

CHAPTER H5

THE AGE OF ALEXANDER (600 B.C. - 400 A.D.)**THE FIRST PILLAR OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION**

After a seventy-year Babylonian captivity, God returned His people to Jerusalem, but He never returned their dominion. Therefore their master was whichever nation had the ascendancy. Media-Persia was their master when they first returned. The imperial rule of Media-Persia marks the end of eastern ascendancy in terms of world power.

Greece sat astride the Dardanelles (called the Hellespont in the old days), which is the strait that divides west from east, Europe from Asia. The Persian Empire under several kings mentioned in the Bible claimed all of Asia Minor. Geographically that included the small portion of eastern Greece. However, the eastern Greek city-states resisted Persian rule and appealed to the western Greek city-states for help. Athens, which was in large part democratic, agreed to help. The imperial Persian army crossed the water to attack Athens and landed at the Bay of Marathon. The resulting battle of Marathon (490 B.C.), though not decisive, was a major turning point in history: It marked the beginning of the Persian wars and was the first battle between east and west. One historian calls the battle “the birth cry of Europe.”

Having survived the battle, Athens gradually extended its sphere of influence until it acquired a seaport. The powerful city-state quickly developed into the world’s first naval empire (similar to the British Empire more than two thousand years later). Their seapower enabled commerce to progress rapidly and Athens became not only a wealthy and powerful imperial capital, but also a cultural force whose doctrine (philosophy, Reason) would take over the world.

In the old days land-locked Athens had been an agrarian society with “down to earth” views. But the combination of the principles of democracy and the wealth and influence that resulted from its maritime power corrupted the moral fiber of the citizens and caused clashes between Athens and Sparta.

Sparta was a very powerful but land-locked city-state whose government was an oligarchy. That put a political divide between it and democratic Athens. Sparta was able to overcome its agrarian, land-locked geographical handicap by a disciplined approach to life in which self-gratification was subordinated to the good of the state. Hence the disciplined Spartans retained their traditional moral outlook on life and detested the new values of the liberal Athenians.

Sparta took advantage of Persia’s hatred for Athens by arranging for Persia to help create a military fleet so Sparta could attack Athens during the Peloponnesian War. Sparta defeated Athens in 405 B.C. and Grecian city-states continued to resist national unification.

King Philip II of Macedonia – the country that bordered Greece to the north – wanted to conquer and unite Greece and then defeat Persia. He successfully subdued Greece and used his campaign against Persia to spark Greek patriotism and unite the country against a common enemy. However, just as he pushed a force across the Dardanelles into Persia he was assassinated. His twenty-one year old son, Alexander, succeeded him. And even though he only lived twelve more years, Alexander changed the world.

Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) learned **philosophy** at the feet of Aristotle. Because Persia was a traditional enemy of Greece and because the equality-based principles of philosophy are ideologically opposed to monarchy, Alexander grew up hating Persia as an enemy of Freedom. Therefore, two years after his father died, Alexander proclaimed himself the champion of Greek democracy against Persian tyranny, and he invaded Persia.

In 332 B.C. Alexander neutralized the threat to his rear by the superior Persian navy by besieging and capturing all the ports along the eastern Mediterranean. A year later in 331 B.C. at the battle of Arbela – one of the most decisive battles in history – he ensured the complete conquest of Persia, which happened a year later. For the first time in history since back when God planted a garden in the east, a western power was supreme.

Behind Alexander’s armies he sent a wave of Hellenistic civilization across the world in order to accomplish his goal of uniting mankind through philosophy. He set up huge libraries and centers of learning in order to facilitate the process history calls “Hellenizing” the world. One of the largest centers of philosophy was in his namesake, Alexandria, Egypt. Other major centers were in Athens, Antioch, Rome, and Smyrna. As you will see, his impact on what would become known as “Western civilization” cannot be overstated. For that reason he is the First Pillar of Western Civilization.

We Bible believers have an advantage when studying history because we can evaluate events by looking at them through the revealed truth of God’s word. Some things in history we can know, and some things we can only wonder about. I wonder about Alexander because he stands out as having possibly been influenced by Satan’s active campaign to use Reason, the knowledge of good and evil, to overthrow the church. Other people also seem to have been directly influenced by Satan in his efforts to shape world events: 1) The serpent got Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 2) Was Cain somehow an offspring of the serpent (**1 Jn:3:10,12**)? 3) Were some of the men who crucified Christ somehow offspring of the serpent (**Jn 6:70,71; 8:44**)? 4) Some of the Greek philosophers, notably the homosexual Socrates (who passed his knowledge on to Aristotle, who passed it on to the probable homosexual, Alexander, who then kept Aristotle’s nephew on his staff), worshipped the serpent and claimed to have been taught about Reason by a familiar spirit. 5) Alexander’s mother, Olympias, a woman so scary that her husband, King Philip, was afraid of her – especially after he saw her in bed one night with a huge serpent, was deeply involved in the occult and told Alexander he was the offspring of a god (**Ge 6:4?**). 6) Does the fact that the champion of Reason, Alexander, amazingly conquered the world by taking 40,000 men on an incredible 10-year, 20,000-mile journey during which he was undefeated against the mightiest kings on earth mean he was rewarded by the serpent (**Mt 4:8,9; Lk 4:5-7**)? 7) The serpent was certainly involved in trying to stop the Lord Jesus Christ (**Mt 4:1; Lk 22:3; Jn 13:2,26,27**). I also wonder if King Saul’s democratic leanings (**1 Sa 15:23,24**) were at least partially the result of his Socrates-like conversations with familiar spirits (**1 Sa 28:7**). Interestingly, those used by Satan die early: Socrates, Judas, King Saul – suicide, Alexander – mysterious circumstances. Later on we’ll wonder if Britain and the United States also got special attention from Satan. But before we move on with history, let’s go back and see where the philosophy that Alexander spread to the world originated.

THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

At about the same time the Lord was getting ready to punish His people with the seventy-year Babylonian Captivity, Satan was busily using the Greek philosophers to put Balaam's whorish doctrines of Peor into writing so the whole world could be infected. These were the much-revered pagan philosophers in ancient Greece during the "Classical Period" (also called "antiquity" and "classical antiquity") of the Greek city-states. Greece is known as the birthplace of democracy, and the philosophers as the midwives of democracy.

Thales (635-546 B.C.) was the first Greek **philosopher** because he was the first who dared to **ban any religious influence upon the thought processes**. Before Thales formalized philosophy mankind was supposed to blend what the gods told them with the thought processes. It was generally considered insulting to the gods, foolhardy, and dangerous to "think on your own." Thales' philosophy, therefore, made him the first "skeptic" who made it fashionable to question everything from a secular, or "Natural", viewpoint.

Anaximander (611-547 B.C.) said the universe was originally just a huge bunch of matter. It somehow began moving due to an unknown force later called the "Prime Mover" and eventually separated into the different parts of the physical realm we know today. This separation of matter into different kinds of matter with different sizes, shapes, compositions, and functions caused all things to no longer be equal, and inequality was considered to be wrong, unjust, and unfair.

Pythagoras (582-507 B.C.) accomplished so much that Greek society not only began to abandon the old views that philosophical thought was blasphemous to the gods, it actually began to view secular thought with respect because people saw with their own eyes that living in accordance with Natural Reason produced bountiful fruit from the tree of knowledge. Pythagoras **theorized that the souls of all men are immortal**, and he taught reincarnation via the transmigration of souls. In his younger days he was heavily involved with the Dionysian and the Orphic mystery religions so prevalent in Greece. Knowing their religions would be in vain if they all just died like dogs (**1 Co 15:13-18**), most pagan religious doctrines retained vestigial links to the belief in everlasting life of their Christian ancestors of Adam's generations. And so it was that, even though Pythagoras tried to distance himself from religion when he embraced philosophy, he never shed the ancestral doctrine that *all* humans on earth had immortal life (which was only true *before* God divided the human race in Abraham's day). He believed religion was harmful to proper, questioning, probing thought. "Philosophy", "philosophical thought", "Natural thought", and secular "Reason" were promoted as "unfettered" or "free" from the biased influence of religion. "Freedom" therefore gained a new meaning: Liberated from outside constraints; being self-reliant and self-governed. Thus freedom and democracy (which was an increasingly popular form of government in Classical Greece) were ideological opposites of the monarchical government that had existed for thousands of years. In Persia the word for a provincial governor was *satrap*, in Greece the word for their ruler and the equivalent of the English word *king* was *tyrant*; same word, different languages. However, because the devotees of philosophy espoused democracy and hated the concept of single-headed government, *tyrant* and *tyranny* became synonymous with evil. Just as the universe was considered unjust because its physical matter had separated into unequal parts, any ruler who was not equal to the people was contrary to the original and "good" state of Nature. That's why as the years passed and philosophy matured, philosophers rejected all religion; not only did it poison pure Reason, but the concept of a dictatorial God was ideologically abhorrent to the doctrine of equality.

Pythagoras was instrumental in developing the theories of mathematics because he believed the Order of Nature was based on its fundamental *unbiased* (as in *not arbitrary*) sameness or equality. Numbers, he believed, were neutral, unbiased, and fair, and therefore mathematics, physics, and geometry could be used to unlock the true laws of Nature that had been obscured by the arbitrary, tyrannical laws of religion. He said the earth was a sphere. He acquired a huge following and philosophy became a way of life, a life of Reason. He strongly influenced men in later generations such as Plato, Nostradamus, and Galileo. Math was his pride and joy because arithmetic itself had been invented by philosophical thought relying on self-evident truths. Rational thought – the prerequisite to finding truth – had produced arithmetic; therefore all numbers were believed to be predictable, unbiased, and *rational*. Years later when a man stepped forward and demonstrated that all numbers were not rational (they are now called irrational numbers), he was taken by the Greeks and drowned for daring to suggest mathematics is a flawed science.

Religion began to have less influence on society as men increasingly sought truths by studying the "Natural Laws" of the "Cosmos." Men who used secular Reason to grow in Knowledge of the Natural Cosmos were approvingly called "cosmopolitan." When society had been religious rather than philosophical, wise men were those who learned and lived in harmony with religious doctrine. But in a secular democratic society it was found that a man no longer needed to *be* wise to be successful, he just needed a majority of the people to *think* he was wise. And that's how the **Sophists** came about. Their world was one of rhetoric. They gave lectures and made public speeches in order to reach as many people as possible so it would become "common knowledge" that they were "wise." And because skepticism was fashionable among cosmopolitan adherents of philosophy, Sophists also found it helped them appear wise if they questioned the validity of societal standards with a slightly mocking and haughty tone. Cleverly-worded speeches and snappy little comebacks that actually said nothing were found to be very effective at convincing the multitudes that Sophists were intellectual giants. What was right was beginning to be based on the changing views of the majority (public opinion, which is the foundation of democracy) who, as the Sophists found out, were so ignorant and insecure they could be easily manipulated by Pied Pipers and empty slogans.

Another group was the **Epicureans** who said all participation in society should be based on the self-interest of the individual, on what he could get out of the whole rather than what he could contribute to the whole. Epicureans despised the Spartans, who believed in selflessly serving their tyrant for the good of the state as a whole. To the Epicureans all laws – right, wrong, good, bad – were relative because their rightness or goodness depended on the views of each individual. Breaking a law was ideologically OK as long as it suited the individual. And because being punished would not please and promote the happiness of the individual, corporal punishment, and even pain itself, became evil.

And then there were the **Stoics**. Stoics were Universalists who believed we are all part of the Cosmos. Therefore, any laws passed by the state, in order to be equitable and thereby promote the welfare of mankind, should be based on the fundamental Natural Law of the Cosmos. Because philosophers thought we are all part of the Cosmos, Natural Law was thought to be a part of our Natural makeup and would therefore be "self-evident" as long as we escaped the mental tyranny of religion by using Reason. All men were brothers, all were equal, and all had Natural rights.

Protagoras (480-410 B.C.) was a famous Sophist who said "man [rather than the gods] is the measure of all things." In fact, the people of Athens ran him out of town for doubting the existence of their god. Making man the measure of all things

was a Naturally-brilliant move on Protagoras' part. Because the world of Sophists consisted of rhetoric and public perceptions, man being the measure of all things meant individual opinions were sovereign and inviolate. But because all individuals had differing opinions, none of which affected the validity of the opinions of others, snappy little rejoinders of those who were "sophisticated" included "That's just your opinion" and "What is truth?"

Socrates (470-399 B.C.) was a homosexual whose influence was so great he is called the Father of Philosophy and a mainstay of Western civilization. He claimed many of his philosophical ideas resulted from discussions with a familiar spirit. There is every reason to believe him; I wasn't just being biased when I earlier said Satan used the philosophers to put his philosophy into writing – writings that Western civilization calls the "Classics" written during the "golden age of civilization." Socrates built upon Protagoras' "man is the measure of all things" by teaching that, since *man* is the measure of all things, man must know himself ("know thyself") before he can properly branch out from that all-important foundation of truth – Self. A true Sophist, Socrates is famous for saying, "I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance." For thousands of years people have heard those immortal words and declared, "What a towering intellect that great man was!" When he was sentenced to death he betrayed the secular Reason of philosophy by sacrificing a chicken to a serpent god (!) and committed suicide. Because he was a lecturer rather than a writer his teachings are preserved in the writings of one of his students, Plato.

Plato (422-347 B.C.) learned much from his master, Socrates. Plato in turn taught much to his student, Aristotle. Aristotle in turn taught much to his student, Alexander the Great. Although Plato and Aristotle are the two most famous philosophers, very little of their work can be considered original thought. The earlier philosophers up through Socrates were the pioneers, and Plato and Aristotle were the intellects who shaped and refined the principles of philosophy they'd inherited from the pioneers into the largely irrefutable system of thought that became the foundation of Western civilization and the free world.

For example, whereas Pythagoras merely theorized souls couldn't die, Plato proved it. Let's sit at his feet and drool over this great man's genius and see why he is called the "wisest philosopher" as he "proves" the immortality of the soul for the first time in history: Eros love in man is inspired by beauty. And, while beauty is in the eye of the beholder because individuals are the measure of all things, when all men agree something is beautiful it is because they are beholding *true* beauty. They agree because, as parts of the Cosmos, the Natural Laws that reveal Truths cause them to agree about beauty, which in this case is universal truth. True beauty is eternal because true beauty is truth. Beauty is truth and truth beauty and always will be because truth/beauty is eternal. And man could not universally know and agree about beauty/truth if there weren't something in him that was itself eternal. Since the body dies it therefore must be the soul, the intellect, that is immortal.

With this childish and foolish Sophist rhetoric Plato made himself immortal by doing what Pythagoras and mathematics had been unable to do – "prove" the immortality of the unregenerate human soul. He also established that – since it had succeeded where mathematical science failed – sophistry was at least as powerful a force in society as science.

Plato said, "Democracy...is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike." The only proper government, he said, is one that complies with what Reason reveals about the Natural Law of the Cosmos. In writing *The Republic*, he expounded on how a republican form of democracy is more efficient than a pure democracy, and outlined its system of checks and balances in order to emulate the equality of a pure democracy and curtail the corruption resulting from inequitable distributions of power.

Aristotle (384-322) put the finishing touches on the doctrines of philosophy. He is famous for agreeing with Anaximander that something or someone was needed back at the beginning of the universe to provide the push necessary to start the Cosmos in motion. Aristotle coined the term "Prime Mover." He agreed that earth was a sphere. In fact, it was Greeks who invented longitude and latitude, divided the earth into 360 degrees, and designated the different zones according to climate (arctic, temperate, tropic). Aristotle formalized the idea of "happiness", recognizing it as a truly personal condition because it originates in and is peculiar to the Reason of each individual – know thyself and be thine own measure of all things. This was the first time Reason and Happiness were treated as inseparable. Aristotle taught, "**Reason is a light that God has kindled in the soul,**" which agreed with Sophocles' earlier pagan speculation that "**Reason is God's crowning gift to man.**" Aristotle also said Reason flourished in a state of "Freedom," and Freedom would always result in democracy, and the purpose of democracy was to promote Freedom. He said Freedom must be based on Equality because without Equality you have injustice and tyranny – which prevent the Natural Right to Happiness. Good government, then, promotes Reason, Freedom, Equality, and Happiness. He said: "If Liberty and Equality are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in government" and, "The basis of a democratic state is Liberty." Because he was an ignorant pagan, Aristotle lacked the wisdom and counsel of God in **Pv 28:2**, and therefore claimed the rule of popular law (the majority) is preferable to the rule of any single person because the collective good of the mediocre masses outshines even the brilliance and goodness of a single great man! As you can see, Aristotle was a Sophist.

The "canon" of philosophy essentially closed with Aristotle. All other philosophers – Roman, medieval, and modern – merely used the tools and rules established by the Classic Greek philosophers. Later philosophers would coin a catchy phrase every now and then, and they would apply philosophy to other disciplines such as economics, but there was nothing they could add to philosophy: The Greeks had already defined it and established the rules. In a nutshell then **philosophy is not letting religion of any kind influence what you think or do.** That's it. Nothing else is philosophy. When someone says, "My philosophy is to keep a low profile", it's just a colloquialism; strictly speaking he is not using the term correctly unless he actually means he didn't consider the Bible. And if someone says, "He sticks to his religious philosophy", the two words are oil and water; they don't mix. When the Bible uses *philosophy, vain deceit, the tradition of men, and the rudiments of the world* as synonyms in opposition to *Christ (Co 2:8)*, it is referring to Greek philosophy and all of its derivatives. It is not referring to "false" philosophy; there is no such thing as false philosophy or true philosophy – philosophy is philosophy. And just as it doesn't matter if a carnal idea is good or bad because anything carnal is bad, any philosophy is bad because *by definition* philosophy must be carnal or it's not philosophy. That's not a secret and it never has been. The following are *all* synonyms for philosophy: Anything secular such as secular thought or writings; anything scientific or anything having to do with science, because science is knowledge arrived at by deliberately philosophical, secular, non-religious means; Reason; Carnality; doing that which is right and good in your own eyes; living by your own counsel; the Natural mind; Nature; Nature's laws; humanism; the Classics; the Enlightenment; the Age of Reason; the whoredom of Peor; the leaven of the Pharisees that results in tradition and false doctrine; the doctrine of devils; the ideology of Satan; the spirit of antichrist; enmity against God; rebellion; witchcraft; and a damnable heresy.

The Greek philosophers were valuable to the cause of Satan because for the first time they wrote down how to be carnal. They formalized enmity against God into a secular system thought to harmonize with religion because it seemed neutral and unbiased. Philosophy claimed to be the friend of truth (and therefore the friend of true religion) because the Natural truths that secular Reason revealed were supposed to be in accordance with whatever god or Prime Mover was responsible for the creation of Nature and its Laws. Philosophy was a Natural product of the pagan philosophers because as unregenerate human beings they were limited to the carnal mind; they were not capable of doing anything that pleased or glorified God. They had no choice or alternative – they had to be carnal because that’s what they were. Christians, on the other hand, have the capability to either walk in the flesh or to walk in the Spirit. Christians have a choice. The Natural old man gravitates toward philosophy at the same time the spiritual new man, by feeding on the Bible, tries to get the baby Christian to grow so he can die to the carnal influences of self daily, or, “To thine own self be dead.”

As you’ve noticed, I usually refer to the Scriptural way of thinking – thoughts that are deliberately influenced by the Bible – as **discernment**, and I usually capitalize words like Reason when they are references to or part of carnality. I do not capitalize carnality because no Christian is going to mistake it for anything good or acceptable. Since we are supposed to be God’s servants forever, He gave us brains for one reason and one reason only – so we could, through His Book, avoid Reason by *reasoning together* (**1s 1:18**) with Him in order to know and do His will. That is discernment.

Because it is so instinctively appealing/self-evident to the Natural mind, philosophy’s collective wisdom was hailed as the crown jewel of the “ancient sages of Classical Greece.” However, this ornament was but the guiled shore to a most dangerous sea. It was the seeming truth which subtle cunning used to entrap the unsuspecting. And it was the true beginning of our end because, as you will see, all of Western civilization is founded upon philosophy. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

HEROD

When God’s people returned to Jerusalem from Babylon they were under the rule of Media-Persia. Alexander the Great then conquered Media-Persia. When Alexander died his empire was divided among his four generals. General Seleucus began the Babylon- and Syria-based Seleucid dynasty whose territory included Israel. General Ptolemy began the Egypt-based Ptolemaic Empire, which often fought the bordering Seleucids and sometimes ruled Israel. Backed by the wealth and military might of the Greek conquerors, philosophy spread quickly. God’s people hated philosophy and the Greeks who spread it because they could already see it beginning to affect Christians. Both generals and their empires were thoroughly Hellenized and Israel was caught between the libraries of Greek Enlightenment in Antioch and Alexandria. A well-intentioned family of Jewish priests, patriots, and freedom fighters, the Maccabees, decided to ignore the Biblical injunctions against rebellion and to revolt against the pagan authorities God had put over them, not realizing they were utilizing the very method of carnal thought they were fighting against. The Maccabees were very popular and continued to be a major influence for generations. They were popular because they cloaked everything they did in sheep’s clothing; they were fighting to terminate pagan control of God’s people so they could have a Christian government and a Christian society again. Most Christians in Israel became patriots who longed for independence. Therefore, many of them also looked forward to the anticipated return of the Messiah because they just *knew* He would overthrow foreign rule and reestablish the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Roman Empire loved Greek philosophy and produced its own crop of philosophers who added volumes to the “Greek Classics” – but little of any substance. Eventually the Roman Empire conquered Alexander’s entire realm, including the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires. Rome generally appointed locals to rule the kingdoms within its empire in an effort to maximize efficiency and good will. The Maccabees, now led by John Hyrcanus II, were heavily involved in politics and periodically revolted against Roman rule. For political reasons they were supported by another ambitious Christian, Antipater. Antipater was a pagan Edomite who converted to the God of the Bible and was the father of Herod the Great. In 63 B.C. the Roman general, Pompey (who would gain fame by defeating Spartacus’ slave revolt) arrived in Palestine to put down another illegal Christian/Maccabean revolt led by John Hyrcanus. Antipater’s political aspirations caused him to quickly shift his support to Pompey. He then patched his rift with the Maccabees by marrying one of their daughters. Later the members of the first ruling Triumvirate of Rome (Caesar and Pompey after the death of Crassus) began fighting each other for supremacy. The Ptolemaics in Egypt backed the politically powerful Pompey. Julius Caesar, while popular with the people, was opposed by the Senate, which backed Pompey. Therefore, it was risky to support Caesar. Antipater in Israel did support Caesar, as did Mark Antony, who had to flee Rome as a result. Friendships formed. Caesar defeated Pompey who fled to Egypt for the protection of the Ptolemaic ruler, Cleopatra. Cleopatra’s dilemma of being caught between her alliance with the defeated Pompey and the rapidly approaching mighty Caesar was solved when one of Pompey’s own soldiers assassinated him. Cleopatra then spread her arms wide with a warm welcome for her new political friend, Caesar. The next year, 47 B.C., Caesar rewarded Antipater for his support in two ways. First, he made him a Roman citizen (which applied to his son, Herod, as well). Second, Caesar appointed Antipater procurator of Judea. Three years later Caesar was assassinated and Mark Antony rose to power in the Second Triumvirate. A year later, Antipater died and Herod rose to power. Because of his father’s friendship with Caesar and Mark Antony, Herod and Antony bonded and established a close and lifelong friendship. Seeing that Herod had done a good job as governor of Galilee, Mark Antony promoted him to tetrarch of Galilee.

A year later the Parthians, seeing the political fragmentation and weakness in Palestine, invaded the region. With that as a catalyst, the local factions began a civil war for supremacy. The new tetrarch of Galilee was caught in the storm: The Maccabees hated him because his father betrayed them by supporting Pompey, and because his father’s alliance with Pompey caused Herod to be bestowed with the political power the Maccabees coveted. The Pharisees – the largest and most powerful denomination – also despised Herod and never treated him as a Christian brother because they couldn’t get over their racial hatred of him as an Edomite. The patriotic Christian population hated him because they wanted independence from Rome and thought he was “selling out” to their pagan masters. Lacking any military power, Herod avoided assassination by fleeing to Rome. The Roman senate, still confident of Herod’s abilities, made him King of Judea, gave him an army, and sent him back to crush the rebels and unite the region under his rule. King Herod turned out to be no slouch militarily; he quickly subdued the region and ruled for thirty-two years until his death. This Herod the Great was the king who ruled at the time of Christ’s birth. After Herod’s death it was his son, Herod Antipas, who executed John the Baptist and skillfully foisted the political hot potato – Jesus Christ – off onto Pontius Pilate.

Herod did everything he could to be a good ruler. In an effort to please the Christians he rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem as a large and magnificent structure. In an effort to establish a relationship with the Maccabees he married one of their daughters. In order to please the people he patronized the Olympics, even becoming president of the games. And, not

neglecting his Daniel-like and Joseph-like Christian duty to serve and please his pagan masters, Herod also made several trips to Rome. His political friendships over the years included Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Augustus Caesar, and Augustus' powerful subordinate, General Agrippa. In fact, both Augustus and Gen. Agrippa honored King Herod by making state visits to Judea. Gen. Agrippa was so close to the Herod family that Herod's grandson was named Herod Agrippa I and became king of the region. King Herod Agrippa's son became King Herod Agrippa II, and is the Agrippa who inspired a popular Christian hymn when he told the Apostle Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (**Ac 26:28**), and who correctly pointed out that Paul was hoist on his own petard when the apostle foolishly relied on the world for protection (**Ac 26:32**).

Although he is despised today, and ignoring the fact that he went mad later in life, Herod the Great proved to be a good ruler in a very difficult position. Lacking understanding, a faction of God's people rebelled against him again under the Maccabees a few years after he became king. Herod subdued this illegal and unchristian anti-government insurrection and executed the last of the Maccabee rebels in 30 B.C. But the death of the Maccabees did not kill off the lust for Liberty and self-rule. Various Jewish rebels who fought for independence from Rome came and went. One of the most famous of these Freedom fighters was a militia leader called Barabbas.

Patriotic groups of Christian Freedom fighters like the Maccabees and Barabbas were generally well-received by their fellow Jews who were very interested in regaining their lost kingdom on earth (**Ac 1:6; Mt 21:5,9; Lk 19:38; Jn 6:15**). And that is why King Herod, who saw both his life and his career threatened by insurrectionists on a number of occasions, was so quick to deal with the birth of the latest populist rebel in Bethlehem – this so-called "king of the Jews" who would take over where the Maccabees left off by trying to overthrow Herod's rule. Would he allow political uprisings in his realm? Negative!

When Jesus Christ's ministry began to attract attention and it became known He was of the house and lineage of David, He became a popular figure among the multitudes of Jewish patriots who favored insurrection. The multitudes of Christians didn't care that Christ attacked their current doctrines, because pewsters in general are more interested in worldly events than they are in Biblical doctrines, concepts, and principles – they just wanted a militant messiah who believed in Freedom as fervently as they did. But the Pharisees greatly resented the way this Scripture-quoting carpenter kept embarrassing them in public. Because Bible doctrine in a country ruled by the Roman Empire had no legal muscle, and because Christ was popularly believed to be a messiah/insurrectionist, and because the penalty for rebellion was death, the Pharisees played the insurrectionist/hopeful-king-of-the-Jews angle in an effort to have the rebellion-hating government execute Him. In order to show the pewsters that Christ was no friend of patriots, the Pharisees in a brilliant political move pointed out that He was a friend of publicans and sinners. Publicans were considered by Jewish patriots to be traitors because they worked for the pagan government as tax collectors, and many Jews wrongly thought it was sinful to give their taxes to support the ungodly agendas of pagan governments.

The Christian outlaw/Freedom fighter, Barabbas, however, was gaining in popularity because he not only didn't pay taxes, he stole from and murdered agents of the government (**Mk 15:7; Lk 23:18,19; Jn 18:40**). (After King Herod's death it quickly became obvious that Herod's sons were not nearly as effective at preventing rebellion.) That is one of the reasons his fellow Christians were so ready to release Barabbas from prison; unlike Christ, he was willing to put feet to his faith by trying to overthrow the pagan tyranny of Rome. And when he was released and Christ was executed in his place, many used that to "prove" God favored Barabbas' kind of Christianity with its political strategy and military tactics. This caused more insurrectionist activity...until 70 A.D. when Rome in a big "get tough on crime" campaign decided to avenge the grieving families of all those who had been murdered by Jewish rebels. General Titus showed up and completely destroyed Jerusalem (**Lk 19:41-44; Mk 13:1,2; Mt 24:1,2**) because it was a breeding ground for rebels. He killed over a million Jews and sent the rest off into slavery. Several years later he became the emperor of Rome and finished building the Coliseum where more of God's people would meet our Maker.

Jesus Christ was born and conducted His ministry during all this political turmoil. And He never paid it any attention. He had no interest in the corruption and ungodliness of the ruling government, He had no interest in preserving the national identity of Israel so children could grow up in a godly society with school prayer, and had no interest in getting the pagan Roman government off the backs of His people. His entire focus was on the church and the leaven that was destroying it from within. Therefore, let's take a look at that leaven – philosophy, the carnal mind, Reason.

The church was very carnal. Well-intentioned Christians had invented numerous traditions that destroyed the authority of the word of God. Even good Christians like John the Baptist had trouble staying focused on the Bible instead of politics. (More on this in chapter D23, *Dominion*. In fact, skip ahead and read *Dominion* either now or after you finish this chapter. You may not understand some of what is referred to in the first several pages because it draws upon some stuff in earlier doctrinal chapters, but *Dominion* will help you put the rest of this historical section into better perspective. And even though you haven't yet learned some of the things it mentions, it will enable you to keep a critical eye on the validity, or lack thereof, concerning my points in both the historical and doctrinal sections.) The Lord spent a great deal of time rebuking Christians for not knowing and applying the Bible. Greek philosophy and its effects were everywhere. Even Pontius Pilate, having run out of anything meaningful to say to Christ, resorted to philosophy by quoting the popular snappy little air-headed cliché of the Sophists, "What is truth?" (**Jn 18:38**). Because philosophy had leavened His Old Testament saints, Christ specifically mentioned it by name in the New Testament (Co 2:8).

THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA BEGINS

Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.-50 A.D.) is a famous example of how philosophy was affecting Bible study. A Hellenized Jew, he worked to develop an allegorical interpretation of the Bible in order to avoid the literal interpretations that were so contrary to the Natural Reason of the sophisticated new way of studying religion – what is now called "theology." He is the earliest known person to openly advocate combining Scriptural revelation with Greek Reason, and is therefore regarded as the father of Christian "theology." (Having a degree in Christian *theology* means philosophical Reasoning was incorporated into your studies. This book on the other hand, is anti-theology; it is a Bible study. I am praying it might help you become a good Christian and stop being a Rational Christian.) Philo was also one of the early advocates of combining the pagan concepts of **morality and ethics** with the Bible in order to produce "Biblical" morality and ethics – something that would not be accepted by Christians until the Age of Aquinas began in the 14th century. Because he thought on a carnal level it is not surprising that Philo also adopted the Greek arguments in support of some form of democracy as the best government.

Early Christian pioneers in the use of Reason in Bible exposition included **Justin** (100-165 A.D.), who wrote two philosophic defenses of Christian doctrine. Christian historians are fond of him because his writings help establish the early

historicity and spread of the written New Testament. For example, he referred to the first three gospels, quoted from the epistles of Peter and Paul, and is the first known writer to quote from Acts. He was a student of Stoic and Platonic philosophy and is considered one of the most important early Christians because he was one of the first to openly advocate improving Christianity by making it compatible with philosophy. He argued that since the Greek word *logos* means both *word* (Christ) and *intellect* (man) it “proves” God made human thoughts conform to His so man could, through Reason, find truth and know what is good and what is evil. Based on how good pagan philosophy seemed to him, and based on the fact that it seemed necessary to finding truth, he was one of the first Christians to claim that, just as Abraham and Moses were Christians before the birth of Christ, so too were Greek philosophers like Plato. Therefore, the writings of the Old Testament prophets and the writings of the Greek philosophers were two branches that combined to form the river of Christianity. He was convicted of attempting to subvert Christianity and was executed.

Clement (155-215 A.D.) was a Greek from Athens who was saved, moved to Alexandria, became a teacher of Christian doctrine, and was the first Christian carnal enough to actually attempt to harmonize Greek philosophy and Christianity. He was a strong advocate of what is deceptively called “intellectualized Christianity” and was often denounced by Biblical literalists because he thought the Reason of Greek philosophy was a necessary prerequisite to finding the truth. He certainly learned from the Sophists how to utter impressive words that really said nothing: “One, therefore, is the way of truth, but into it, just as into an everlasting river, flow streams but from another place.” Clement was one of the earliest Bible preachers who openly sided with philosophy by claiming the Bible’s injunctions against rebellion against all authority do not apply to subjects when they rise in rebellion against governments that treat them like slaves by disregarding the “will of the people.” He taught that God did not need to intervene in events in Egypt by giving Moses the authority to resist Pharaoh; he thought the Hebrew slaves could have justly risen in rebellion against their masters on their own.

Origen (185-254 A.D.) was Clement’s student and became a more famous Christian philosopher than his teacher. His writings were numerous and well known. (I am not going to avoid the labels history uses such as “Christian philosopher.” But I want you to remember the two terms are mutually exclusive because the Bible prohibits philosophy and philosophy prohibits religion.) Faithful Christians despised Origen and accused him of using pagan philosophy to corrupt Christianity. For example, one of the reasons philosophy speaks of a “Prime Mover” rather than a personal God is philosophy’s foundation of equality cannot accept the inequality inherent in one supreme God who does things arbitrarily. Because of that Origen rejected the concept of hell: If there is a hell there also of necessity must be some arbitrary Judge who decides who goes there to suffer – with no consideration whatever for the wishes and feelings of individuals. Origen therefore changed the God of the Bible into a kinder, gentler entity of “good” who would never be that cruel. Origen even believed Satan would end up where everyone ends up – heaven. He thought we are all going to be given the time we need to repent of evil and be “good.” When Origen argued that Satan’s having the free will to rebel and fall from grace was in itself proof that he also has the free will to repent and return to God’s favor, it showed that Origen understood neither the arbitrariness of authority nor the finality of Laws as taught in the Bible. (The subject of Laws is covered in chapter D19.)

Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 A.D.), who was a Christian preacher and “Doctor of the Church”, was a student of philosophy whose sermons included his famous quote about common knowledge: “Those beliefs common to all men must be true.” (The liberal scholars in these examples would remain a despised minority within Christianity for another 1,000 years.)

St. Ambrose (339-397 A.D.) was one of the most influential Christian thinkers of the Age of Alexander. He was a pagan citizen of Rome and a serious espouser of Greek philosophy. At the age of thirty-four this notable and influential pagan philosopher was appointed to be bishop of Milan. In order to qualify, however, he needed to meet certain requirements. So he was baptized to make him a Christian and then given theological degrees that promoted him through all the necessary ecclesiastical steps. This amazing transition from pagan to high-ranking preacher took eight days and has resulted in his unofficial title – the Eight-Day Wonder.

He hypocritically accused pagans and heretics of leavening themselves with the tenants of philosophy (a typical accusation and hypocrisy of his day – it was just how the game was played). I say “hypocritically” because his sermons – not surprisingly – reveal that his Christianity was saturated with philosophy. Ambrose used Greek thought to teach the Bible as “erudite philosophical allegory” in his sermons and lectures, which historians have labeled “brilliant.” His *On the Six Days of Creation* and *On Isaac and the Soul* especially reveal by their Neoplatonic mystical language the depths of his involvement with philosophy. Ambrose’s sermons today remain a rich source for documenting the transmission of Greek doctrine into Western theology. History says this about his combining pagan thought with Christian doctrine: “His brilliant religious writings molded *Classic learning* in a Christian context.” In fact, when compared with pure Biblical Christianity, the brand of Christianity embraced by the educated class of Ambrose’s day has been called “an impeccably Classical version of Christianity.”

The Eight-Day Wonder thought civil rulers who claimed to be Christian should be subject to church rulers like him. His influence was so great he actually did successfully impose his will on a number of emperors. He also blended Stoic virtue with his own extreme and unusual ideas about the value of abstaining from pleasure; he advocated a rigid form of monkish asceticism that included not just sexual abstinence, but also the belief that sex itself was a sinful act unless performed for procreation. This eight-day wonder twisted **1 Co 7:1** (“it is good for a man not to touch a woman”) in order to preach “it is good for a woman not to touch a man during her entire lifetime” in such strong condemnation of even marital sex that responsible members of his congregation tried to shield their daughters from these pro-virginity sermons (which eventually – when the Roman Catholic Church adopted St. Ambrose and his student as “church fathers” – helped produce the Roman Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Joseph’s wife, Mary.)

I mentioned Ambrose’s student. His pupil was none other than Saint Augustine, who is the main reason Ambrose is so important to history: Just as Alexander had his mentor, Aristotle, so did Augustine have his Ambrose.