

Who were the false apostles Yeshua commended the Ephesian church for exposing as “liars”?

By Scott Nelson 7/10/2011 judaismvschristianity.com

Introduction

In chapter two of the book of Revelation Yeshua addressed the Ephesian church, and in verse two he gave the Ephesians a commending pat on the back for labeling certain individuals as “liars” for having presumptuously taken to themselves the title of *apostle*.

“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil, And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.” Revelation 2:2

The question concerning the *identity* of these false apostles is seldom considered by Christian scholars. It is usually brushed off with the assumption that these false apostles were anonymous shameless individuals of the time. But in light of the facts which are known about the Ephesians and who had claimed to be an apostle to them, the identity of these men should have been as obvious to us as it was to the Ephesians themselves. By the time you have finished reading this article it should be apparent that one of the greatest reasons Christian scholars have typically walked away from inquiring into this passage is because they are instinctively aware of the damning implications it presents to none other than Paul and his young apprentice Timothy.

Presented below are the facts of the case. After carefully weighing all of the evidence, you will have to render your own verdict.

Establishing the Authorship Date of Revelation

One detail that must be established is the date of John’s visitation and the writing of the book of Revelation. It seems that the majority of scholars (but by no means all of them) have postulated a date of around 96 A.D. When it comes to this date that scholars point to, all of them must ultimately rest the entirety of their case on a single short and obscure statement made by Eusebius in the early fourth century where he quoted a lost, late second-century document of Irenaeus. Here are the supposed end-all-debate words of Eusebius and his quote of Irenaeus.

“In this persecution, it is handed down by tradition, that the apostle and evangelist John, who was yet living, in consequence of his testimony to the divine word, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos. Irenaeus, indeed, in his fifth book against the heresies, . . . speaks in the following manner respecting him; ‘If, however, it were necessary to proclaim the name of the Anti-Christ, . . . it would have been declared by him who saw the revelation, for it is not long since it was seen, but almost in our own generation, at the close of Domitian’s reign.’” (Eusebius, III, XVII)

It should be pointed out that there is uncertainty as to Eusebius’s understanding of whom Irenaeus was referring to. Was it Domitian, or Domitius (Nero)? Even if Irenaeus *had* indicated that the Revelation was given to John later during Domitian’s reign, one must ask how much doctrinal stock they want to put in a man who was known for making fantastic errors in dates and times. Irenaeus also taught, for example, that Yeshua was crucified at fifty years of age! (See *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, chapter 22)

Irenaeus’ few words as quoted by Eusebius are all that exist for outside evidence that Revelation was written very late in the first century. That’s it! Some scholars claim that *other* “early church father’s”, like Tertullian, Origen, Victorinus, and Jerome, confirm the later date of Domitian’s reign as though “early” means they were as good as eye witnesses, yet these men wrote anywhere from 100-300 years *after* Irenaeus and were simply following his lead. Scholars and teachers who opt for the later date must ultimately rest the entirety of their case on these few obscure and unreliable words of Irenaeus.

There is however within the book of Revelation considerable evidence that clearly indicates it was written before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. If recognized academic credentials are of any value to the reader, scholars

who have argued for this earlier time period include; David E. Aune, Ph.D.¹; A. Tholuck, D.D.²; and J.A.T. Robinson, Ph.D. just to name a few.

There is also internal evidence that can pinpoint the time of John's vision to early 67 A.D. In chapter 11, John is told to measure the temple of God.

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, **for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will trample the holy city under foot—forty two months.**" Revelation 11:1-2

The temple that is spoken of here is without question the earthly temple in Jerusalem and not to be confused with the temple "in heaven" spoken of later. This should be obvious in light of the fact that "the holy city" (Jerusalem) was going to be "trampled". The one in heaven will never be "trampled".

Not only does this indicate that at the time of John's vision the temple had not yet been destroyed, but the interpretation of *when* the "forty-two months" would occur is open to debate. Did the angel mean that Jerusalem would be given to the Gentiles and trampled *for* a period of forty-two months? Most English translations interject the word "*for*" into the text, but this word is not found in the Greek manuscripts and it is the reason why some translations italicize it.

Or, could the angel have indicated that the city would fall *in* forty-two months time from the showing of the prophecy to John and *then* be trampled by the Gentiles for a much longer period of time? In this case I would contend the measuring of the temple that John was commanded to do was a prophetic act designed to *bring about* its destruction in 42 months! The fact that the temple and the altar were destroyed, but the court outside the temple is still there today would also support this interpretation.

This second interpretation where Jerusalem is predicted to fall in a given time and *then* is trampled for a much longer period of time dovetails perfectly with what Yeshua prophesied in Luke 21:20-24.

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

The facts of history are that Jerusalem fell and the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. Jerusalem was trampled by the Gentiles for at least 1,897 years until 1967 when it was retaken by Israel in the six day war. One could argue that Jerusalem is *still* being trampled by the Gentiles in light of the fact that Islamic mosques continue to occupy the temple site! Either way, the point is made. Jerusalem has been trampled for a very long time. And, considering the fact that there is no historical record of a short forty-two month long trampling of Jerusalem, we must conclude that the angel meant Jerusalem would fall in 42 months time *from* the time he spoke the time-frame to John. Jerusalem was besieged by Rome shortly after Passover in 70 A.D. and fell several months later. Forty-two months before then would have been early 67 A.D. ...right at the time of the Neronian persecution!

In chapter two of the book of Revelation, Yeshua addressed the Ephesian church, and in verse two gives the Ephesians a commending pat on the back for determining and exposing certain individuals as "liars" for having presumptuously taken to themselves the title of *apostle*. To the Ephesians, Yeshua said:

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil, and you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars." Revelation 2:2

This is the elephant sized problem that Christian leaders sweep under the rug and quickly move past. This verse is

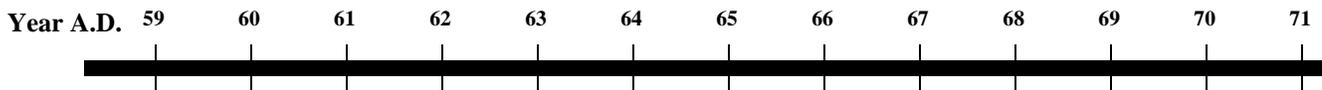
¹ See *Apopogetics Study Bible*, Ted Cabat, Ph.D. Editor

² See *Biblical Illustrator N.T.*

treated as though: “There’s nothing to see here folks ...so move along!” In light of the well known facts concerning the Ephesians and who had claimed to be an apostle to them, the identity of these false apostles should have been as obvious to us as it was to the Ephesians and ALL the churches of Asia.

Authorship Dates For Paul’s Letters

Below is a timeline showing the broader timeframes in which it is believed Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and Timothy, and John’s messages to the churches of Asia in the book of Revelation were written. The yellow highlighted areas mark the timeframe in which each book was most likely written. Now read in chronological order the facts of the case concerning the supposed apostles to the Ephesians and see if you can come to any other conclusion than the obvious.



Aside from Peter, Paul is the only person from that time period known to have claimed to be an apostle. John didn’t even use the title that was rightfully his to identify himself in the book of Revelation! But Paul claimed the title many times, and introduces himself as such, again, to the Ephesians of Asia Minor.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus...”
Ephesians 1:1

Later, when writing to Timothy in Ephesus, Paul orders his young apprentice to stay there, and deputizes him to police his exclusive doctrine there in his stead.

“...remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine.”
1 Timothy 1:3

In the same letter, Paul displays an unusual defensiveness of his *apostle* title in a manner that clearly suggests some there in Ephesus had accused him of lying about it!

“...for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying...” 1 Timothy 2:7

Question: Who is ever compelled to defend themselves with a statement like, “I am not lying”, if they have never been accused of it? Paul’s defensiveness speaks volumes. He had undoubtedly been accused by the Ephesians of lying about his apostleship!

Here, Yeshua tells John to write to all his church assemblies in Asia.

“What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”
Revelation 1:11

Yeshua commends the Ephesian assembly for exposing as “liars” some who have claimed to be apostles.

“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.”
Revelation 2:2

Yeshua states that the truth he speaks to each church is good for all who are willing to listen.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
Revelation 2:7,11,17, 29 & 3:6,13, 22

Because of the urgency of the prophecy and the obvious time-sensitive information of 2:10, the Revelation is immediately circulated to all the believing church assemblies in Asia as Yeshua commanded.

2 Timothy

A year later, out of his own mouth, Paul complains to Timothy that not only the Ephesians, but ALL of Asia had rejected him!

“This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me.”
2 Timothy 1:15

Paul did not say Asia had turned away from Yeshua! Those who would try to defend Paul must believe that Paul would have placed a higher value on Asia believing in Yeshua than on his own personal acceptance there and therefore would have been more distressed by Asia’s rejection of Yeshua had that been the case. But that’s not what Paul’s concern was. His was a *personal* complaint. Paul said Asia had rejected only him!

This should not come as a surprise in light of the fact that the believers in Asia had recently heard from Yeshua by letter from John and had heard that Yeshua commended the Ephesians for rejecting the one they all knew was Paul! They apparently had “ears to hear” what the Spirit had said to the Ephesians and went and did likewise!

Why didn't James come to Paul's rescue?

(The Trophimus incident)

Introduction

Acts 21:26-31 records the account of Paul's arrest for ostensibly bringing a Gentile into the temple. In the account, the "Jews from Asia" (modern Turkey) were obviously well aware of what Paul had been teaching in Asia. Ephesus was a prominent city of Asia. When Paul was in the temple providing the animal sacrifices for the purification rites of four Nazirites at James's behest to ostensibly prove to everyone that he still kept the law of Moses, these Asian Jews spotted Paul and leveled the following accusation against him.

"Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place, and furthermore **he also brought Greeks into the temple** and has defiled this holy place."

Immediately after this in verse 29, Luke makes this interesting quasi-defense for Paul.

"For they had seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom **they supposed** that Paul **had brought** into the temple."

This argument as it stands would have an impossible time holding up in court. It would be absurd to suggest that simply having seen Paul with a Gentile in the city would have been grounds on which to convict him of actually bringing that Gentile into the temple. No one would make that argument. Jews and Gentiles mingled outside the temple all the time. It should be apparent that there must be more to the story here ...and probably something that Luke would really rather not reveal to us. Therefore, we are forced to read between the lines and logically put the missing pieces of the puzzle together.

Now if Trophimus had gone into the temple and been caught, and Paul was *responsible* for putting it in his mind to go there on his own, then we have a different story.

First: Trophimus was caught in the temple

It is evident that Trophimus had indeed been caught in the temple. Here is the flow of logic:

1. The Jews of Asia could not have been referring to the Nazirites with Paul in the temple at that time as "Greeks". (No Jew would have confused a Nazirite for a Gentile.)
2. If no Gentile had been in the temple at all, it would have been Paul's and Luke's first and only-necessary line of defense!
3. If no Gentile had been in the temple, James most certainly would have come to Paul's rescue and reassured the "many myriads of Jews" which he led that such was the case. Therefore:
4. Some Gentile had obviously defiled the temple.
5. The fact that Luke is compelled to mention Trophimus by name is telling. Obviously, he was the one being prosecuted for being in the temple. If Trophimus had not been the one who everyone was already talking about, there would have been no need for Luke to name him and bring him into it.
6. Luke only tries to put distance from the idea that Paul had *physically ushered* Trophimus into the temple by saying they only "supposed" it.

The Jews of Asia knew that Paul was responsible for Trophimus defiling the temple. Some of them, having seen Trophimus and Paul together in the city would have naturally jumped to the conclusion that Paul had actually accompanied Trophimus into the temple. Thus the rumor began. Luke seized upon the error and tried to cover for Paul by saying, "they **supposed** that Paul **had brought**" Trophimus into the temple. But the Asian Jews were none the less correct in accusing Paul of being *responsible* for Trophimus defiling the temple.

Second: Paul was responsible for Trophimus being in the temple

That Trophimus was an Ephesian and a friend of Paul is not in question. How Trophimus came to believe he had some right to enter the temple on his own accord is what tells the rest of the story. It could hardly be more obvious where Trophimus got his presumptuous idea in light of what we **know** Paul had been teaching the Ephesians. In his epistle to the Ephesians Paul had written these words:

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands--that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, **who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division¹ between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that he might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death **the enmity**. And he came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. **For through him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father**. Now, Therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,² having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone in whom **the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord**, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.”
Ephesians 2:11-22**

¹ "the middle wall of division" is a direct reference to the wall in the temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of Israel.

² "members of the household of God" is an indisputable reference to those who have the right to worship in the temple.

Thus Trophimus boldly went where no Gentile was supposed to go! When he was caught and interrogated, his immediate defense would naturally have been along the lines of:

“...but **Paul** said there is no difference between Jew and Gentile anymore! He said the wall of division in the temple is meaningless. He said I now have access to the Father and am a fellow citizen and an equal member with you in the household of God!”

Now try to imagine how that defense would have gone over with the priests!

This scenario would perfectly explain several things:

1. It explains why Paul was held **responsible** for a Gentile being in the temple ...even though he may not have physically ushered him in.
2. It explains the subsequent uproar in all of Jerusalem against Paul.
3. It also perfectly explains why **James never did come to Paul's rescue after this**.

Prior to this, James had confronted Paul concerning the anti-Moses rumors that were going around about him and effectively made it known to Paul that they had better not be true. James was the one who had sent Paul to the temple in the first place, for the very purpose of giving him opportunity to prove that the rumors were *not* true and that he continued to abide by the Law. (see Acts 21:18-25) James could have easily calmed the crowd by explaining everything and assuring the people that Paul had not brought a Gentile into the temple if that were the case and it was all a simple misunderstanding. But that wasn't the case. After Trophimus defiled the temple and tried to defend himself with Paul's doctrine, it was all over for Paul. The Jews from Asia testified that Paul had indeed been teaching such things, and quite possibly documented the fact with a copy of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. After this, James **could not** defend Paul any longer. There was no question anymore. The rumors **were** true. Paul had in fact been teaching "...against the people, the Law, and **this** place...”!