

The Heirs (A Brief Look at Church Leaders Before 135 Ce)

by Robert Wurtz II

The sermon explores the early Church leaders, their dynastic succession, and the transition to non-Jewish leadership after the Bar Kochba revolt.

Topics: "Early Church", "Church Leadership"

Description

Robert Wurtz II delves into the early leadership structure of the Church at Jerusalem, revealing that the first fifteen bishops were relatives of Jesus, known as desposynoi, who were appointed to the bishop position. The Church, initially comprised of believing Jews who kept the law, faced a shift after 135 CE when non-Jews took over leadership and sought to distance the Church from its Jewish roots. Despite persecution and division, the early Church displayed clear leadership and a practice of meeting in homes for fellowship. The question arises of what God desires His Church to resemble, whether mirroring the early Church pre-70 CE or embracing a return to the Acts-style Church with Messianic Jews in leadership.

Transcript

According to Dr. Ron Moseley of the American Institute for Holy Land Studies, the first fifteen bishops (presidents) of the Church at Jerusalem were relatives of Jesus. All of whom are of Hebrew descent, and according to Eusebius was "to have received the knowledge of Christ in purity, so that they were approved by those who were able to judge of such matters, and were deemed worthy of the episcopate."

The entire Church prior to Acts chapter 10 was comprised of believing Jews who also kept the law (the Nazarenes). The first, then, was James, the half brother of the Lord; the second, Simeon; the third, Justus; the fourth, Zacchaeus; the fifth, Tobias; the sixth, Benjamin; the seventh, John; the eighth, Matthias; the ninth, Philip; the tenth, Seneca; the eleventh, Justus; the twelfth, Levi; the thirteenth, Ephrem; the fourteenth, Joseph; and finally, the fifteenth, Jude. These are the bishops of Jerusalem that lived between the age of the apostles and the Bar Kochba Revolt (135 CE). After the death of James the half brother of Christ we see the dynastic succession of the Jerusalem Church. Only relatives of Jesus (termed desposynoi, or "the heirs") were appointed to the bishop (president) position.

After 135 CE and the Bar Kochba revolt the Jews were banished from Jerusalem and the city was renamed Aelia Capitolina. The Jews were forced to leave for 100 years. During this time the Church was turned over into the hands of non-Jews and the quest to rid the Church of all things Jewish began. The

first non-Jewish leader of the Church was Mark. This was nearly the middle of the second century.

The Church would meet from house to house while James was still alive and James chaired the first Church council meeting in Acts 15. This meant two things: 1) that there was definite leadership in the early Church and 2) the Church would fellowship in their own houses. They would likewise find themselves worshipping in the synagogues as Jesus said that they would be beaten in those synagogues (as they were). Paul always preached in synagogues when he could. When the division finally came the Jewish Christians scattered to the Mountains of Pella. Once the birkat ha minim curse was devised at Yavneh (Jamnia) the separation between the circumcision and the believing Jews (Nazarenes) was inevitable. When the split between the Jews and the Synagogue had taken place and the Temple was destroyed- the church began drifting towards Rome. Much persecution was happening in the Roman world against Christians also. The question in our day- which is one only God knows is... what does God want the Bride to look like? Does He want it to look like the early Church pre 70 CE? As we continue in our discussions it is interesting to note that some see a return to the "book of Acts" style Church to also include Messianic Jews in leadership- as they were in the book of Acts in Jerusalem. Although there were many non-Jews in the Church outside of Rome it can be argued that they were all in submission to Jerusalem as is evident in Acts 15.

*** Notes***

Eusebius History of the Church (HE 4:5:3-4; 5:12:1-2)

Moseley, Ron. "Yeshua" A guide TO The Real Jesus And The Original Church. Ebed Publications c 1996

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