



Chapter 16

VISIONS, DREAMS AND SIGNS

It has become customary since A.D.326 for the majority of the Christian world to accept the site now occupied by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the area for the resurrection of Jesus. The reason this location was selected rests solely with the opinions of one man. That person was Constantine the Great who became the first emperor of the Romans to publicly accept Jesus as his Savior and Lord. Of course, once Constantine became convinced that the Venus Shrine in the western part of Jerusalem was the true place of Jesus' passion, he was able to persuade a number of people that his proofs were legitimate. One must remember that the emperor's authority was supreme and people found it prudent not to arbitrarily question his convictions.

Did Constantine, however, select the correct spot? What prompted him to pick the region of the Venus Shrine? There is really no difficulty in answering these questions if we pay attention to the documentary evidence written during and immediately after the time of Constantine. The prime information comes from the top theologian and historian living in that period. This was Eusebius

Pamphilus, bishop of Caesarea on the Palestinian coast.

Constantine and the Shrine of Venus

The decision to select the Venus Shrine in Jerusalem as the site of Jesus' resurrection was Constantine's alone. There was no theologian, or any council of theologians prior to A.D.326 (as recorded in the accounts we have available), who recommended to Constantine that the Venus Shrine was historically proper nor did anyone suggest that a memorial church should be built there. So surprising was Constantine's discovery to Eusebius that when the knowledge of it reached him, he said that the tomb of Jesus located in that region was "*contrary TO ALL expectation*" (*Life of Constantine*, III.28). Simply put, Eusebius was astonished at the revelation of Constantine. And he wasn't the only one who expressed surprise. When Eusebius said the location was "contrary to all expectation," his expression signified (by his use of the word "all") that no other theologian or historian of the fourth century had expected the Venus Shrine either to be selected. This interpretation of Eusebius' text is not my reading something into his statement that is not there. This is plainly what Eusebius was conveying to his readers.

Constantine, however, insisted that his location was correct. What prompted the emperor to demand such a location? Eusebius was well aware of why the emperor did what he did, but it still baffled him why he would insist that the Venus Shrine was the proper place when the Holy Scriptures and history did not support his interpretation. Constantine had a profound reason why he selected the western site. The emperor believed himself to possess special and superior intelligence that gave him an almost infallible assurance that he was correct in his decisions concerning matters such as these. His conviction that the Venus Shrine was proper was based on evidences that Constantine considered unassailable. The proof of the spot came to Constantine by visions and dreams which, according to Constantine, came to him by no less than Jesus him-

self. It was visions and dreams that were more important to Constantine than what the Holy Scriptures had to say or what the historical records related as shown to him by men of lesser rank than he, and this included the testimonies of theologians and bishops of the Church. Constantine thought he was in possession of *secret* knowledge that even the ordained bishops did not have.

Eusebius was Not Convinced the Venus Shrine was Correct

Eusebius called attention to this belief of Constantine at the time the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was dedicated at Jerusalem in A.D.336 (some ten years after the spot was selected by Constantine). In Eusebius' speech of dedication, he petitioned the emperor to inform him and the other Christian bishops why he insisted on *this* spot as the place for Jesus' resurrection. Though Constantine was not present at the ceremonies (an official was in Jerusalem who represented him), Eusebius nonetheless directed his dedicatory remarks to the emperor himself. In Eusebius' closing statement of his oration, he asked the emperor (as the spokesman for the combined assembly of ecclesiastical dignitaries who had come from most of the Roman world) to reveal to his bishops the *secret* intelligence that only the emperor seemed to possess which caused him to select the Venus Shrine. And though Eusebius was aware that Constantine was utterly convinced that he was correct in his selection of the Venus Shrine, Eusebius wanted to know *why* the emperor was convinced.

Eusebius commenced this summing up of his dedicatory remarks in chapter XVIII of his *Oration* by mentioning the profound convictions of Constantine regarding the site of the Holy Sepulchre: "*convinced as you are by FREQUENT and PERSONAL experience of our Savior's Deity.*" Because of supernatural experiences which so frequently accompanied the emperor, Eusebius made a plea to Constantine that at some future time when he had the leisure to explain more about his extraordinary intelligence concerning divine things that he might "relate *to us* [the bishops of the

Christian Church] the abundant manifestations which your Saviour has accorded you of His presence, and the *oft-repeated VISIONS of Himself* that have attended you in the hours of sleep. I speak not of those *secret suggestions which to us are unrevealed*: but of those principles which He has instilled into *your own mind*, which are fraught with general interest and benefit to the human race... You [Constantine] will, it may be, also detail *to us* [the bishops] those particulars of His favor *which are SECRET to us, but known to YOU ALONE*, and treasured in your royal memory as *in SECRET storehouses*. Such, doubtless, are the reasons, and such the *convincing proofs* of your Saviour's power, *which caused YOU to RAISE UP that sacred edifice* [the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which was then being dedicated] which presents to all, believers and unbelievers alike, a trophy of victory over death, *a holy temple of the Holy God*" (*The Oration of Eusebius*, XVIII emphases mine).

In simple language, Eusebius was asking Constantine to explain to his bishops why his supernatural visions had directed his attention to *this* place then being dedicated. Eusebius knew that Constantine was convinced in the reliability of his visionary experiences, but to Eusebius and the bishops then assembled in Jerusalem it was not clear to them why the area of the Venus Shrine was selected. None of them had been graced with such "secret" knowledge. Indeed, such particulars, said Eusebius, "*are secret TO US, but known to YOU ALONE.*" Eusebius petitioned Constantine to show him and the assembled bishops "*the convincing proofs...which caused YOU to RAISE UP that sacred edifice* [the Church of the Holy Sepulchre]."

Eusebius was Careful in what he Wrote

Note that Eusebius couched his queries to Constantine amongst a great deal of laudatory language designed not to infuriate the emperor's sensitivities regarding his spiritual opinions and certainly not to question the visions or their genuineness. After all, Eusebius and the other bishops were quite interested in maintaining

the top part of their anatomies attached to their nether parts. And this cautious approach of Eusebius is no exaggeration because at this time of Constantine's life he was very stern in his demeanor with his subjects.

The truth is, there was not the slightest biblical or historical evidence to sustain the selection of this western site as the proper place of Jesus' passion. Indeed, just the opposite was the case and Eusebius provides the evidence (as will be shown) which demonstrates this fact. Yet, Constantine's opinion prevailed while he remained alive. And fourteen years after his death a celestial event took place (which I will explain in chapter eighteen) that convinced many people that Constantine's selection of the Venus Shrine was correct.

What must be understood by us of modern times, however, is the fact that the present Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was selected as the site of Jesus' passion exclusively through the agency of *visionary signs* and *dreams* that Constantine had experienced. This is attested by the historian Sozomen about a hundred years after Constantine. Notice what he said in Book Two, chapter one.

“It was no easy matter to discover the Lord's sepulchre...however the place was discovered...*by means of signs and dreams*; for I do not think that human information [that is, any historical record] is required when God thinks it best to make manifest the same”
(*Eccl.Hist.*, II.1).

The supernatural signs and dreams to which Sozomen was referring came from Constantine and his mother Helena. His mother had been sent to Jerusalem for the express purpose of discovering the true site of Jesus' resurrection. And she found the exact spot all right (at least to her satisfaction), and she did it through visions and dreams, not through biblical or historical records.

Constantine Was Long Interested in Holy Places

Constantine had earlier been interested in the “holy places” in

Jerusalem. He issued an edict to his eastern subjects after the defeat of Licinius (about A.D.324) which included a remarkable prayer to God in which he asked that there might be a “restoration of Thy most holy dwelling-place” (*Life of Constantine*, II.55). This prayer showed Constantine’s desire to rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem at this early date. The edict was taken with such joy by the Jews that they began to rebuild the Temple. This rebuilding activity is mentioned by John Chrysostom in his oration *Against the Jews*, VI. But after the Nicean Council in the summer of A.D.325, Constantine began to have a belligerent attitude to the Jews and he caused them to cease their rebuilding of the Temple. So insistent was Constantine that the Jewish authorities cease their building activities in reconstructing the Temple, that he had the ears cut off of the ones who were the professional craftsmen and the priests that supervised them. And indeed, this put a stop to the construction of the Jewish Temple.

After the Temple was denied to the Jews, the emperor’s attention turned to another project that had been occupying his mind for some time. Instead of rebuilding the Temple of the Jews as an honor to God, he decided to erect a memorial in Jerusalem to the resurrection of Jesus. Eusebius explains.

“After these things [after the events resulting from the Nicean Council], the pious emperor addressed himself to another work truly worthy of record, in the province of Palestine. What was this work? He judged it incumbent on him to render *the blessed locality* of our Saviour’s resurrection an object of attraction and veneration to all. He issued immediate injunctions, therefore, for the erection in that spot of a house of prayer: and this he did, *not on mere natural impulse* of his own mind, but *being moved IN SPIRIT by the Saviour himself*” (*Life of Constantine*, III.25).

Constantine was moved by preternatural forces to build the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. And his intention to do so took place even before the Nicean Council. Eusebius said Constantine had a visionary experience “that a house of prayer worthy of the worship

of God should be erected near the Saviour's tomb" (*ibid.*, III.29). "This object he had indeed *FOR SOME TIME* kept in view *AND HAD FORESEEN* as if by the aid of a superior intelligence, that which should afterwards come to pass" (*ibid.*). Professor T.D. Barnes gives the correct translation of Eusebius' *Oration* (11:1) to show that Constantine was used to "frequent divine visions" (*Constantine and Eusebius*, p.368).

Constantine had Frequent Visions and Dreams

Indeed, Constantine was long used to visionary experiences. From the year A.D.312 they had become a regular part of the emperor's life. From that year he had frequent supernatural occurrences happening in his career. And what is extraordinary, according to Constantine, he never had a reversal of his quests if he followed the advice of his supernatural advisors.

The start of his trust in the supernatural happened at a momentous time in Constantine's life. Just before the battle at Milvian Bridge outside Rome which gained for him the mastery of the western part of the Roman Empire, he witnessed (along with his troops) a parhelion of the sun which appeared to him as a cross in the heavens. He noticed with the cross were the Greek letters (Chi Rho) accompanied with the words "by this sign conquer." That evening he said that in his sleep "the Christ of God" came and told him to adopt the sign of the "Chi Rho" as a symbol to protect him and his armies and that he would ever be victorious (*Life of Constantine*, I.29). Constantine immediately had his army portray on their shields this sign of the "Chi Rho" which became the Labarum (a Roman shield symbol) for his conquering armies. And no wonder, the "Chi Rho" symbol was a very common one that the Roman Imperial Army had long used extensively. It was an abbreviation for a commissioned officer, notably a "centurion" (see Fink, *Roman Military Records on Papyrus*, for many examples of the "Chi Rho" being used as an abbreviation of the officer class even as early as the second century). In essence, the "Chi Rho" signified the seal

(sign or insignia) of the officer class of the Roman Imperial Army, and to Constantine he could easily have interpreted the “Chi Rho” as meaning that the Army was now to be the “Army of Christ Jesus” under the control of Constantine to control the whole of the world. Amazingly, after Constantine adopted the “Chi Rho” as a sacred and salutary sign, from that time forward Constantine never lost a decisive battle but he blazed forth with victory after victory until he became emperor of the whole Roman Empire.

The emperor Constantine came to believe that this “Chi Rho” symbol not only represented the officer class of the Roman Imperial Army but it also represented the first two letters in Greek for “Christ.” And after talking with Christian theologians, he identifying it with the Christ of the Christians. To Constantine, it became a miraculous sign. It was the extraordinary “supernatural sign” (as Constantine believed it was) that prompted the emperor to think he had been divinely selected to bring in a universal kingdom that would recognize the deity of Jesus the Christ and that it was through Christ (and his servant Constantine) that divine salvation and peace would finally be brought to the world.

This visionary experience of seeing the “Chi Rho” in the sky had a profound effect upon Constantine. In the following years he featured himself as the divinely chosen instrument of God to bring in the universal (catholic) kingdom to the totality of the world. It gave Constantine great confidence that he was a special and elect vessel of God himself. And all the battles that Constantine fought from A.D.312 onward, with what he called the salutary sign of the “Chi Rho” in the advance of his armies, convinced him that he was indeed that special person selected by God to bring to pass the universal kingdom of Jesus on earth.

The Consequence of the Vision at Milvian Bridge

Not long after the visionary experience at Milvian Bridge, Constantine began to conceive of himself as a *new* Moses to lead

the true people of God into a *new* world kingdom with Constantine as its head (*ibid.*, I.12). He reckoned that he was the instrument to inaugurate the “new Jerusalem” of the prophets (*ibid.*, III.33). And to accommodate Constantine’s identification with Moses, he had a special tent constructed in the form of a cross which he, like Moses, placed “outside the camp” (alluding to Exodus 33:7). Into this tent only he and his trusted advisors would enter before any engagement with the enemy. It was there that he sought divine counsel to direct him in what he should do. “And making earnest supplications to God, he was *always* honored after a little while with a manifestation of His [God’s] presence. And then, as if moved *by a divine impulse*, he would rush from the tent, and suddenly give orders to his army to move at once without delay, and on the instant to draw their swords. On this they would immediately commence the attack, fight vigorously, so as with incredible celerity to secure the victory, and raise trophies of victory over their enemies” (*ibid.*, II.12).

Constantine was always in the habit of consulting his heavenly advisors and he was not disappointed in his petitions. Things were “miraculously revealed by God *through VISIONS to His servant* [Constantine]. For He [God] *frequently* vouchsafed to him manifestations of Himself, the Divine presence appearing to him in a most marvelous manner, and according to him *manifold intimations* of future events. Indeed, it is impossible to express in words the indescribable *wonders of Divine grace* which God was pleased to vouchsafe to His servant [Constantine]” (*ibid.*, I.47).

And very *frequent* indeed were the manifestations that Constantine received from his celestial advisors. Eusebius said that Constantine’s visions and other supernatural encounters became such a regular part of his career that “a *thousand* such acts as these were *familiarly* and *habitually* done by the emperor” (*ibid.*, II.14 compare with 12). Constantine’s life was replete with visions, dreams and supernatural wonders and they were a dominant factor

in all his major decisions. There was no exception to this procedure in his selection of the Venus Shrine in Jerusalem as being the “true” spot of Jesus’ passion. There was not any biblical or historical teaching that prompted Constantine to select this western area for the location of Jesus’ tomb nor was there any biblical encouragement for him to build a memorial church in that place. Eusebius informs us that it was “not on the mere natural impulse of his own mind [that he picked the Venus Shrine in Jerusalem], but *being moved in spirit by the Saviour himself*” (*ibid.*, III.25). Eusebius simply reported that Constantine selected the location because of supernatural signs given to him.

The decision to build a church at the place of Jesus’ resurrection was made by Constantine in A.D.326 probably while he was in Rome (and after he executed his son Crispus and his wife Fausta and felt sorry for his deeds). As a means of atoning for his actions against his own family (and to get over his melancholy attitude that was afflicting him at the time) he came to the conclusion that it was necessary to raise up a monument to Jesus’ passion in Jerusalem. Indeed, his initial desire to build such a memorial church at the site appears to have occurred to him even before A.D.326. Eusebius mentions that some kind of supernatural impulse had long before inspired Constantine to build a memorial church at the place of Jesus’ tomb. Note what Eusebius said on the matter: “This object he had indeed *for some time* [in the past] kept in view, *and had FORESEEN*, as if by the aid of a superior intelligence, that which should afterwards come to pass” (*ibid.*, III.29).

But in A.D.326, and in a sense of urgency, he sent his mother Helena to Jerusalem to discover the spot that he “*had foreseen*” as the place of Jesus’ resurrection. To Constantine “foreseeing things” was nothing new. As an example of this, Eusebius records that at one time while Constantine was in his imperial palace some 700 miles away from Lebanon, and like an eagle that could look down and see distant objects which no ordinary human could perceive,

the emperor was able to observe quite vividly a foul Venus Shrine in the mountains of Lebanon. What Constantine saw in vision (or in a dream) was a school for training initiates in the religious debauchery of the mysteries of Venus. The emperor was so incensed at what his visionary experience revealed to him that he gave an immediate command to utterly destroy that secret Venus Shrine. This was done as soon as Constantine's orders reached his army in Lebanon (*ibid.*, III.55; *The Oration of Eusebius*, VIII.5,6).

Constantine had Extraordinary Visionary Powers

Eusebius himself was amazed at the supernatural power of Constantine to observe things at a great distance that no other ordinary humans could perceive. Interestingly, no one in the metropolitan area of Lebanon knew that such a Venus Shrine existed in their mountains. But Constantine far away in Constantinople was able to describe the details of the debauchery that were going on at the site, and his description was with such precision that even Eusebius was startled at the emperor's perceptions. But this was no uncommon thing to Constantine. Eusebius said that such supernatural "forethought" of Constantine was a frequent characteristic of the unusual psychic powers that the emperor seemed to possess with his determinations (*The Oration of Eusebius*, VIII.7).

The Shrines to Venus which were located throughout the Roman Empire were particularly offensive to Constantine (as they would be to any decent person who respected commonsense morality). Though Constantine gave an order to destroy heathen shrines in the empire, he was foremostly hostile to the pagan temples that advocated orgiastic rites and at the top of his list for destruction were Venus Shrines. Those sacred areas of debauchery were in the "first" category for annihilation in the opinion of Constantine (*The Oration of Eusebius*, VII.3). Most other pagan temples which simply honored the national gods and goddesses of the various peoples of the empire were normally allowed to continue their rites, yet the ones which advocated orgiastic activities with effeminate men as

priests and temple prostitutes as their chief protagonists (especially the Venus Shrines where such things were commonly done) were especially abhorrent to Constantine and he leveled them to the ground.

Eusebius began to Express Concern

The common practice of Constantine was to destroy the most offensive of pagan temples and build in their locations Christian churches. He suppressed the immoral practices at a pagan temple in Heliopolis of Lebanon and built a church in its place (*ibid.*, III.58). It was recognized that Constantine overturned many celebrated temples to raise churches upon their ruins. Thus, when Eusebius saw the army of Constantine tearing down the Temple of Venus in Jerusalem, this would have caused him little surprise (and even if Constantine gave the orders that a Christian church was to be built there), but when it came to Eusebius' attention that Helena, who in late A.D.326 was in Jerusalem, began to call the site of the Venus Shrine the place of Jesus' sepulchre, Eusebius began to express alarm. This must be the case because somewhere in this very period Eusebius urgently sent a message to Constantine *begging* him for permission to present to him a scriptural discourse on the subject of our Saviour's sepulchre (*ibid.*, IV,33). Eusebius was so anxious to present his teaching about this matter that he informed those who were reading his work *The Life of Constantine* that this was one event "I must by no means omit to record." He made a special journey from his home in Palestine to the imperial palace in Constantinople to present this material on Jesus' tomb to the emperor himself.

Eusebius' Dismay over Constantine's Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Upon his arrival at the palace and in the midst of the emperor and a large number of Constantine's advisors, Eusebius commenced his discourse on the subject of Jesus' sepulchre. All

seemed quite in order except for one thing. While Eusebius lectured, the emperor refused to sit down! Constantine remained standing with fixed attention on Eusebius. This attitude of the emperor was disturbing to Eusebius (as it would be to anyone trying to present a subject of importance to those in his audience). The body-language of Constantine was rather easy for Eusebius to read. "I entreated him, but in vain, to seat himself on the imperial throne which stood near, but he continued with fixed attention to weigh the topics of my discourse" (*ibid.*, IV,33). And up to this point in Eusebius' lecture the emperor gave his assent "to the truth of the theological doctrines it contained," but he still refused to sit down and he exhorted Eusebius to continue his presentation. So, Eusebius proceeded with his essential teaching about Jesus' sepulchre. And what did Constantine do? He continued to stand with fixed attention and he weighed every word Eusebius was saying. Now notice what happened.

"After some time had passed, the oration being of considerable length, I was myself desirous of concluding; *but this he would not permit*, and exhorted me to proceed to the very end. On my again *ENTREATING HIM TO SIT*, he in his turn was displeased and said that it was not right to listen in a careless manner to the discussion of doctrines relating to God; and again, that this posture [of standing with fixed attention] was good and profitable to himself, since it was reverent *TO STAND* while listening to sacred truths. Having therefore, concluded my discourse, *I returned home and resumed my usual occupations*" (*Life of Constantine*, IV,33).

This was a most unnerving experience for Eusebius. There was nothing courteous to Eusebius by this action of Constantine. Indeed, it was an overbearing display. Revealingly, Eusebius stated three chapters before (*Life of Constantine*, IV,29) that when the emperor was in the habit of standing erect at the time sacred topics were discussed he would then assume "a grave aspect and subdued tone of voice." The truth is, when Constantine remained standing throughout the long discourse of Eusebius about Jesus' sepulchre in Jerusalem, he was showing forth an obstinate and fixed attitude

toward the topic being discussed. In a word, Eusebius was being intimidated! And what was the outcome of this crucial conference about Jesus' sepulchre that brought Eusebius all the way to Constantinople to present to the emperor? The emperor won the day! Eusebius summed it up very well. In a curt and matter-of-fact way, Eusebius (in so many words) said: "With Constantine in the attitude he was in, I packed up my belongings and went on home to Palestine where I continued my usual occupations." Eusebius apparently got nowhere with the emperor.

Constantine was Convinced in his Visionary Experiences

At this point in history there was no turning back for Constantine. He had now identified, to his satisfaction, the exact area where Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. Visions, dreams and miracles had succeeded. In his letter to Macarius, the bishop in Jerusalem, Constantine admitted it was a "wondrous circumstance" that had revealed the site of Jesus' passion (*Life of Constantine*, III.30). The emperor acknowledged to Macarius that the place had "remained *unknown* for so long a series of years" but now the site had once again been discovered by Constantine. The emperor called it "*this miracle* as far transcends the capacity of human reason as heavenly things are superior to human affairs" (*ibid.*). In other words, human reasoning [what he meant was "historical documents" and ordinary proofs that most humans accept as evidence] was not the proof that Constantine had for substantiating that his site for Jesus' sepulchre was correct. Indeed, the emperor said that the location was being confirmed "by fresh wonders" revealed in Constantinople (not in Palestine) that made the location certain in the opinion of Constantine.

The emperor simply told Macarius that it was by divine knowledge that the place where the Venus Shrine stood had been legitimized as Jesus' sepulchre. In his official orders to Macarius to build a church at the site which was to be "the most marvelous place in the world" (*ibid.*, III.31), Constantine said "I have disen-

cumbered that sacred spot *under divine direction*” and he informed Macarius that he had “a clear assurance” that his determination of the spot was correct (*ibid.*). Eusebius wrote that Constantine was the “discoverer” (and no one else) of the sacred places in Palestine (*ibid.*, III.41), and that he was “under the guidance of the divine Spirit” in accomplishing this (*ibid.*, III.26).

One might wonder by what authority did Constantine sustain his beliefs even when Eusebius and the other bishops had no evidence of a biblical or historical nature to vouch for such teachings? That is not difficult to determine. Constantine felt himself to be of higher authority in making judgments on religious matters than even the theologians and bishops of the church. After all, it was Constantine who approved the final decisions of the bishops at the Nicean Council and he put the edicts into effect. Eusebius records that “once on the occasion of his entertaining a company of bishops, he let fall the expression, ‘that he himself too was a bishop,’ addressing them in my hearing in the following words: ‘You are bishops whose jurisdiction is within the Church: *I am also a bishop, ordained by God to overlook what is external to the Church*’” (*Life of Constantine*, IV,24).

Constantine was More Powerful than the Bishops

Truly, Constantine came to feel that his prestige was far more eminent than the authority possessed by the bishops. He even reckoned himself as equal to the apostles of Jesus. When he designed a church in Constantinople in honor of the twelve apostles, he placed twelve coffins in the midst of the church. But in the middle of them (with six on one side and six on the other) he placed his own monumental coffin in which he was placed after death. This is because, as Eusebius tells us, the emperor felt that he “shared his title with the apostles themselves” (*ibid.*, IV,60). And interestingly, the Greek Church to this day recognizes Constantine as “Equal to the Apostles” (Hastings, *Dict. Religion and Ethics*, vol.IV,p.78). The fact is, how could anyone in the fourth century disagree with the

emperor who thought himself to be an “apostle” of Jesus? Constantine had such an exalted opinion of his authority (and this was recognized by others at the time) that he saw his rule within the Roman Empire as being like that of Moses at the time of the Exodus (*ibid.*, I.12) and better than that of Cyrus or Alexander the Great. No one in the world (including Eusebius or even the bishop of Rome) could approach Constantine’s “divine stature” in the authority he thought he had.

Eusebius Gave Up Trying to Influence Constantine

After Eusebius’ encounter with Constantine at his palace in Constantinople, Eusebius returned to Caesarea. He now found it hopeless to deal with the opinions of Constantine. The emperor was now utterly convinced that his visionary experiences were guiding him correctly in the identification of the place of the Holy Sepulchre, that anyone who disagreed with him was made to think he was disagreeing with Jesus himself because Constantine consistently stated that it was Christ who presented the visions to him and told him what he had to do. This matter put Eusebius and the other bishops into a precarious position. If they showed from their interpretations from history and the Bible that Constantine was wrong, they ran the risk of calling into question the visions that Constantine relied on. Eusebius saw that those visions were a formidable obstacle to proclaiming the truth to Constantine. Interestingly, from A.D.326 onward we find Eusebius making no written comments whatever that the Mount Sion of the early Christians was the Mount of Olives and that is where Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the dead. Dr. Peter Walker in his book “Holy City, Holy Places?” makes the correct observation that “Mount Sion as such disappears from Eusebius’ map and from his writings after that date.... Mount Sion was conveniently forgotten” (p.306). Indeed, avoiding any mention of Mount Sion from that time forward, Dr. Walker states was “a policy of seemingly quite conscious silence” (p.307). That’s right. Eusebius simply called a

halt at writing any longer that the Mount of Olives was the place of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Eusebius Regains Courage

About ten years later, however, Eusebius, speaking at the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in A.D.336, asked Constantine to reveal to his bishops the reason *why* he selected the Venus Shrine for the site of Jesus' resurrection. Eusebius was not insubordinate in his request. He said that he and the other bishops in Jerusalem were not "presuming to instruct *you* [Constantine] who is yourself taught of God; nor to disclose to *you* those secret wonders which He himself, not through the agency of man, but through our common Saviour, and the *frequent light* of His divine presence *has long since revealed and unfolded TO YOUR VIEW*" (*The Oration of Eusebius*, XI.1). At this dedication, Eusebius acknowledged that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and its adjacent buildings were "lofty and noble structures, imperial monuments of an imperial spirit, which you [Constantine] have erected in honor of the everlasting memory of the Saviour's tomb, *the cause*, I say, of these things *IS NOT EQUALLY OBVIOUS TO ALL*" (*ibid.*).

It was not discernible to Eusebius and the other bishops *why* Constantine picked *this* spot which became the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In fact the site did not seem obvious to anybody except Constantine. Of course it was realized that the emperor was guided by supernatural signs to pick the place then being dedicated. "These works are the result, to appreciate the *more than human impulse* by which our emperor *was guided* to admire his piety toward God, and to believe his care for the memorial of our Saviour's resurrection to be a desire *imparted from above*" (*ibid.*, XI.6).

To Eusebius there was no obvious reason which most humans relied on (such as historical documents) for erecting the monuments to Jesus' resurrection at the location where the Venus Shrine

formerly stood. That's why he asked Constantine at this dedication ceremony of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, "convinced as you are by *frequent* and *personal* experience...that you will at a time of leisure to relate to us [the bishops of the Church] the abundant manifestations which your Saviour has accorded you of His presence, and the *oft-repeated VISIONS of Himself* which have attended you in the hours of sleep.... You will, it may be, also detail to us [the bishops] those particulars of His favor *which are SECRET to us*, but *KNOWN TO YOU ALONE*, and treasured in your royal memory as in *secret storehouses*. Such, doubtless, are the reasons, and such the convincing proofs of your Saviour's power, *which caused you* [Constantine] *TO RAISE THAT SACRED EDIFICE* [the Church of the Holy Sepulchre] which presents to all, believers and unbelievers alike, a trophy of his victory over death, a holy temple of the holy God" (*The Oration of Eusebius*, XVIII, captials and italics are mine).

Eusebius and the Bishops Knew it was the Wrong Place

In other words, Eusebius and the assembled bishops in Jerusalem saw no logical reason why Constantine would have picked the site of the Venus Shrine as the place for a church to the memory of Jesus' resurrection. The selection of the spot came through *secret* visions and supernatural revelations known only to Constantine. The emperor's opinions, however, prevailed. He claimed to possess divine knowledge, just like the apostles, and those visionary experiences gave him the essential teachings which he thought to have as their source his Saviour and which he considered necessary for all the Christian Church (including the bishops) to follow.

But where did Constantine get his authority to make decisions on such matters? True, Constantine was assured he had the power. Note that he even proclaimed himself a bishop along with the other bishops of the Church, and indeed, he thought himself of more exalted rank than the bishops because he reckoned himself as being

an apostle of Jesus (and in his burial he outranked all the original apostles of Jesus). And to demonstrate this authority that Constantine thought he possessed, he presided (and made the ultimate decisions on doctrines) of the first ecumenical meeting of the Church since the time of the apostles which was held at Nicaea. There was no individual (including the bishop of Rome or the bishop of Constantinople) who held more power in the Christian Church than that which Constantine thought himself to have. But note this. While all this authority of Constantine was being exercised within the Christian Church, Constantine himself *was not even a baptized member*.

The fact is, Constantine did not become a member of the Church through the normal ceremony of baptism until he was on his death bed. But in spite of this lack, it was he who made all the important decisions in matters concerning the Christian Church from A.D.325 until his death in A.D.337.

These extraordinary procedures show how a secular ruler of the Roman Empire (though he was giving lip-service to a belief in Jesus) could completely dominate the ordained "ministers of Jesus," even in deciding on crucial theological matters about which only the bishops of the Christian Church supposedly had authority to decide. And ever since Constantine took over essential control of the Christian Church, all Christians have had to be wedded to those decisions instigated by the emperor Constantine on prime theological matters affecting the Christian Church.

Some might wonder how it was possible for Constantine and his immediate successors to change so effectively the opinions of many people in the Roman world into the erroneous beliefs that then began to emerge? This can in part be explained by the extraordinary environmental circumstances that affected the people who lived within the first fifty years of the fourth century. There was no fifty years in recorded history that underwent such momentous and revolutionary changes in the whole of society than that period of time.

It started with the emperor Diocletian in A.D.303 with the greatest persecution ever perpetrated on Christians and their property (a policy of utter devastation was commenced in certain parts of the Empire that left many Christian regions leaderless and their buildings for assembly leveled to the ground). This lasted with lessening intensity until A.D.312 when Constantine took over control of the Empire in the west. But the Empire was in civil war until A.D.324 with the defeat and death of Licinius. When Constantine came to sole emperorship in A.D.324, and with his conviction that Christianity was true, a new age dawned for Christendom.

With the emperor now Christian oriented, the people who were Christians looked on the new society with a sense of exhilaration. Note what had happened in twenty-five years. Christianity had come from being a despised religion and highly persecuted by the imperial government to a leadership in the world. This success prompted many people in the Christian Church to express an exceptional euphoria. This condition caused many of the people and leaders to acquiesce (at the expense of biblical doctrine) to the ecumenical spirit among Christians which was perpetuated by Constantine and his successors. Christians were now striving for unity and harmony among themselves. It became common for many people to join the Church at this time because of the prestige that being a Christian afforded. People who were pagans and followers of the Greek, Egyptian and Roman religious beliefs swarmed into the bosom of the Church. These people brought with them their pagan ideas and theologies which began to make their appearances in the Christian churches at the time.

Before the end of the fourth century a new type of Christianity had emerged that was quite different from that described by Eusebius in the first part of the century. It was a Christianity where visions, dreams and signs took center stage and where pagan customs and philosophies began to permeate the whole of society. A brand new civilization had come on the scene. While the political

power resided with the emperors, church leaders began to exercise great influence. The religious center of Christianity within the Empire began to be attached symbolically to the new Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It became reckoned as being the holiest spot in this new Christendom. And, as we will see in chapter eighteen, an astronomical event took place in A.D.350 that the people of Jerusalem witnessed, that made the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to be acknowledged as the legitimate site of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It was the wrong place, but the emperors and the people were now prepared to accept its credentials, and that erroneous site has been accepted as proper even until our day.

The Dangers in Accepting Dreams and Visions

What actually happened in the early fourth century is that Constantine was able to persuade some bishops that his visions, dreams and signs were proper. If only the principal bishops would have had in their hands the teachings of St. John of the Cross who lived in the 16th century about the real dangers of trusting in visions, dreams and signs, they could have been spared the great falsehood concerning the whereabouts of Jesus' sepulchre that was being perpetrated upon some of the bishops of the Church (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk.II. XVI through XXIX). No one in early times has given a better appraisal of how dangerous and foolish it is to trust in visions, dreams and signs than the appraisal of St. John of the Cross. His classic evaluation should be read by all people today who rely upon such manifestations as visions, dreams and miracles as a means for establishing doctrines or religious principles. Such procedures are some of the most dangerous imaginable in their ability to produce falsehood and deception amongst the unwary. Had there been a "St. John of the Cross" at the time of Constantine (with the warnings he so ably presented to the theological world of the 16th century), and had he been believed, then the Christian Church would not have been saddled with the sup-

posedly “divine” teachings of Constantine and his advisors about the need to accept the place of the Temple of Venus as the place of Jesus’ passion. It would have been understood that visions, dreams and miracles are the most unreliable “proofs” for demonstrating historical, geographical and theological truths.

But in actual fact, there was indeed, at the time of Constantine, a “St. John of the Cross” who warned Constantine (and the Christian Church) of the dangers of the teachings that were being accepted because of the visionary experiences of Constantine. But his appeal for biblical and historical commonsense on these matters was not received by Constantine and his chief advisors. Who was this person? It was none other than Eusebius himself! That’s right. Eusebius actually stood up for the truth of history and the teachings in the Gospels. He tried, unsuccessfully, to get people to change their minds. The next chapter will explain.