Providence, Virtue, and Wisdom, and out of these subsequently were made Principalities, Powers, and Angels. There ensued infinite issues and processions of angels, and by these angels 365 heavens were formed, and the world, in honor of Abraxas, whose name, if computed, has in itself this number. Now, among the last of the angels, those who made this world, he places the God of the Jews, that is, the God of the Law and of the Prophets, whom he denies to be a God, but affirms to be an angel. To him, he says, was allotted the seed of Abraham, and accordingly he it was who transferred the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt into the land of Canaan. Christ, moreover, he affirms was sent, not by this maker of the world, but by the above-named Abraxas; and to have come in a phantasm, and been destitute of the substance of flesh. It was not He who suffered among the Jews, but Simon was crucified in His stead. Again, there must be no believing on him who was crucified, lest one confess to having believed on Simon. Martyrdom, he says, are not to be endured. The resurrection of the flesh he strenuously impugns, affirming that salvation has not been promised to *bodies*.

Eusebius also wrote¹⁵⁷ of the relationship of the heretics Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, and Carpocrates, who was the father of the Gnostics.

¹⁵⁵ It is uncertain what part of Jeremiah’s writings this refers to. Perhaps Jeremiah 1:16, 8:1-5, 25:5-9, 35:15.

¹⁵⁶ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

“Accordingly there proceeded from that Menander, whom we have already mentioned as the successor of Simon, a certain serpent-like power, double-tongued and two-headed, which produced the leaders of two different heresies, Saturninus, an Antiochian by birth, and Basilides, an Alexandrian. The former established schools of godless heresy in Syria, the latter in Alexandria. Irenaeus states that the false teaching of Saturninus agreed in most respects with that of Menander, but that Basilides, under the pretext of unspeakable mysteries, invented monstrous fables, and carried the fictions of his impious heresy quite beyond bounds. But as there were at that time great many members of the Church who were fighting for the truth and defending apostolic and ecclesiastical doctrine with uncommon eloquence. Agrippa Castor, one of the most renowned writers of that day, furnished posterity through their writings with a most powerful refutation against the heresies, which shows the terrible imposture of the man. He says that Basilides wrote twenty-four books upon the Gospel, and that he invented prophets for himself named Barcabbas and Barcoph, and others that had no existence, and that he gave them barbarous names in order to amaze those who marvel at such things. He taught also that the eating of meat offered to idols and the unguarded renunciation of the faith in times of persecution were matters of indifference”.

Jerome referred¹⁵⁸ to many of the early heretics in his writing against re-baptism. Jerome noted that most of these heresies broke out while the Apostle John was still alive. Since the issue was re-baptism, this means that all these heretics came from within the Church.

Then came Simon Magus and his disciple Menander. They asserted themselves to be powers of God (Acts 8:9-10). Then Basilides invented the most high God Abraxas and the three hundred and sixty-five manifestations of him. Then Nicolas, one of the seven Deacons (Acts 6:5), and one whose lechery knew no rest by night or day, indulged in his filthy dreams (Revelation 2:14-15). I come to those heretics who have mangled the Gospels, Saturninus, and the Ophites, the Cainites and Sethites, and Carpocrates, and Cerinthus, and his successor Ebion, and the other pests, the most of which broke out while the apostle John was still alive, and yet we do not read that any of these men were re-baptized.

And yet the Lord encourages all these to repent, and adds a threat of future punishment if they do not turn. Now he would not urge them to repent unless he intended to grant pardon to the penitents. Is there any indication of his having said, ‘Let them be re-baptized who have been baptized in the faith of the Nicolaitans?’ (Revelation 2:6) Or let hands be laid upon those of the people of Pergamum who at that time held the doctrine of Balaam? (Revelation 2:14) Nay, rather, ‘Repent therefore’, he says, ‘or else I come to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth’ (Revelation 1:16).

Theodoret, the 5th Century Bishop of Cyrus, linked¹⁵⁹ the 1st Century heretics with later heretics that caused considerable grief in the Church.

¹⁵⁷ Eusebius, Church History, IV, 7.

¹⁵⁸ Jerome, “Dialogue Against the Luciferians”, 23, Treatises, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 6.

¹⁵⁹ Theodoret, Letter to the Monks of Constantinople, 145.

“Simon, Menander, Cerdo, and Marcion absolutely deny the incarnation, and call the birth from a Virgin fable. Valentinus, Basilides, Bardesanes, and Harmonius and their following, accept the conception of the Virgin and the birth. But they deny that God the Word took anything from the Virgin, but made as it were a transit through her as through a conduit. He appeared to mankind in semblance only, and seeming to be a man, in like manner as He was seen by Abraham and certain others of the ancients. Arius and Eunomius on the contrary held that He assumed a body, but that the Godhead played the part of the soul, in order that they may attribute to it what was lowly in His words and deeds. Apollinarius asserted that He assumed a soul with the body, not the reasonable soul, but the soul, which is called animal. Their contention is that the Godhead took the part of the mind. He had learned the distinction of soul and of mind from the philosophers that are outside the Church while divine Scripture says that man consists of soul and body”.

Early Apostolic tradition mentions¹⁶⁰ some of the practices of these heretics that are referred to in the New Testament, such as rejecting marriage, abhorring some kinds of food, and indulging in gross uncleanness and fornication.

“When we went forth among the Gentiles to preach the word of life, then the devil sent after us false apostles to the corrupting of the word. They sent forth one Cleobulus, and joined him with Simon, and these became disciples to one Dositheus, whom they despised and put him down from the principality. Afterwards also others were the authors of absurd doctrines: Cerinthus, Marcus, Menander, Basilides, and Saturninus. Of these some own the doctrine of many gods, some only of three, but contrary to each other. And some reject marriage; and their doctrine is that it is not the appointment of God. Others abhor some kinds of food; some are impudent in uncleanness, such as those who are falsely called Nicolaitans”.

References to Simon’s Heresies in the New Testament

Tertullian, in commenting on 2nd Century heretics, mentioned¹⁶¹ that the Apostles in the 1st Century had already dealt with many of Simon’s heresies in writing the New Testament. Marcion, Apelles, Valentinus and Ebion had taken their lead from Simon and his followers, but most of their heresy was not new.

“I am adding a review of the doctrines themselves, which existed in the days of the Apostles, and were both exposed and denounced by the Apostles. They were then seedlings of the tares, which then were. Paul sets his mark on certain who denied and doubted the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12). The Sadducees also espoused this opinion (Matthew 22:23-32, Acts 23:7-9). A part of it, however, is maintained by Marcion and Apelles and Valentinus, and all other impugners of the resurrection”.

“Writing to the Galatians, he inveighs against such men who observed and defended circumcision and the Mosaic Law (Galatians 5:2). This was Ebion’s heresy”.

¹⁶⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, VI, ii, 8, Ante-Nicean Fathers, v. 7.

¹⁶¹ Tertullian, The Prescription Against Heretics, II, I, 33.

“Others who ‘forbid marrying’ he reproaches in his instructions to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Now, this is the teaching of Marcion and his follower Apelles”.

“The apostle directs a similar blow against those who said that ‘the resurrection was past already’ (2 Timothy 2:18). Such an opinion did the Valentinians assert of themselves. When again he mentions ‘endless genealogies’ (1 Timothy 1:4), one also recognizes Valentinus, in whose system a certain Aeon of a new name generates of his own grace Sense and Truth. And these in like manner produce of themselves Word and Life, while these again afterwards beget Man and the Church. From these primary eight¹⁶², ten other Aeons after them spring, and then the twelve others arise with their wonderful names, to complete the story of the thirty Aeons”.

“The same apostle, when disapproving of those who are ‘in bondage to elements’ (Galatians 4:9), points us to some dogma of Hermogenes, who introduces matter as having no beginning, and then compares it with God, who has no beginning. By thus making the mother of the elements a goddess, he has it in his power ‘to be in bondage’ to a being which he puts on a par with God”.

“John, however, in the Apocalypse is charged to chastise those ‘who eat things sacrificed to idols’, and ‘who commit fornication’ (Revelation 2:14). There is even now another sort of Nicolaitan. Theirs is called the Gaian heresy. But John, in his epistle, especially designates those as ‘Antichrists’ who ‘denied that Christ was come in the flesh’ (1 John 4:3), and who refused to think that Jesus was the Son of God. The first dogma Marcion maintained; the second, Ebion. The doctrine, however, of Simon’s sorcery, which inculcated the worship of angels (Colossians 2:18), was itself actually reckoned among idolatries and condemned by the Apostle Peter in Simon’s own person (Acts 8:20-23)”.

The Apostle John had to deal extensively with Cerinthus and Nicolas. Irenaeus stated¹⁶³ that John wrote his Gospel specifically to contradict what these heretics were saying, and that this is apparent in the words that John used to begin his Gospel.

“They allege that the Creator and the Father were not the same; and that the Son and the Christ were not the same¹⁶⁴. They say that He descending upon Jesus, the Son of the Creator, and flew back again into His Pleroma”. That is, Jesus was not God in Mary’s womb.

“John thus began his Gospel, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made. What was made was life in Him, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not’ (John 1:1-5). ‘All things’, he says, ‘were made by Him’. Therefore in ‘all things’ this creation of ours is included, for we cannot concede to these men that the words ‘all things’ are spoken in reference to those within their Pleroma”.

“John, the disciple of the Lord, preached this faith, and sought, by the proclamation of the Gospel, to remove that error which Cerinthus had

¹⁶² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, i, 1.

¹⁶³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, xi, 1.

¹⁶⁴ See also Ignatius, “To the Trallians”, 10-11, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 1.

disseminated among men, and a long time previously by those termed Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans are an offset of that “knowledge” (Greek: *gnosis*) falsely so called, that he might confound them, and persuade them that there is but one God, who made all things by His Word. They allege that the Creator and the Father were not the same; and that the Son and the Christ were not the same. They say that He descending upon Jesus, the Son of the Creator, and flew back again into His Pleroma”.

Jesus Warned the Twelve That Simon’s Heresies Were Coming

Prior to the Crucifixion in c. 30 AD, Jesus had warned the Twelve that these heretics would be coming and that they would show great signs promoting their evil. Christ’s warning was fulfilled within a couple years when Simon began promoting himself as the Christ. Simon, who was formerly a disciple of John the Baptist, ran into Deacon Philip (Acts 8:9-24) just after the death of Stephen in c. 31 AD. Jesus had warned:

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it” (Matthew 24:23-26).

False Apostles from Among the Seventy and from Paul’s Associates

Four of the original Seventy (Luke 10:1-20) turned traitor to follow the teachings of Simon. In addition, three of Paul’s fellow workers also did so. These are

- **Nicolas** of Antioch was one of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:5) and one of the original Seventy (Luke 10:1-20). When Simon came to Antioch, Nicolas began to follow his teachings, and the Apostle John later rebuked Nicolas very strongly (Revelation 2:14-15).
- **Demas** was a companion of Paul and Luke at the time that Paul was under house arrest in Rome (c. 62 AD), and was Paul’s fellow worker as Paul drafted his Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24). However, Demas began following the teachings of Simon shortly afterward, and within 5 years, Paul stated that Demas “had forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). Hippolytus stated that Demas became “a priest of idols”¹⁶⁵
- **Phygellus and Hermogenes**: Just before his death in c. 67 AD, Paul wrote that Phygellus and Hermogenes had turned away from him (2 Timothy 1:15). Hippolytus stated that these two of the Seventy began to follow Simon’s teachings, and were therefore deleted from the ranks of the Seventy¹⁶⁶
- **Alexander** was the son of Simon of Cyrene, who helped to carry Jesus’ Cross (Mark 15:21). Together with his father and brother Rufus, who was one of the Seventy, Alexander helped to found the Church in Antioch (Acts 11:20). By the mid 60’s AD, Alexander had become a follower of Simon, and Paul delivered him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh¹⁶⁷ on account of his

¹⁶⁵ Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

¹⁶⁶ Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

¹⁶⁷ Compare 1 Corinthians 5:4-5. The intent was the eventual salvation of the individual through a greater recognition of who it is that he’s in league with.

blasphemy (1 Timothy 1:20). A year or two later, Alexander was instrumental in affecting Paul's martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

- **Hymenaeus** was associated with Alexander and was also delivered over to Satan by Paul (1 Timothy 1:20). A year or two later, Hymenaeus was still busy teaching Simon's doctrine of the resurrection (2 Timothy 2:17-18).
- **Philetus** was an associate of Hymenaeus who also taught Simon's doctrine (2 Timothy 2:17-18).

Corinth: Numerous Problems in c. 55 AD

Denial of the Resurrection: Heretics had moved into Corinth, and Simon's heresies were part of the problems that Paul had to deal with at the Church in Corinth. Some at Corinth were teaching that there was no resurrection of the dead. For Corinth, especially, this was incredible since Peter, Apollos and Paul had all been to Corinth within the past three years teaching the opposite. Denial of the Resurrection of Christ, however, is exactly what Simon and his followers taught¹⁶⁸.

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not risen. And if Christ has not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ has not risen. And if Christ has not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Corinthians 15:12-18).

Sexual Immorality: Immorality was another problem at Corinth. Paul even criticized Corinth for being worse than the Gentiles in this aspect of the Christian life (1 Corinthians 5:1). Sexual immorality was a very prominent characteristic of the followers of Simon. For example, Cerinthus stated¹⁶⁹ that, after the resurrection, the kingdom of Christ will be set up on earth, and that the flesh dwelling in Jerusalem will again be subject to desires and pleasures. He taught that there is to be a period of a thousand years a for marriage festivals. Since he was himself devoted to the pleasures of the body, he dreamed that that kingdom would consist in those things, which he desired, namely, in the delights of the belly and of sexual passion. People would continue in eating and drinking and marrying, in a way in which he thought he could indulge his appetites with a better grace.

Simon had taught¹⁷⁰ that God, the Creator, is the author of evil, that is, of our wickedness and impieties. He asserted that God created a human nature that by the impulse of its necessity-constrained will, it can do nothing else can will nothing else, but sin. It is tossed to and fro, and set on fire by the furies of all sorts of vices; it is hurried away by unquenchable lust into the utmost extremes of baseness. Therefore why fight it; just accept it. Their catchwords were:

Foods are for the belly	The belly is for foods
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¹⁶⁸ Ignatius, “To the Trallians”, 10-11, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxiii, 4-5. See also Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, xxxii, 5.

Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix, 2.

Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

Eusebius, Church History, III, 26.

¹⁶⁹ Eusebius, Church History, III, 28.

¹⁷⁰ Vincent of Lerins, The Commonitory, XXIV, 62-63.

They saw no negative connections and thought both food and sex were necessary for the body (1 Corinthians 6:13). The Greek word *porneia* is a general term and includes adultery, fornication and incest.

Paul responded to this heresy in Corinth by saying that our bodies are members of Christ, not members of prostitutes. Our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, Who is in us, and we are not our own, for we were bought with a price. Therefore we need to glorify God in our body (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

False Apostles in Corinth: Paul described these heretics in Corinth in more detail. He called them “false apostles”, yet they were Hebrews. He compared them to Satan transforming himself into an angel of light; but their deeds were evil (2 Corinthians 11:14-15), and they will be judged accordingly. About them, Paul said, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3).

These heretics boasted of visions and revelations from God, which was a major tenet¹⁷¹ of Simon, Cerinthus and the Ebionites. So Paul mentioned one of his visions, where he was caught up to the Third Heaven or Paradise, which is the abode of God, where he heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Corinthians 12:4). In order that Paul might not become exalted in his own mind because of this, the Lord also gave him a “thorn in the flesh” to literally strike him with the fist. John Chrysostom wrote that this “thorn in the flesh” was Alexander the Coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:14), the son of Simon of Cyrene and brother of Rufus (Mark 15:21). Simon, Rufus and Alexander had been among the founders of the Church in Antioch (Acts 11:20), but Alexander had turned false and followed the teachings of Simon Magus when Simon came to Antioch. Paul described this as follows:

“For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted -- you may well put up with it!” (2 Corinthians 11:4)

“For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

“Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours *you*, if one takes *from you*, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face” (2 Corinthians 11:18-20).

“Are they Hebrews? So *am I*. Are they Israelites? So *am I*. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am I*. Are they ministers of Christ? — I speak as a fool — I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often” (2 Corinthians 11:22-23).

“It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether

¹⁷¹ Eusebius, Church History, III, 28.

in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

Galatia: Rejection of Christ’s Humanity and Legalism from the Ebionites

Paul had to deal with the Ebionites in the Churches in Galatia. Intruders had come in preaching a different gospel, and courting the Galatians in order that the Galatians might be zealous for them (Galatians 4:17). Paul said that the Galatians had been deceived, and that the heretics will reap what they sow (Galatians 6:7). Specifically, Paul said:

“There are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:7-8).

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:1-3)

There are three aspects of Simon’s heresies here: (1) Was Christ really crucified? (2) What is the role of the Mosaic Law for believers? (3) How does our human flesh play a part?

Simon taught¹⁷² that Jesus did not have human flesh and was not born of the Virgin Mary. It was not Jesus who suffered among the Jews, but Simon himself who was crucified in His stead. Simon strenuously stated that there is no resurrection of the flesh, because salvation has not been promised to bodies. Paul contrasted Simon’s heretical teaching by saying, “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?” (Galatians 3:1)

The Ebionites were one group of Simon’s followers that advocated¹⁷³ a return to the Mosaic Law and Judaism¹⁷⁴. Regarding their influence on the Churches in Galatia, Paul said, “But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain” (Galatians 4:8-11). These heretics were obviously causing a big stir in Galatia.

Paul contrasted this by saying that the Law was our pedagogue or instructor until Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:19-25). This can be illustrated by the example Paul used: the Patriarch Abraham. Old and New Testament writers alike used the life of Abraham as the model of a righteous life and a close walk with God. He was called “The friend

¹⁷² Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix, 2.

Theodoret, Letter to the Monks of Constantinople, 145.

¹⁷³ Eusebius, Church History, III, 28.

Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix, 3.

¹⁷⁴ See for example Galatians 5:10-12, 4:16-18.

of God” (2 Chronicles 20:7, James 2:21-24), and because of his faith, Israel inherited the Promised Land. The Church, with Christ as Head, has inherited the blessing of Abraham in the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14). Those who obey the Law as Abraham did are now sons of Abraham and heirs according to the promise and are blessed with the believing Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 9, 29). John Chrysostom added¹⁷⁵, “Paul showed that Faith was prior to the Law, as is evident from Abraham’s case, who was justified before the giving of the Law. ‘The Scripture’, says he, ‘fore-seeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand unto Abraham’ (Galatians 3:8-9). Before He gave the Law, He Himself had decreed that the heathen should be justified by Faith. For He said, referring to the words spoken to the Patriarch, ‘In you shall all nations be blessed’ (Genesis 12:4) at a time when Faith existed, not the Law. ‘So then they which are of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham’”.

In all this our human flesh plays a part. Our physical bodies are a Temple of the Holy Spirit and members of Christ, and we are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:15-19). Yet our human flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41) and we are easily tempted (James 1:12-14), but we are never tempted beyond what we are able to resist (1 Corinthians 10:13). If we can resist the temptation to abandon the direction of the Holy Spirit, but we choose to follow the temptation, the thoughts and intents of our hearts are revealed (Hebrews 4:12). Since Jesus Himself is a man, He can sympathize with our weakness as we are tempted (Hebrews 4:15). The point is that we might be led to the Throne of Grace and a closer relationship with God.

Simon, on the other hand, rejected the role of our human flesh. Instead, Simon and his followers taught a version of reincarnation, where the body is a prison for the soul. God, they said, created men with a human nature that can do nothing else, can will nothing else, but sin. Therefore it is hurried away by unquenchable lust into the utmost extremes of baseness¹⁷⁶. Whenever depravity has not been fully perpetrated early in life and the soul has fallen short in sin, it has to be recalled to existence¹⁷⁷ in another body until it “pays the utmost farthing,” thrust out from time to time into the prison of a body”. As a result, Simon’s followers worked hard at sinning more, in order that they might be freed from the prison of the body. Paul referred to this in several places: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” (Romans 6:15) “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:2) “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not!” (1 Corinthians 6:15) Heresies, such as Simon’s, are one of the works of the flesh that lust against the Spirit along with fornication, uncleanness and idolatry (Galatians 5:17).

All this may seem contradictory to us: Simon’s followers advocate a return to the Mosaic Law, but yet they work hard at sinning. As we saw earlier during the debate between Simon and the Apostle Peter, Simon’s theology was based on a web of lies, and was not exactly systematic. Paul described this to Timothy, “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13).

¹⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, Commentary On Galatians 3

¹⁷⁶ Vincent of Lerins, The Commonitory, XXIV, 62-63.

¹⁷⁷ Tertullian, A Treatise on the Soul, I, ix, 35.
Eusebius, Church History, III, 28.

Ephesus: a Warning in c. 61 AD

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians was written in the early 60's AD from the rented house where he was staying in Rome under house-arrest (Acts 28:16, 30-31) and was probably meant to be circulated among several Churches. The Epistle that we know as "Ephesians" may have been the one referred to as "the Epistle from Laodicea" (Colossians 4:16). In it Paul did not include specific details about heresies that he mentioned in other Epistles. Referring generally to the followers of Simon Magus, Paul wrote, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:6). And Paul described the general characteristics of the followers of Simon (Ephesians 5:3-5). And he referred to their general practices (Ephesians 5:12). But he didn't say that the Ephesians had run headlong into following Simon Magus.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians in very glowing terms concerning the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 1:15-2:10), perhaps more so than Paul's other Epistles. The Christians in Ephesus and vicinity were probably in pretty good shape, but a little warning about the problems that others were experiencing is always helpful.

Ephesus: Serious Matters in c. 64-67 AD

Paul had sent Timothy various places (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3) to counter the advances of the heretics. By the mid 60's AD, Paul had been released from house-arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30-31), and was in Macedonia. Timothy was in Ephesus when Paul wrote his first Epistle to him (1 Timothy 1:3). Timothy remained in the vicinity of Ephesus until his martyrdom in the mid 90's, after which the Apostle John returned from exile on Patmos and ordained Onesimus as Bishop of Ephesus in Timothy's place¹⁷⁸.

Paul's first instruction to Timothy in Ephesus was to correct some of the teachers in Ephesus, who were paying attention to the web of lies and the endless genealogies¹⁷⁹ (1 Timothy 1:4) of Simon and his followers. The teachers simply did not understand the difference between what the Apostles had taught and what the heretics were teaching (1 Timothy 1:7). The key point that Timothy needed to make was an emphasis on the Mosaic Law, which was not made for righteous people, but exposes the lawless and insubordinate very clearly (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

There were three things that Timothy needed to emphasize (1 Timothy 4:13):

1. The Reading, that is from the Scriptures and the memoirs of the Apostles¹⁸⁰.
2. The Exhortation, which was a homily or commentary appropriate for the time.
3. The Teaching or Doctrine, where the heretics cloaked their falsehoods in familiar sounding terms.

About these heretics, Paul stated, "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words. From which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wrangling of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*. From such withdraw yourself" (1 Timothy 4:3-5).

¹⁷⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, February 15.

¹⁷⁹ The genealogies had to do with the seemingly endless lineage of the gods promoted by the heretics.

¹⁸⁰ The canon of the New Testament was not established until c. 300 years later.

Some people, Paul said, will not endure good teaching because their heart is not right with God. Simon and his followers simply tell these people what they want to hear.

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers. They will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:3-5).

Some of these heretics that Timothy had to deal with had been pillars of the Church, like Hymenaeus, Philetus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:17, 4:14), where Paul had to deliver two of them over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. Others that Paul warned Timothy about were Phygellus, Hermogenes and Demas, three of the original Seventy, who had recently left Paul to follow the teachings of Simon Magus (2 Timothy 1:15, 4:10). These heretics taught that the Resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:18), which was a common element in Simon’s teaching¹⁸¹. They taught that by being baptized in the name of Simon, they would be immortal and not need a resurrection¹⁸². Paul warned Timothy to beware of these heretics when he encounters them.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer” (2 Timothy 2:15-18).

“But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom (plural) you have learned them” (2 Timothy 3:13-14).

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

Paul gave Timothy a standard by which he could recognize the heretics, and a summary of their character, where he compared them with the magicians who opposed Moses in Egypt¹⁸³. This agrees with descriptions of later writers¹⁸⁴, who described Simon and his followers. Jerome wrote¹⁸⁵ that it was common for Simon and the heretics that followed him to have bands of women that they would use for fornication and other purposes

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers,

¹⁸¹ Their concept was that our resurrection occurs as we come up out of the waters of baptism. As with many heresies, there was some insight into the importance and power of baptism, but with a twisted understanding.

¹⁸² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxiii, 4-5. See also Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, xxxii, 5. Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

¹⁸³ That is, Jannes and Jambres, who were able to duplicate Moses’ sign with his staff (Exodus 7:8-13) and the first two of the Ten Plagues on Egypt (Exodus 7:17-22, 8:1-7). With the Third Plague, they recognized the hand of God (Exodus 8:16-19), just as Simon recognized a power greater than his in the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:13, 18-21)

¹⁸⁴ Tertullian, “On Idolatry”, I, ii, 9, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.3.

Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 22, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

¹⁸⁵ Jerome, Letter to Ctesiphon, CXXXIII, 4.

disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith” (2 Timothy 3:1-8).

Philippi: Influence of the Nicolaitans and the Ebionites in c. 61 AD

Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians was also written in the early 60’s AD from the rented house where he was staying in Rome under house-arrest (Acts 28:16, 30-31). Paul had founded the Church in Philippi on his Second Missionary Journey in the early 50’s AD, and he had made two brief visits to Philippi (Acts 20:1, 6) on his Third Missionary Journey about 57-58 AD.

Prior to the founding of the Church in Philippi, Nicolas of Antioch, one of the first deacons (Acts 6:5), and one of the Seventy, had joined Simon’s heresy. Since Simon taught that only the spirit was resurrected (and that at baptism), it did not matter what one did with the body. The Nicolaitans therefore engaged in grossly immoral practices in keeping with the teachings of Simon¹⁸⁶, who said that to enter fully into their mysteries, they needed to practice all the worst kinds of wickedness in order to escape the cosmic powers¹⁸⁷.

The influence of the Nicolaitans and others in Philippi is evident from Paul’s Epistle, where Paul warned the Philippians to beware of the sensuality and depravity of the Nicolaitans and other followers of Simon. Paul said,

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame -- who set their mind on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19).

Prior to saying this, Paul had warned the Philippians to beware of those who follow the practices of the Nicolaitans, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit” (Philippians 3:2-3). The term “dog” was used in the Mosaic Law to refer to a Sodomite, where the Law stated:

“There shall be no temple prostitute of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the wages of a prostitute or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for any vowed offering, for both of these *are* an abomination to the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 23:17-18).

Paul contrasted the term¹⁸⁸ “mutilation” with the term “circumcision”, again referring to some of the practices of the Nicolaitans and Ebionites that some of the Church Fathers¹⁸⁹ thought

¹⁸⁶ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

¹⁸⁷ Eusebius, Church History, IV, 7.

¹⁸⁸ Jesus had said, “There are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake” (Matthew 19:12). Those who were born eunuchs are the people who are comfortable

were so gross that they were embarrassed to even mention their practices in detail. By saying that the Philippians were the “circumcision who worship God in the Spirit”, Paul was referring to the Mosaic Law. The Law had taught that true worshippers of God were circumcised in heart (Deuteronomy 10:14-17, 30:5-6), and that the flesh was just an outward sign of something greater within.

Paul went on to contrast himself to the Ebionites. While they advocated a return to the Mosaic Law, Paul stated that if anyone should advocate such, it should be him (Philippians 3:4-6). Even though he was a Pharisee along with his father (Acts 23:6), he found the excellence in Christ to be far greater than anything else.

Colossae: Worship of Angels and a Return to Judaism in c. 61 AD

Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians was also written in the early 60’s AD from the rented house where he was staying in Rome under house-arrest (Acts 28:16, 30-31). Paul had probably founded the Church in Colossae on his Third Missionary Journey in the late 50’s AD when he spent over two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10). Colossae is in the vicinity of Ephesus and Laodicea, and was also the home of Philemon, who was the Church’s largest financial supporter. Epaphras (Colossians 1:7-8) was a native of Colossae, a member of the original Seventy, and may have had a hand in founding the Church there.

Paul got word of what was happening in Colossae probably from Epaphras, who had journeyed to Rome to seek Paul’s help. Demetrius of Rostov stated¹⁹⁰ that Epaphras was later the Bishop of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. Epaphras brought word to Paul about the inroads that the heresies of Simon Magus had been making in Colossae.

Simon and his followers taught that Jesus was merely one of the angels sent by the Supreme God to create man and the universe. And therefore worship of angels was common among the heretic groups¹⁹¹. To address this, Paul stated:

“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (Colossians 2:18).

Prior to that, Paul had said, “This I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the

remaining celebrate. Those who were made so by men are the “mutilation”, also known in medieval times as the “Castrati”, or singers who were castrated as a boy to preserve a soprano voice. Those who made themselves eunuchs are the Twelve Apostles and others, who voluntarily gave up the pleasures of the flesh, along with other things of this world.

¹⁸⁹ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

Jerome, Letter to Ctesiphon, CXXXIII, 4.

Jerome, “Dialogue Against the Luciferians”, 23, Treatises, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 6.

Ignatius, “To the Trallians”, 10-11, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

Roberts and Donaldson, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, VI, ii, 8, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

¹⁹⁰ Demetri of Rostov, “The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints”, tr. Fr. Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2002

¹⁹¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxiii, 4-5.

Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix, 3.

Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

Tertullian, A Treatise on the Soul, I, ix, 23.

Eusebius, Church History, III, 26.

tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:4, 8). In contrast to the Ebionites, who advocated a return to circumcision and the Mosaic Law, Paul stated that the Colossians had a greater “circumcision”. “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (Colossians 2:11).

The Early Church spoke out¹⁹² very strongly against Simon and his followers regarding Who Jesus really is. Eusebius stated¹⁹³ that there were “a great many members of the Church who were fighting for the truth and defending apostolic and ecclesiastical doctrine with uncommon eloquence” in the face of these heresies. To address the heretics’ claim that Jesus was a lesser God and not equal to the Father, Paul wrote:

“Christ is the image of the invisible God and the firstborn over all creation; He created all things, is before all things and in Him all things consist. All the fullness of God dwells in Him” (Colossians 1:15-19).

Part of the teachings of the heretics was either an indifference to or a concentration on certain foods and behavior, such as taught by the Ebionites¹⁹⁴. Eating of meat offered to idols and the renunciation of the faith in times of persecution were matters of indifference to Simon¹⁹⁵, since, he said, salvation has not been promised to *bodies*. Since bodies didn’t matter, some, like the Nicolaitans, were grossly immoral¹⁹⁶. On the other hand, others of these heretics¹⁹⁷ abhorred certain kinds of food. Timothy had to address a similar problem in Ephesus a few years later (1 Timothy 4:3). Paul addressed the Colossians regarding the ascetic, food-abhorring group of heretics:

“Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths¹⁹⁸, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations -- ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle’, which all concern things which perish with the using -- according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians 2:16-17, 20-23).

As Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians in the early 60’s AD, probably during the time when he was under house-arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30-31), Demas, who was one of the Seventy, was still working with Paul (Colossians 4:14). A few years later, after Paul had been released and arrested again, Demas had left the Faith to follow Simon Magus¹⁹⁹, and was now in Thessalonica. Paul stated that Demas “has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10).

¹⁹² Ignatius, “To the Philadelphians”, 6, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxiii, 4-5. See also Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, xxxii, 5.

¹⁹³ Eusebius, Church History, IV, 7.

¹⁹⁴ Eusebius, Church History, III, 28.

¹⁹⁵ Eusebius, Church History, IV, 7.

¹⁹⁶ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1

¹⁹⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, VI, ii, 8, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

¹⁹⁸ These were some of the major observances of 1st Century Judaism.

¹⁹⁹ Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

Thessalonica: Early Heretical Developments in c. 51 AD

The two Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians were among the first of Paul's Epistles and were written during the eighteen months that Paul was in Corinth (Acts 18:11). Thus these Epistles were written in the middle of Paul's Second Missionary Journey in the early 50's AD. Paul had just founded the Church in Thessalonica a few months earlier, but he had to be hustled out of town by night to avoid a riot (Acts 17:1-10). Paul had already sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, and Timothy had returned to Paul in Corinth (1 Thessalonians 3:2, 6). Timothy, at this time, had been numbered with the Seventy to replace others, such as Nicholas of Antioch, who had apostatized.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that his methods were different from those of the heretics. "For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness -- God *is* witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ" (1 Thessalonians 2:5).

Paul also warned the Thessalonians that they might not get sucked into the heresy being circulated. He reminded them of the verbal instructions that he gave them regarding holiness, and contrasted this with what the heretics were saying in an attempt to defraud them. Since Paul referred to defrauding one's brother, we know that he is speaking of things that are occurring within the Church.

"For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification. That you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God. That no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 4:2-8).

A few months later, when Paul wrote his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, there was a heresy circulating in Thessalonica concerning the Second Coming of Christ. This should not be surprising among the heresies associated with Simon and his followers, since Simon even tried to stage an illusion of his return to his father in heaven²⁰⁰. Paul warned the Thessalonians not to let anyone deceive them. Prior to the Second Coming of Christ is the coming of the "antichrist", the man of sin and the son of perdition, who exalts himself as God. There is a mystery of lawlessness already at work, and there will be a great falling away from the Faith prior to the Second Coming of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7).

"The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11).

So the natural question to ask in Thessalonica is just who are these heretics? Are they really Apostles, or are they just the evil precursors to the Second Coming of Christ.

²⁰⁰ See the discussion starting on page 36.

Island of Crete: Subversion of the Ebionites in c. 64 AD

Paul and Titus had visited Crete in c. 63 AD, and Paul left Titus as Bishop there (Titus 1:5). Writing to Titus shortly thereafter, Paul warned him to beware of the followers of Simon, who were sent by Satan to turn peoples' ears away from the Truth²⁰¹. Paul said that these followers of Simon were part of what was loosely called "the circumcision", implying that they advocated a return to the Mosaic Law.

"For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans *are* always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons'. This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:10-16).

Toward the end of his Epistle to Titus, Paul mentioned some things to do and some things not to do. This following Reading is used today as the Epistle Reading for remembering what the Fathers of the Church have done at the various Ecumenical Church Councils. By concentrating on good works as a demonstration of their Faith, the Church Fathers also demonstrated that they were NOT of the same mold as the heretics. By avoiding disputes, genealogies, etc., which had to do with the seemingly endless lineage of the gods promoted by the heretics, the Fathers of the Church concentrated on what the Church really needed to learn.

"This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned. When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. And let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. All who *are* with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace *be* with you all. Amen" (Titus 3:8-15).

The Apostle John Referred to These Heretics as "Antichrists"

The Apostle John wrote in the late 1st Century, where most people feel that his writings date from the early to the mid-90's. His viewpoint is different from that of the Apostle Paul, because the Apostle John wrote after the heresies had 30 years longer to develop.

²⁰¹ Hippolytus, The Refutation of All Heresies, VII, 20.

Ignatius, "To the Trallians", 10-11, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, xxxi, 2.

The Apostle John referred to these heretics as “antichrists”, where he defined “antichrist” as the spirit that denies the Father and the Son and denies that Jesus has come in the flesh (1 John 2:22, 4:3; 2 John 1:7). These antichrists, John said, “went out from us, and they were not of us” (1 John 2:19), indicating that they were at one time part of the Church. Paul had also warned the Ephesian elders about heretics rising up in their midst (Acts 20:29-30). John’s comments include:

“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:18-23).

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits²⁰², whether they are of God. Because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already, in the world” (1 John 4:1-3).

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 1:7-11).

John Warned Specifically About the Nicolaitans

Nicolas, one of the first deacons (Acts 6:5), and one of the Seventy, had joined Simon’s heresy. Since he taught that only the spirit was resurrected (and that at baptism), it did not matter what one did with the body. Nicolas’ followers therefore engaged in grossly immoral practices in keeping with the teachings of Simon²⁰³, who said that to enter fully into their mysteries, they needed to practice all the worst kinds of wickedness in order to escape the cosmic powers²⁰⁴. Because of the grossness of his practices, early writers²⁰⁵ were too embarrassed to even write down the details of what Nicolas and his followers did.

²⁰² The Twelve drafted a “Test” prior to leaving Jerusalem for their various missionary journeys. The “Test” is called the Apostles’ Creed and is a common statement of the Faith. They realized that they may not see each other for the rest of their lives, and they wanted a metric that their followers could use to discern falsehood from the Truth. This Creed was memorized at baptism, and was not even written down until the 4th Century. For details, see Rufinus, Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed, 2.

²⁰³ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

²⁰⁴ Eusebius, Church History, IV, 7.

²⁰⁵ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

Eusebius gave a good description²⁰⁶ regarding how Nicolas came to be this way. Nicolas tried to imitate the holiness of the Apostles, where they gave up the things of this world for the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:29). Since the Apostles had given up the pleasures of the flesh in their relationship with their wives (those Apostles that were married), Nicolas did this also. But whereas the Apostles traveled with their wives, living as brother and sister²⁰⁷, Nicolas gave blanket permission to anyone who wished to marry his wife. Nicolas' followers took his words literally and practiced open fornication with her (Revelation 2:6, 15), and Nicolas was branded a heretic because he didn't correct them. Thus he sought to be perfected in the flesh instead of setting his mind on the Spirit (Galatians 3:3, 4:9).

The effect of Nicolas doing this was the same as Balaam's counsel to the king of Moab, and the Apostle John criticized Nicolas very strongly for doing this. Balaam had been hired by Moab to get God to curse Israel, but he couldn't curse what the Lord had blessed (Numbers 23-25). Therefore he taught Moab to entice Israel into fornication using young Moabite prostitutes, telling them that by doing so, Israel would become defiled and the Lord would then curse Israel. John wrote:

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate’” (Revelation 2:1, 6).

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas²⁰⁸ was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate’” (Revelation 2:12-15).

The Spread of Heresy in the 1st Century as Seen from Jude's Epistle

Jude wrote his Epistle from Persia, where he was working with Simon the Zealot. Since Peter quotes parts of Jude's Epistle²⁰⁹, and Peter was martyred in c. 67 AD, we can assume that Jude wrote his Epistle in the early 60's AD.

Jude refers to the Faith “which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Christianity had been well defined at this time, but there was still a Jewish aspect to it. The Temple in Jerusalem was still standing, and the Jewish revolt against Rome, which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem, hadn't occurred yet. But there were many heretics that had come forward, including seven from among the Apostles: Nicolas of Antioch, Demas, Phygellus, Hermogenes, Alexander, Hymenaeus and Philetus.

²⁰⁶ Eusebius, *Church History*, III, 29.

²⁰⁷ Paul referred to the other Apostles, including Peter and the brothers of the Lord (Jude and Joseph Barsabas) as traveling with “a sister, a wife” (1 Corinthians 9:5).

²⁰⁸ [Antipas was the Bishop of Pergamos and was burned to death in c. 92 AD. OSB; others???](#)

²⁰⁹ Compare 2 Peter 2:1-18 with Jude 1:3-18. It is not word-for-word, by very similar.

These heretics were very influential, and the Apostles had to take strong measures to try to control their viciousness. These seven early heretics were not just ignorant bystanders, but were bona fide bad guys who knew better and rebelled against God.

The common characteristic of these heretics is that they promoted teachings that were different from that which “was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Jude said that men like these had crept into the Persian Churches unnoticed, and, denying Christ, turned the grace of God into lewdness (Jude 1:4). Because they knowingly rebelled against Apostolic authority (Jude 1:8), Jude found it necessary to distinguish these heretics from the body of believers.

By way of contrast, Jude referred to the way the Archangel Michael spoke to the devil regarding the body of Moses. Jude here referred²¹⁰ to the pseudepigraphal book, “The Assumption of Moses” (compare Deuteronomy 34:5-6, Zechariah 3:1-2), which gives the background regarding Moses’ appearance at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:4-5). Michael treated the devil with dignity, even though he deserved none.

The result of the presence of the heretics in the Persian Churches was what Jude called “hidden reefs in your love feasts” (Jude 1:12). The “Love Feasts” of the Early Church were meals that were served in conjunction with the Eucharist. It was at these meals that some of the Corinthians became drunk at the serving of the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:21). Paul said that because the Corinthians did not discern the Lord’s body and respect the Lord’s Presence, some of them are weak and sick, and many had died (1 Corinthians 11:29-30).

Jude’s solution to the problem with the heretics is as follows: “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh” (Jude 1:20-23). The “garment” is the human body with which we are clothed, as with a tent (2 Corinthians 5:1-4, Zechariah 3:4-6).

Jude gave a series of descriptive terms for the Persian heretics that have applied to other heretics in the Church since then:

- **They have gone in the way of Cain** (Jude 1:11). This refers to jealousy and hatred over ecclesiastical honor given to another, which is equivalent to murder (Matthew 5:21-22), just as Cain killed his brother, Abel, because the Lord accepted Abel’s offering and not his (Genesis 4:3-8).
- **They have run greedily in the error of Balaam** (Jude 1:11). Balak, King of Moab, hired Balaam to curse Israel (Numbers 22:2-6), but Balaam couldn’t curse what the Lord had blessed (Numbers 24:10-14). So Balaam taught Balak to send the Moabite cult prostitutes into Israel to draw the men of Israel away from God (Revelation 2:14, Numbers 25:1-9, 31:12-17). If the Israeli men did this, Balaam knew that the Lord would curse Israel independent of Moab (Deuteronomy 28:15-19). Similarly the heretics taught that only spiritual things mattered, and fleshly things, like fornication, were of no significance to the Christian life. The heretics had condoned practices similar to that of

²¹⁰ Because Jude referred to the pseudepigraphal book, Enoch, there was a hesitancy among some people to accept the Book of Jude into the Canon of the New Testament. As a result, Jude was one of the last books added to the Canon.

the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah, who had given themselves over to immorality (Jude 1:7), like animals (Jude 1:10, Genesis 19:1-5).

- **They have perished in the rebellion of Korah** (Jude 1:5, 11). Korah, Dathan and Abiram, rebelled against Moses and against God during the Exodus, and perished when the earth opened up and swallowed some of them and when fire came out from the Lord to consume the others (Numbers 16:1-35). Similarly the heretics rebelled against the Apostles and their teaching (Jude 1:3, 8).
- **They are hidden reefs on your Love Feasts**²¹¹ (Jude 1:12). A reef is a sharp underwater obstacle that can tear apart a ship's hull. The reef represents self-centeredness and self-serving by the heretics at an occasion specifically designed to show love to others. Paul criticized the Corinthians for doing the same thing (1 Corinthians 11:20-22).
- **They are clouds without water** (Jude 1:12). Clouds carrying water speak of the Holy Spirit in the Church (Isaiah 55:9-11). Devoid of the Holy Spirit, the heretics are carried about by the winds, which represent the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2).
- **They are late autumn trees without fruit** (Jude 1:12). One expects fruit on trees in late autumn. They are twice dead in that they turned their back on Christ after they were baptized, and then again when they were "pulled up by the roots" (Matthew 18:15-20) and excommunicated by the Apostles for rebellion against Apostolic teaching.
- **They are raging waves of the sea**, foaming up their own shame. This is a paraphrase of Isaiah, "But the wicked *are* like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt" (Isaiah 57:20). Paul also warned the Philippians to beware of the followers of Simon Magus. "For many walk, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is* their belly, and whose glory *is* in their shame" (Philippians 3:18-19). Prior to saying this, Paul had warned the Philippians to beware of the followers of the Nicolaitans, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!" (Philippians 3:2-3), where the term "dog" was used in the Mosaic Law to refer to a Sodomite (Deuteronomy 23:17-18).
- **They are wandering stars** (Jude 1:13). The Book of Enoch²¹² uses the term "wandering stars" to refer to fallen angels²¹³. These angels are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness until Judgment Day (Jude 1:6, 13), and it is for these fallen angels that the everlasting fire has been prepared (Matthew 25:41). Clement of Alexandria referred²¹⁴ to these angels as "apostate" and unable to be converted. The "darkness" is the dark air near the earth, and the "chains" are the loss of honor in which they had stood.

²¹¹ From Philip Schaff, ed., "Notes on Canon 11 of the Council of Gangra", The First Ecumenical Council, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 14, "There are few subjects upon which there has been more difference of opinion than upon the history and significance of the Agape or Love-feasts of the Early Church. All agree that these feasts are referred to by Jude in his Epistle. There is also much discussion as to the order in which the Agapae and the celebrations of the Holy Sacrament were related, some holding that the love-feast preceded others that it followed the Divine Mysteries. There seems no doubt that in early times the two became separated, the Holy Sacrament being celebrated in the morning and the Agapae in the evening. All agree that these feasts were at first copies of the religious feasts common to the Jews and to the heathen world, and that soon abuses of one sort or another came in, so that they fell into ill repute and were finally prohibited at the Council in Trullo".

²¹² James Charlesworth, "1 Enoch", The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Doubleday, New York, 1983.

²¹³ See for example 1 Enoch 21:3

²¹⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, "Comments on the Epistle of Jude", Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, 2, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 2.

- **They are grumblers, complainers**, walking according to their own lusts (Jude 1:16). These are symptoms of a deeper problem; namely a lack of love and humility.

Jerome mentioned²¹⁵ that when Jude spoke of Egypt, Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 1:5-7), naming them together, it is not these spots, but the present world, that is meant.

Jude's warnings in his Epistle became prophecies regarding those Christians that followed in the next century, and Peter and Paul issued similar warnings. Following is a short introduction²¹⁶, by Roberts and Donaldson to the history of Irenaeus [122-202 AD]. In this history we can see how the heresies started by Simon Magus, that the Apostles were fighting in the 1st Century, had developed further to cause a great deal of grief to the Church. Irenaeus devoted his life to fighting and classifying these heresies in order that his successors might benefit:

“The history of Irenaeus (122-202 AD) introduces us to the Church in her Western outposts. We reach the banks of the Rhone, where for nearly a century Christian missions have flourished. Between Marseilles and Smyrna there seems to have been a brisk trade, and Polycarp had sent Pothinus into Celtic Gaul at an early date as its evangelist. He had fixed his see at Lyons, when Irenaeus joined him as a presbyter, having been his fellow-pupil under Polycarp. There, under the “good Aurelius,” as he is miscalled (A.D. 177), arose the terrible persecution which made ‘the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne’ so memorable. It was during this persecution that Irenaeus was sent to Rome with letters of remonstrance against the rising pestilence of heresy; and he was probably the author of the account of the sufferings of the martyrs, which is appended to their testimony²¹⁷. But he had the mortification of finding the Montanist heresy patronized by Eleutherus the Bishop of Rome; and there he met an old friend from the school of Polycarp, who had embraced the Valentinian heresy. We cannot doubt that to this visit we owe the lifelong struggle of Irenaeus against the heresies that now came in, like locusts, to devour the harvests of the Gospel”.

“But let it be noted here, that, so far from being ‘the mother and mistress’ of even the Western Churches, Rome herself is a mission of the Greeks; Southern Gaul is evangelized from Asia Minor, and Lyons checks the heretical tendencies of the Bishop of Rome. Ante-Nicene Christianity, and indeed the Church herself, appears in Greek costume, which lasts through the synodical period; and Latin Christianity, when it begins to appear, is African, and not Roman. It is strange that those who have recorded this great historical fact have so little perceived its bearings upon Roman pretensions in the Middle Ages and modern times”.

“Returning to Lyons, Irenaeus found that the venerable Pothinus had closed his holy career by a martyr's death; and naturally Irenaeus became his successor. When the emissaries of heresy followed him, and began to disseminate their licentious practices and foolish doctrines by the aid of “silly women,” the great work of his life began. He condescended to study these diseases of the human mind like a wise physician; and, sickening as was the process of classifying and describing them, he made this also his laborious task, that he might enable others to withstand and to overcome them. The works he has left us

²¹⁵ Jerome, Letters, XLVI, 7

²¹⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, “Introductory Note”, Irenaeus Against Heresies, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

²¹⁷ See also Eusebius, Church History, V, 15-28.

are monuments of his fidelity to Christ, and to the charges of the Apostles Paul, Peter, and Jude, whose solemn warnings now proved to be prophecies. No marvel that the great apostle, ‘night and day with tears’ (Acts 20:31), had forewarned the churches of ‘the grievous wolves’ (Acts 20:29) which were to make havoc of the fold”.

“If it shocks the young student of the virgin years of Christianity to find such a state of things, let him reflect that it was all foretold by Christ himself, and demonstrates the malice and power of the adversary. ‘An enemy has done this’ (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43), said the Master. The spirit that was then working ‘in the children of disobedience’ (Ephesians 2:2), now manifested itself. The awful visions of the Apocalypse began to be realized. It was now evident in what sense ‘the Prince of Peace’ had pronounced His mission, ‘not peace, but a sword’ (Matthew 10:34-39). In short, it became a conspicuous fact, that the Church here on earth is ‘militant’; while, at the same time, there was seen to be a profound philosophy in the Apostolic comment, ‘There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be manifest’ (1 Corinthians 11:19). In the divine economy of Providence it was permitted that every form of heresy, which was ever to infest the Church should now exhibit its essential principle, and attract the censures of the faithful. Thus testimony to primitive truth was secured and recorded: the language of catholic orthodoxy was developed and defined, and landmarks of faith were set up for perpetual memorial to all generations. It is a striking example of this divine economy, that the see of Rome was allowed to exhibit its fallibility very conspicuously at this time, and not only to receive the rebukes of Irenaeus, but to accept them as wholesome and necessary; so that the heresy of Eleutherus, and the spirit of Diotrephes in Victor, have enabled reformers ever since, and even in the darkest days of pontifical despotism, to testify against the manifold errors patronized by Rome. Hilary and other Gallicans have been strengthened by the example of Irenaeus, and by his faithful words of reproof and exhortation, to resist Rome, even down to our own times”.

Irenaeus noted²¹⁸ that the priests of these heresies “both lead profligate lives and practice magical arts, each one to the extent of his ability. They use exorcisms and incantations, love-potions and charms, as well as those beings who are called dream-senders”. The Apostle Jude, writing to the Churches in Persia, came breathing out smoke against these heretics and stated:

“Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’ But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah”.

“These are spots in your love feasts²¹⁹, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by

²¹⁸ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxiii, 4.

²¹⁹ The Love Feast was a meal served either before or after the Eucharist or Lord’s Table. Since the Eucharist as instituted by the Lord (Mark 14:17-25) was accompanied by a meal, the Apostles continued the tradition. In doing so, they encountered problems, and Paul criticized the Corinthians for self-centeredness and

the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever ‘ (Jude 1:8-13).

Like Cain, who felt that he was not his brother’s keeper (Genesis 4:9), the heretics did not have love for their brethren. John stated that anyone who does not love his brother abides in death (1 John 3:14-16). Like Balaam, for whom fornication was just part of life, the heretics did not seek holiness. Like Korah, who rebelled against Moses in the wilderness (Numbers 16:1-35), the heretics rebelled against the authority within the Church.

Peter, in his Epistle to the Jewish Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, wrote that they should not “use their liberty as a cloak for wickedness” (1 Peter 2:16). This is exactly what the Apostle Jude was facing in the Persian Churches. Jude wrote to the Persian Churches:

“For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4).

Thus Peter and Jude experienced similar problems with the followers of Simon Magus. Creeping in unnoticed and using their liberty as a cloak for wickedness were the characteristics of Simon’s life style. Peter said,

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).

The followers of Simon Magus were not ignorant of the teachings of the Church on the Grace of God. As former Apostolic workers, they knew about Grace, but twisted it for their own pleasure. They said that they were under grace, and therefore they can sin in an unlimited fashion. Pretending to be under Grace, they were really under neither Law nor Grace. John Cassian explained²²⁰ the relationship between Law and Grace in that both are directed toward godliness.

“The man living under grace is not oppressed by the dominion of sin, for to be under grace is to do those things which grace commands. But whoever will not submit himself to the complete requirements of evangelical perfection, must not remain ignorant that, although he seems to be baptized, yet he is not under grace, but is still shackled by the chains of the law, and weighed down by the burden of sin. For it is the aim of Him, who by the grace of adoption accepts all those, who have received Him, not to destroy but to build upon, not to abolish but to fulfill the Mosaic requirements. But some, knowing nothing about this, and disregarding the counsels and exhortations of Christ, are so emancipated by the carelessness of a freedom too hastily assumed, that they not only fail to carry out the commands of Christ as if they were too hard, but actually scorn as antiquated, the commands given to them as beginners and children by the Law of Moses. They say, in this dangerous freedom of theirs, that which the Apostle execrates:

drunkenness at these love feasts (1 Corinthians 11:21). The Love Feast became such a problem that the Church did away with them by the end of the 1st Century.

²²⁰ John Cassian, Conferences, III, xxi, 34.

‘We have sinned, because we are not under the Law but under grace’” (Romans 6:15).

“Some, then, are neither under grace, because they have never climbed the heights of the Lord’s teaching, nor under the Law, because they have not accepted even those small commands of the Law. These men, ground down beneath a twofold rule of sin, fancy that they have received the grace of Christ, simply and solely for this. By this dangerous liberty of theirs they may make themselves none of His. They fall into that state, which the Apostle Peter warns us to avoid, saying, ‘Act as free, and not having your liberty as a cloak of wickedness’ (1 Peter 2:16). The blessed Apostle Paul also says, ‘For you, brethren, were called to liberty’, i.e., that you might be free from the dominion of sin, ‘only use not your liberty for an occasion of the flesh’ (Galatians 5:13). That is, do not believe that the doing away with the commands of the Law is a license to sin. But this liberty, the Apostle Paul teaches us, is nowhere but where the Lord is dwelling, for he says, ‘The Lord is the Spirit, but where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty’ (2 Corinthians 3:17). This is very clearly revealed even without anyone’s explanation to all those who have acquired practical training. For they will need no effort to understand in discussion what they have already learned by practice”.

The Jerusalem Church Warned the Gentiles About the Heretics

From the outcome of the First Church Council in Jerusalem c. 48 AD, we get a hint at some of the heresies going around. The issue at the Council was whether the Gentiles needed to be circumcised. Some apostate Jews (perhaps Ebionites) had “gone out from us²²¹ and troubled the Gentiles” speaking as if they had the authority from Bishop James in Jerusalem. An underlying problem was that some of the apostate Jews sided with Simon and his followers against the Christians. Therefore the Apostles, elders and brethren in Jerusalem wrote to the Gentiles three things that were necessary for holiness:

- Abstain from things offered to idols to focus on God (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:18-21).
- Abstain from drinking blood to respect the blood of the Lord’s Table (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26-32).
- Abstain from sexual immorality to respect the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

The text of the letter reads:

“Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas²²², and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this *letter* by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us²²³ have troubled

²²¹ The term “went out from us” is used several times to refer to heretics leaving the Church. E.g. 1 John 2:19, Galatians 1:7.

²²² Barsabas was also called Justus, Judas and Joseph (Acts 1:23, 15:22), and was a member of the original Seventy. He was one of Jesus’ stepbrothers along with James, the Bishop of Jerusalem and Jude, who was numbered with the Twelve.

²²³ This implies a connection with the heretic Ebionite groups.

you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "*You must* be circumcised and keep the Law" -- to whom we gave no *such* commandment -- it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well" (Acts 15:22-29).

The Evangelist Luke Begins "Writing" Icons

The Evangelist Luke, author of one of the four Gospels, is also known to the Church as the Father of Iconography. Icons in the Church are two-dimensional portrayals of individuals and events having to do with the Kingdom of God. Traditionally the icons portray an otherworldly sense as if one were looking through a window into heaven. As such, they are not "painted", they are "written", since there is a theological message to each icon. At least 70 icons are attributed to the Evangelist Luke, and some still exist today. Most of the Evangelist Luke's icons portray the Virgin Mary holding her young Son.

One might ask why the Evangelist Luke would "write" this same icon over and over again. Each one of his icons is a little different, but they all portray the same subject: the Virgin and her Son. When one considers what was happening in the 1st Century with the spread of Simon's heresies, which deny the humanity of Christ, these icons come as an answer to the 1st Century heretics: Here is His mother; here is her Son. How can anyone say that He is not a man? Are they completely daft? Today we often say that a picture is worth a thousand words. Such was also the case in the 1st Century, and the Evangelist Luke's icons came to be a central feature in the worship of the Church.

At the front of all Orthodox Churches today is an icon of Christ. To His right is an icon similar to the icons written by the Evangelist Luke, showing the Virgin holding her Son. And to His left is an icon depicting John the Baptist, also called "The Forerunner", who stands as a witness to the Master. The style of icons today is not necessarily the same as that used by the Evangelist Luke, but the intent is the same: a testimony that Christ is fully God, while at the same time, fully man.

The Virgin Mary Speaks Against the Heretics

In the early 50's, toward the end of the Virgin Mary's life, Mary Magdalene returned to Jerusalem from her evangelism in Rome. Since she had been very close to the Virgin Mary during Jesus' three-year ministry, she stayed with the Apostle John for several years until the Virgin Mary's death. The Virgin Mary, at this time, was in her early 70's and Mary Magdalene was in her late 60's.

Earlier in the Virgin Mary's life, it had been possible for her to live a quiet life of fasting and prayer without a great deal of interruption. But during the last few years of her life, men and women journeyed from all parts of the world to visit her. One such visitor was Dionysius the Aeropagite and Damaris, his wife (Acts 17:34), shortly after their conversion. He had been a member of the Greek Supreme Court (the Aeropagus) in Athens and was converted by the Apostle Paul on Paul's Second Missionary Journey in about 51 AD. According to tradition²²⁴, Dionysius was added to the ranks of the Seventy to replace others who had fallen into Simon's heresy. Dionysius was very impressed by the saintly grace of both Mary and John²²⁵.

Mary was accustomed to taking many of the visitors to Jerusalem around the city, showing them the places where her Son was born, where He had walked and preached, where He was scourged and carried His cross, and where He was crucified and buried. The effect of this was a substantial undermining of Simon's heresies that were going around in the 1st Century. These heresies taught that while Jesus was divine, He was not really a man. Yet here was His mother demonstrating all the very human events in His life. From Mary's custom, which included kneeling and burning incense at the various sites, it became customary in later centuries to make pilgrimages to the holy sites and to offer up prayers there.

Word of Mary's activities were reported to the chief priests and scribes, and they sought an opportunity to seize her and kill her. Placing guards at the various sites, they gave them orders that no Christians may approach; if the Virgin Mary were to approach, she was to be slain. This did not deter Mary; she came anyway and prayed that the guards would not notice. Somehow, their recognition was withheld and she continued unmolested.

They also tried to slander the Virgin Mary by saying that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier and that Mary was a loose woman. This was obviously a lie since everyone in Nazareth knew her; family life in Nazareth was such that everyone knew everyone else's family matters.

In addition, this lie neglected to account for Jesus' respect from everyone and how He was often asked to read the Scriptures and to preach in the synagogues (Luke 4:16, Matthew 12:9-10). From the Mosaic Law, "No one of illegitimate birth shall enter the assembly of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 23:2). The Scribes and Pharisees contradicted themselves; the testimony of their fathers in allowing Jesus to do this said that they were now lying.

²²⁴ Demetrius of Rostov, "The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints", January 4, tr. By Fr. Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2002.

Prologue of Ochrid
²²⁵ Holy Apostles Convent, The Life of the Virgin Mary, pp 440-445

Dealing with Heretics: The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

About a year and a half before the Crucifixion, Jesus gave a parable to His disciples about wheat and tares. The tares have been interpreted as representing the heretics that rise up within the Church, and this parable was given as instruction as to how to deal with them.

To understand this parable, one has to understand the methods used to harvest wheat in the 1st Century. Gower gives a good description²²⁶ of these methods. After the grain was cut off near the top with a sickle, it was bundled together and carried to the place of threshing. The remainder of the stalks was left in the ground for the grazing of sheep.

At the threshing floor, the grain was first separated from the stalks by driving oxen over a pile of wheat that was about 18 inches high. On the more efficient threshing floors, the oxen pulled a heavy sledge made of wood, and having pieces of flint protruding beneath. The heavy sledge pressed on the kernels of wheat and separated the wheat from the stalk. The heavier grain fell through the straw to the hard ground below, and the flints chopped up the straw into animal fodder.

After threshing came the winnowing to separate the grain from the straw. As the evening breezes picked up, the straw was lifted into the air with a pitchfork and carried off the threshing floor by the wind. When the remainder was too small to be picked up by the pitchfork (called a winnowing fork), the remainder was picked up with a shovel.

To separate the grain from loose fragments on the threshing floor, the grain had to be purified by sifting. Everything went through large sieves that allowed the grain to pass through, but left most of the rubbish behind. At this time, tares were also separated from the wheat. The tares were a species of dandelion that looks identical to the wheat until the grain ripens, when it becomes black instead of yellow. If eaten, the tare grains are bitter and cause dizziness and sickness. After separation, the good grain was stored in large earthenware receptacles or in brick silos.

What to Do About the Heretics

With the above as a backdrop, Jesus gave the parable of the wheat and the tares to His disciples. He had just finished explaining the Parable of the Sower to them, where Cyril of Alexandria explained that the wayside represents the hard-hearted, the rocky soil represents people who are nominal toward Christianity, and the thorns represent the rich.

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Matthew 13:24-30).

²²⁶ Ralph Gower, The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1998, pp. 95-101.

In this parable, we note that the tares are first gathered, bundled and burned prior to threshing. This would make sense if there were a great deal of tares present. It would be easier to separate them as stalks, 50 or so grains at a time, than to separate them as individual grains once they had been separated from the stalk.

John Chrysostom interprets²²⁷ the parable as follows: The Parable of the Sower represents people who heard the Word where they were in the world, but they threw away the seed and refused to receive Him. But the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares represents the societies of the heretics, where Jesus foretold this to His disciples in order that it might not disturb them after Pentecost.

The enemy, the devil, sowed the tares “while men slept”. This refers to the rulers or hierarchs within the Church who are entrusted with the keeping of the field. “And He signifies also that the error comes after the truth, which the actual event testifies. For so after the prophets, were the false prophets; and after the apostles, the false apostles; and after Christ, Antichrist. For unless the devil sees what to imitate, or against whom to plot, he neither attempts, nor knows how. Not having been able to carry away what had taken root, nor to choke, nor to scorch it up, as in the Parable of the Sower, he conspires against it by another craft. And what a difference between them that sleep, and them that resemble the wayside! In the latter case he immediately caught it away before it could even to take root; but here more of his craft was needed. In these things Christ instructs us to be always wakeful. For as in those instances “the wayside,” and “the rock,” and “the thorns,” so here sleeping hierarchs can be our ruin”.

“Something like this took place even at the beginning. Many of the prelates brought into the churches wicked men, disguised heresiarchs, and gave great facility to laying that kind of snare. For the devil needs not even to take any trouble, when he had once planted them among us. Wherefore Paul said, ‘Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong’ (1 Corinthians 16:13). Right after the land has been tilled, then this enemy sows, as the heretics also do, who for no other cause than vainglory inject their proper venom. At the beginning they disguise themselves; but when they have gained much confidence, and someone imparts to them the teaching of the word, then they pour out their poison”.

We note that pulling up a plant by the roots means death to the plant. In this vein, Chrysostom continues, “And mark also the affection of the servants. How they are in haste to root up the tares, even though they do it indiscreetly, which shows their anxiety for the crop, and to the preservation of the seed sown. But the Master forbids them in order to hinder wars from arising, and blood and slaughter. For it is not right to put a heretic to death, since an implacable war would be brought into the world. By these two reasons then He restrains them; one, that the wheat would not be hurt; another, that punishment will surely overtake them, if they are incurably diseased. Wherefore, if you would have them punished, yet without harm to the wheat, wait for the proper season.

In uprooting the wheat with them, there are two possible implications. If you take up arms to kill the heretics, many of the saints also will be overthrown with them. Also, from among the tares it is likely that many may change and become wheat. If therefore you root them up beforehand, you injure that which is to become wheat, slaying some in whom there is yet

²²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XLVI, 1.

room for change. He does not therefore forbid our checking heretics, and stopping their mouths, and taking away their freedom of speech, and breaking up their assemblies and confederacies, but only our killing and slaying them.